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December 16, 2011: Christopher Hitchens R.I.P.

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Title: Christopher Hitchens R.I.P.

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12/16/2011—I was very sorry to read today of the death of Christopher Hitchens from cancer. Hitchens had been suffering from the disease for some time and he faced his death with grace and courage. Well, why not? He was familiar with the classic sources and undoubtedly resigned himself to death years ago. Hitchens was no fool. But his writing about religion was simplistic. And his error was apparent in the title of his most famous book—God is not great: how religion poisons everything. Hitchens, though he assuredly knew better, confused God with religion. Many crimes are committed in the name of God. But they are committed by people. And the name of the very human associations that commit these crimes—along with all the good—is “religion”. Religions are not God. Even the concept of religion in general, whatever that is, is not God. God is God. If I remember correctly, Hitchens had little to say about all the different meanings of the word, God. He was interested only in impossible dogmas. He needed God to be as implausible as possible because only then could he debunk religion. But what if God is not implausible at all? The philosopher Ernst Cassirer, in the early Twentieth century, wrote about the new logic of Bertrand Russell. Cassirer argued that there must be a connection between math and experience. Only when we understand that the same fundamental syntheses on which math is based also govern empirical science will we be able “to speak of a firm lawful order behind the appearances... .” What if God is the firm moral order behind the appearances? The irony is that Hitchens himself testified to his belief in such an ordering in many ways in his life. I’m just sorry he spent his life enjoying controversy rather than showing similarities.