

Sacrifices: The death of soldiers

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [July 13, 2010](#) issue

After reading Walter Brueggemann's [review](#) of Terry Eagleton's *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (March 23), I ordered a copy. Eagleton teaches at the University of Lancaster, England, at the National University of Ireland and at Notre Dame. The book is a compendium of lectures in which Eagleton challenges the new atheism of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. Although Eagleton acknowledges the differences in the two authors' thinking, he conflates their names to one name, "Ditchkins," and then skewers them both as spokespersons for the new atheism.

Eagleton claims not to know much Christian theology, but he laces the book with a breathtaking pantheon of authorities: Augustine, Pascal, Rowan Williams, Jacques Derrida, George Eliot and more. He is smart and funny, and I laughed out loud when he spoke of Martin Heidegger, "whose thought some in Anglo-Saxon circles consider so deep as to be meaningless." I encountered Heidegger in college and still shudder when I remember struggling late at night with *Being and Time* and wondering if I'd made a mistake in quitting my summer job.

But as I read on, I became more and more irritated with Eagleton. He is relentless in his cynicism about the U.S.—its foreign policy, role in the world, market economy, culture, and in particular its use of military power. It is healthy to critique all of this. But his sarcasm and cynicism bothered me.

Maybe that was because I was also reading Rick Atkinson's *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944*, which chronicles the sacrifice and loss of life of American, British and other allied forces that slowly pushed Italian and then German armies up the Italian peninsula. Was this war necessary? One telling fact: before the U.S. military effort, when Italy had surrendered and the German Nazis were in control of the region, Jews were being arrested and shipped to extermination camps.

Outside of Florence, Italy, there is an American military cemetery with rows of small, white crosses and stars of David against green grass with an American flag in the center. After a day of enjoying Florence's art and architecture, I found this sight a sobering reminder that sometimes evil must be challenged, even at great cost. I thought back to being a six-year-old and saying goodbye to two uncles who went to war. They did not return. Frank Buchanan is buried in a U.S. military cemetery near Nancy, France, and John Calvin McCormick, for whom I am named, was killed in Saipan and buried in the U.S. military cemetery in Honolulu.

Eagleton is right that the U.S. has often acted out of a morally flawed sense of power, entitlement and empire. Journalists, academics and religious leaders need to raise pertinent critical questions. The constant, however, is the death of soldiers. I think about them a lot, and with gratitude.