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October 11, 2012: Simon Chritchley Writes About Religion

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Title: Simon Critchley Writes About Religion

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10/11/2012—In his new book, *Faith of the Faithless*, Simon Critchley writes about religion. But he is at pains to point out that he has not retreated from his earlier claim that philosophy begins in religious disappointment—that religious belief is not an option for us. (See 2003 interview [here](#)) In his new book he calls religious disappointment, “crudely stated, the death of God.” “When I talk about faith, it is not at all a matter of belief in the existence of some metaphysical reality like God. My conception of faith—as fidelity to the infinite demand—is not just shared by the denominationally faithless, or unbelievers, but can be experienced by them in an exemplary way.” I’ll pass by for the moment the restriction that Critchley imposes—that the infinite manifests through a demand, that is as ethics or law. That seems to me a monotheistic prejudice. For the artist, the infinite may manifest as invitation or lure. (And to the thinker?) Critchley does succeed in articulating a common ground of believers and nonbelievers—we all experience the infinite. The news that the nones now comprise almost 20% of the American population reminds us that we now have a sizeable segment of the population unmoored from traditional religion, but still experiencing the ultimate as demand. This opens up enormous possibilities for what the monotheistic religions call idolatry. Hitler answered the infinite demand faithfully through devotion to race and nation. Lenin to class. (Americans to the market? To God as a supreme being?) The point is that the religious traditions are very good at sniffing out self-delusion substituting itself for religion. I’m not confident that the nones will do as well.