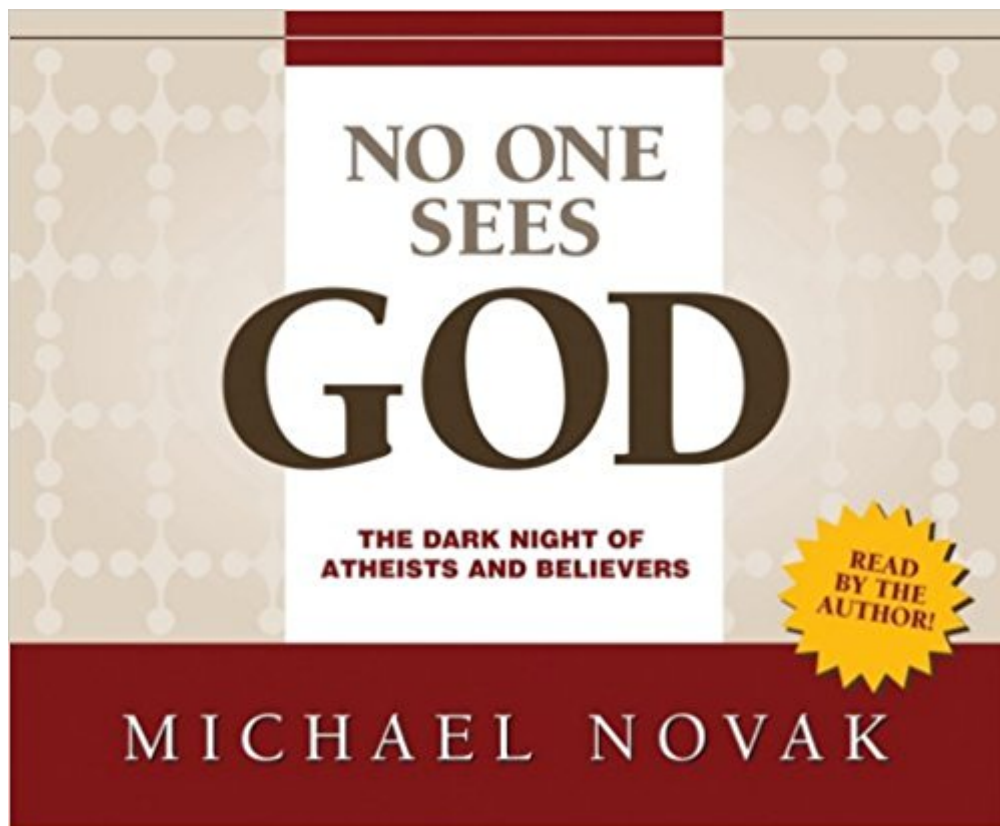




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No One Sees God: The Dark Night Of Atheists And Believers



Synopsis

Surveying the contemporary religious landscape, the division between atheist and believer seems stark. However, having long struggled to understand the purpose of life and the meaning of suffering, Michael Novak finds the reality of spiritual life far different from the rhetorical war presented by bestselling atheists and the defenders of the faith who oppose them. In *No One Sees God*, Novak brilliantly recasts the tired debate pitting faith against reason. Both the atheist and the believer experience the same dark night in which God's presence seems absent, he argues, and the conflict between faith and doubt stems not from objective differences, but from divergent attitudes toward the unknown. Drawing from his lifelong passion for philosophy and his personal struggles with belief, he shows that, far from being irrational, the spiritual perspective actually provides the most satisfying answers to the eternal questions of meaning. Faith is a challenge at times, but it nonetheless offers the only fully coherent response to the human experience. Ultimately, *No One Sees God* offers believers and unbelievers the opportunity to find common ground by acknowledging the complicated reality of the human struggle with doubt. Novak provides a stirring defense of the Christian worldview, while sidestepping the shrill tone that so often characterizes the discussion of faith, and given the challenges faced in the present age, all who value liberty will find hope in his new way of conversing.

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Customer Reviews

This book is one of the most lyrical and moving reflections on God I have encountered. It is also remarkably generous, both to believers and nonbelievers. Most helpfully it is about how to pray,

and how to suffer through the dark night in which answers, and communication,Â seem absent. A remarkable book by a remarkable man. --Peggy Noonan, Wall Street Journal columnist, author of John Paul the Great Over the years, Michael Novak has explored with great insight the relationship between religion, society, and the individual. Here he engages with the recent intellectual challenges to religion and provides the perspective of a profound believer who knows what it is like to wrestle with doubt --Walter Isaacson, CEO of the Aspen Institute, author of Einstein: His Life and Universe No One Sees God conveys a depth, erudition, generosity of spirit, and wisdom that simply transcend anything that the new atheists have to offer. --Dinesh D'Souza, author of What's So Great About Christianity

MICHAEL NOVAK received the 1994 Templeton Prize, an award that has also gone to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Mother Teresa, and Charles Taylor. He has taught at Harvard and Stanford and has held academic chairs at Syracuse University and Notre Dame, and now holds the Jewett Chair in Religion, Philosophy, and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.

I got the audio version and listened to it in my car while commuting back and forth to work. I had to really stay focused to listen. The author reminds me of a beloved, grandfather, who sometimes rambles. At times he is very enduring and thought provoking; at other times slightly boring... All in all, he has some great insight, and a good handle on history, which I find interesting. In places, I think an atheist may be offended, if they are not open to another point of view, but mostly, his dialog is well thought out and deep. He has lived in doubt and darkness, and survived. It is a LONG book, so if you take it on, be prepared to be patient. Once you get through the first few chapters, things pick up and become more interesting. My feeling is if I can walk away from a book and keep thinking about it's content, then it was worth the price. I did walk away thinking, and I did learn some things.

Novak writes clearly, persuasively, with a generous spirit, exhorting believers and unbelievers to communicate better with each other, to respect each other, to learn from each other. The book was published in 2008, so gathering from the dust and drama to be viewed on the internet every day, precious few people have taken this wisdom to heart. He makes a very strong case for the humility that both "sides" should have, and generally comes across as fair and sincere. He manages to paint a very grim view of secularism / atheism / agnosticism and the limits and future possibilities of these worldviews. I am not convinced that he always states his opponent's position in its best possible version, but there is no apparent sense of malice or strawman building in evidence. If you believe, as

I do, that the debate about faith and atheism / secularism is a very important one, one with far-reaching implications, this book will probably expand and enrich your views on some aspects of the debate, regardless of the "team" you play on. An important read, highly recommended.

This book is not for the weak minded, you must know how you view God in order to read this and to be able to gain an understanding of atheism.

This is a fascinating book. It adopts a charitable, friendly tone in addressing the views and experiences of atheists from within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Novak sees a kind of common ground with atheists in the experience of nothingness (the dark night of the soul) experienced by Catholic mystics and articulated by those in the Carmelite tradition like St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Therese of Lisieux. This is a wise and thoughtful book, open and reflective in tone. It is a kind of summing up of the life experience and reflections of a lifetime--the author more than once mentions his age as of writing--74 years. What it is not: If you are looking for a polemic that takes on the knock-down arguments and jibes of popular atheists like Dawkins and Hitchens in a similar vein of knock-about debate, this is not your book, though it does discuss and dispute them. For that, the reader should go to Dinesh D'Souza's *What's So Great About Christianity?* or one of several books that take these authors to task for their arrogance and ignorance, like Terry Eagleton's *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* or David Bentley Hart's *Atheist Delusions*. This book reminds me more of the 1981 film, *My Dinner with Andre*. Instead of dinner, though, Novak imagines a genial but spirited conversation (or series of conversations) over several brandies. (And I myself spent a few hours with this author, brandy in hand.) The real and imagined atheists who serve as his Alcibiades tend to be blunt, to the point, and commonsensical, like Wallace Shawn in the movie. Novak's replies are long and subtle, like Andre Gregory's in the film, but with less of the pretentious and more of sharp philosophical acuity. As Novak says and shows, it is much easier for a believer to put himself in the shoes of an atheist than the other way round. I recommend the book highly to atheists interested in an understanding of Jewish and Christian belief that goes beyond the usual objections and who are open to the possibility that those objections have been considered and responded to at a very high level of sophistication over centuries or millennia. But the book is also deeply enriching for believers who seek to understand their atheist friends and family members in a way that respects them and is both civil and non-defensive. The book requires and rewards effort from both kinds of reader. For the closed-minded, whether atheist or believer, who are content to stay that way, this book is probably not for you.

quite interesting; lots to learn from this book;

Novak is a thoughtful author with an immense intellectual depth and capacity. He deals humanely with an important subject that is "ripe" in our time. That subject is atheism and the problem of faith for believers in a period of unbelief and cynicism. He studiously and respectfully establishes common ground of thought and life that both atheists, non-believers and believers share. He shares his conclusions and beliefs while respectfully understanding that other conclusions can be drawn. Life does not spare anybody, we all wrestle with doubt.

I could pick many original ideas, but I refer on pages 43-48 as an example. On those pages Michel Novak gives "four arresting reflections" of Christianity. They are: 1. A theology of the absurd 2. The burden of sin 3. The bright golden thread of human history 4. The point of the cosmos is friendship. These should arouse your curiosity for the book. I have never looked upon Christianity along those principles. This is one of the best books I have read lately. Novak points out that it is very easy for a Christian to understand atheism, but opposite seems to be true of many atheists. At least the books of the major proponents of atheism (Dawkins & Hitchens etc.) give this view. The major aim of the book is to improve the mutual understanding of people having different worldviews.

Good defense of faith by an erudite scholar. Arguments range from complex to simple. Answers to the atheist perspective are illuminating. A memorable remark is paraphrased thus: the problem of evil is more than answered by the problem of good.

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