

# THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST



## **ATHEISM:**

**is the acceptance that there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of a god, gods or the supernatural.**

# ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

## EST. 1970

## PHILOSOPHY

The Atheist Foundation of Australia recognises scientific method as the only rational means toward understanding reality. To question and critically examine all ideas, testing them in the light of experiment, leads to the discovery of facts.

As there is no scientific evidence for supernatural phenomena, atheists reject belief in 'God', gods and other supernatural beings. The universe, the world in which we live, and the evolution of life, are entirely natural occurrences.

No personality or mind can exist without the process of living matter to sustain it. We have only one life - here and now. All that remains after a person dies is the memory of their life and deeds in the minds of those who live.

Atheists reject superstition and prejudice along with the irrational fears they cause. We recognise the complexity and interdependence of life on this planet. As rational and ethical beings we accept the challenge of making a creative and responsible contribution to life.

## AIMS

To encourage and to provide a means of expression for informed free-thought on philosophical and social issues.

To safeguard the rights of all non-religious people.

To serve as a focal point for the fellowship of non-religious people.

To offer reliable information in place of superstition and to offer the methodology of reason in place of faith so as to enable people to take responsibility for the fullest development of their potential as human beings.

To promote atheism.

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# FROM THE EDITOR

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We were all greatly saddened by the news of the death of former AFA president Keith Cornish, and I would like to extend my sympathy to Brenda and her family. I only knew Keith for a short while as a relatively new member, but am truly glad that I had that opportunity and privilege. I greatly admired Keith for the fact that he made it known publicly that he was an atheist, yet lived in a small country town where being an atheist would have taken considerable courage, especially in those early years.

I agonised for some time over what to write in this editorial. The death of Keith seemed to warrant something sombre. But in the end I decided that it was more fitting to write something that Keith would hopefully have enjoyed, so that is what I have done.

I am in the habit of reading the *Adelaide Advertiser* each morning while I eat my breakfast. One of the columns that I always read, because it is good to start the day off with a laugh, is the column by Marty Smith. It comprises various witty sayings and jokes amongst other things. A typical line is “Laughing matter: What’s the best way to remember your wife’s birthday? - Forget it once”.

But immediately under this column is ‘Thought for Today’, which is always an inspirational quote from the Bible.

However, whoever is responsible for providing the thought for the day, in this newspaper as in all others, is being very selective. One would get the impression from these quotes that the Bible was all love and goodness. I would like to have the job of sub-editor in charge of ‘Thought for Today’ for a while. I would also be very selective, and my first week of thoughts for today would look like this.

Monday – “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.” *Colossians 3:18*

Tuesday – “For I have done your bidding, I have slain mine enemies in your name. I have put women and children to death in your honor, I have caused great pain among them, for your glory.” *Psalms, 5:4 - 10*

Wednesday – “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” *Ephesians 5:22 - 24*

Thursday – “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.” *Matthew 10:34*

Friday – “Slaves are told to submit to masters, even masters who are harsh. That would mean that if a slave were to try to gain freedom, he/she would be disobeying god! Just like women are disobeying god when they refuse to submit and breed!” *Peter 2:18*

Saturday – “No man who has any defect may come near (the altar of God): no man who is blind or lame, who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles.” *Leviticus 21:19 - 21*

It is doubtful that I would last the first week without getting the sack.

Perhaps I should apply for the job of sub-editor in charge of horoscopes instead.

*Dennis*

# Letters to the Editor

**T**hank you to all who sent cards, letters and emails following Keith's death. I would dearly love to respond to you personally but my failing eyesight makes writing too difficult.

When I read the wonderful comments people have written about Keith I feel he should be the one hearing them.

Sincerely  
Brenda Cornish



**I**would like to suggest to all other Atheists who subscribe to the 'THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST' Magazine to give past copies to your local library. In my case they go to the Northern Regional Library at Launceston, Tasmania.

Cheers  
Phil  
Launceston Atheist



Posted on the Atheists Australia Yahoo Group  
Atheists\_Australia@yahoogroups.com

**I**attended the debate between Allan Meyer and John Perkins at the Careforce church this evening. John did a great job of articulating some of the more relevant and contemporary issues to a packed house. Although there was nothing groundbreaking in the arguments of either party, the debate sparked a vigorous discussion among the attendees afterwards.

I was approached by a staff member who told me that there was someone wanting to speak with me. Somehow she'd managed to identify me as an atheist. The young lady who wanted to talk with me was looking to discuss her thoughts with any atheist that was available. Her name was Lisa, she was 21, and she told me, some way into our discussion, that she had been drawn to religion, that she was investigating it, and that after having witnessed tonight's debate she was now leaning significantly more toward atheism. This says something for John's choice of arguments and retorts given that Allen Meyer was right at home and highly polished.

For myself, I can say that I was glad to have made the journey. I would like to see more of these debates because although they would almost certainly do nothing to waken the deluded, I think they would more often prove sobering than entrancing, that they would be of genuine aid to the 'fence sitters' allowing them to see a bigger rather than narrower picture.

John presented as respectful though not timid, polite though not patronising, sensitive though not shy. He was mindful of his audience as well as of his objective, and I am sure he took many people by surprise with his quiet demeanour and his charm. Bravo John.

Mark Lucas



**T**hought your ex-catholic readers/members might be interested and amused reading "YES FATHER" It is a very funny book by Maria Honey. It chronicles the bizarre upbringing of a young girl in the Catholic faith. Highly recommended!

Michael, Tasmania.



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If Linda H. (Letters, March-April) wishes to hand over her own money for a “fitting headstone or monument” to the late Madalyn Murray O’Hair, that is her choice. But please keep my money out of it!

At the risk of sounding patronising (if I am mistaken), I suspect that Linda’s impressions of O’Hair may be derived almost entirely from the recent television programme about her.

Like Linda H., I also watched the S.B.S. documentary on M. M. O’Hair’s life, and found the programme very interesting; but I have been reading things by and about O’Hair for nearly forty years, and I noticed that the documentary gave the impression that O’Hair’s critics were just Christians. In fact a number of freethinkers and atheists were, for many years, appalled by O’Hair’s style and methods.

Here are two examples.

“Frequently at the [Atheist] Center we had meetings, and usually at some point Madalyn would entertain herself and Garth, her youngest son and official heir to the fiefdom, with a tirade against Jews or gays or blacks or Indians (that is, the natives of India). She has described the New York and Jersey Jews as gray-skinned, blue-lipped freaks with all the faults Hitler found in them. Blacks, of course, smell bad and are too lazy to better themselves. Gays, she claims, make her sick to her stomach. When Edamaruku, the great Atheist leader in India, and his son Sanbal were in the USA for the 1979 American Atheist Convention, Madalyn and Garth referred to them as ‘beggars’ and ‘monkeys’.” - Richard Bozarth in the American Rationalist, Jan.-Feb. 1983: p. 68.

“She has ‘ruled’ her own group in a totally arbitrary, undemocratic and capricious manner, as despotic as the very Jehovah she despises. She has thrown out members without any real cause. She has refused to reveal membership or financial data . . . even to members. . . . She has lied on radio and TV many times, especially about her background, qualifications and accomplishments. Even her own adopted daughter (really her granddaughter) has publicly stated that her grandmother has lied for so long that she no longer knows how to tell the truth. . . . “We frankly do not care who the atheist leaders are, as long as they are effective spokespeople for the cause. We do not think that Madalyn has been effective, or ever will be effective, as a spokesperson for atheism.” - Gordon Stein, Arthur Stahl, Walter Hoops and Bernard Katz, American Rationalist, May-June 1984: p. 3.

Another critic is Fred Woodworth, editor of *The Match!* (Tucson, Arizona), who has written a booklet (*The Atheist Cult*) about O’Hair running to several editions.

In the late 1970s I came to the conclusion, after reading several of O’Hair’s publications, that she had created a bizarre analogue of an authoritarian, money-grubbing religious sect, devoted mainly to the glorification of herself.

Madalyn Murray O’Hair was, I regret, not the only dysfunctional atheist or freethinker in the United States. In the early 1970s I met (briefly, in England) Garry De Young, who ran a freethought “diploma mill” called the Minnesota Institute of Philosophy. O’Hair received a “doctorate” from this source. Perhaps the worst embarrassment was James Hervey Johnson, who took over the *Truth Seeker* in 1964, and filled its pages with bad articles on atheism and worse diatribes of pathological hate against black people. After Johnson’s death (1988), O’Hair tried (unsuccessfully, I think), to acquire his estate for her organisation. (I should perhaps mention that, because of her public profile, M. M. O’Hair was also subject to what are best described as urban myths. Allegations that she sought to ban television programmes mentioning God, angels or the supernatural are almost certainly false: probably waspish spoofs or jokes rather than Christian black propaganda.) Madalyn O’Hair’s murder, organised by a vicious, embittered former employee was appalling. The murders also included Madalyn’s son Jon Garth Murray and - saddest of all, I think - her granddaughter Robin Murray O’Hair.

Linda H. says that O’Hair “is one person who I wish I could have met in my lifetime”. In about January 1983 I was invited to meet Madalyn Murray O’Hair in Melbourne, when she was visiting Australia. I am very glad I declined to do so.

Kind regards,  
Nigel Sinnott



**CORNISH, Keith Stanton.**  
1916 to 2007  
Committee and Members of  
the Atheist Foundation of  
Australia Inc. offer our sincere  
condolences to Brenda and  
family and friends.  
An outstanding and much  
loved and respected President  
for 30 years.  
An Unsung Hero  
David Nicholls, President.

Transcript of the  
**EULOGY**  
By David Nicholls

**Keith Stanton Cornish**  
27<sup>th</sup> January 1916 - 14<sup>th</sup> March 2007

I would like to thank Brenda for the privilege of allowing my partner Lee, and me, to be present on this sad occasion. My name is David Nicholls, and I am the president of the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC. I speak today, not only on behalf of the AFA, but also for Lee, as long-time friends and colleagues of both Keith and Brenda; a friendship valued more than most, and one which has not faltered or declined over the decades.

It was with great sorrow we received the news of Keith's death. The grief was on a personal level for Brenda, family, friends and us, but it also involved the knowledge that the wider recognition of Keith's achievements, in promoting Atheism, will be appreciated mainly by posterity, as has largely been the case with his favourite historical character, Thomas Paine.

Even though Keith deservedly should have been highly acclaimed as someone with a necessary and positive message for humanity, he understood that the habitual frailties of our species would most likely not allow for this. Keith did not require any adulation more than the due respect from fellow Atheists, which is there in abundance.

My reference to Thomas Paine is deliberate. Keith has an article on the AFA web site concerning the life of Thomas Paine, aptly titled: 'An Unsung Hero'. The parallels in the attitude to life, of Keith and Thomas Paine, were remarkable. They equally conceded that any wish for a populist public respect, came a very second place to understanding; there was an urgent need for a relentless promotion of ethical standards, unhampered by emotively driven, supernatural concepts.

Keith Stanton Cornish was a founding member of the Atheist Foundation, and the president for 30 years. That is a remarkable feat in itself and one that has left a firm and tangible legacy, to be added to, by those who follow.

There can be no greater commendation afforded Keith, than we honour his life, by continuing that to which he fervently aspired...Keith was actively engaged with the Foundation to the end. The oft touted recanting of Atheism was not at any stage, an option.

Keith was a good, gentle, kind, honest, wise and thoughtful person and it will become known, he was a great person. The inseparable partnership of Brenda and Keith will develop into 'stuff' of legend. I would go so far as to state, that if the rational objectives of Keith, are not accepted by civilisation as a whole, life on planet earth may well become impossible.

Even though the condolences Lee and I offer Brenda and close-ones are said with sincerity and fond regard, we know such words are of little immediate benefit. What may be of small comfort is that, if we all lived life as did Keith, the world would be a better place. It is coincidental but interesting that Keith, scientifically minded as he was, died on the 14<sup>th</sup> March, the date of Albert Einstein's birth.

Lee and I will miss Keith dearly. The certainty is... we are not alone with that sentiment.

Thank you.

# FOR GRANDPA'S FAMILY - IN HIS MEMORY

By Shannon Cornish  
Delivered by Shannon at the funeral service.

The photo of Keith was taken at his 90th Birthday celebration by grandson Luke Dix.



**T**here is nothing so sad  
as when somebody dies;  
your heart is all heavy  
and everyone cries.

And everything around you  
feels so far away;  
It's numb and it's strange  
and you fear the sadness will stay.

You cry and you sob  
and your thoughts are all rushed,  
until eventually you find somewhere to sit;  
where it's quiet and peaceful and everything's hushed.

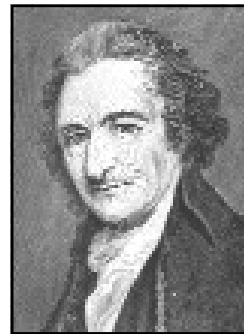
Always cherish your memories;  
and remember the happy times we had.  
May your inner strengths help  
through the times that are sad.

For all of us who loved him  
may he live on in your heart.  
Celebrate his long life  
and then you are never apart.



# THOMAS PAINE - AN UNSUNG HERO

by Keith S Cornish



Two men are regarded as having contributed equally to the successful outcome of the American War of Independence. George Washington in directing the movement of the soldiers and another man whose words in a time of crisis inspired those soldiers.

This man's first Crisis pamphlet, which Washington ordered to be read to the troops, begins with these words "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he who stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered." With Washington's troops near disintegration, Thomas Paine, a man about whom few people have heard or know what he did, published those words in mid-winter on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1776.

He was the first person to use the phrase "The United States of America", so let us recall the life and work of a man dedicated to liberty and reason.

He was born on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1737 in Thetford, Norfolk, England. His father was a Quaker and his mother an Anglican. He attended the Thetford Grammar School and received a good education despite being withdrawn at age 13. After completing his apprenticeship as a stay maker, (his father's trade) he went on a six-month voyage on a privateer which netted him £30, about two years or more pay. He used this to pay for an extended stay in London where he attended scientific lectures and bought a globe to assist.

He became an exciseman. He married Mary Lambert in 1759, but she died in 1760 possibly in childbirth. Mary's father had been an exciseman and Thomas may have been influenced by this to seek a post in the Excise. He was appointed first to Grantham then Alford, both in Lincolnshire but dismissed for fraud. Later it turned out that his supervisor was responsible and he was dismissed. Paine petitioned for his job back and was appointed to Lewes in Sussex.

He married Elizabeth Ollive in 1771 but they separated in 1774. He was asked to draw up a petition arguing for better pay and conditions for Excisemen but Parliament refused to accept it. He was dismissed for neglecting his duties. Paine arrived in Philadelphia in November 1774 and secured work as co-editor of *The Pennsylvania Magazine*. He wrote and published poems and other articles anonymously (or under noms de plume): such works as his scathing denunciation of the slave trade, which he signed "Justice and Humanity".

There was fighting against the British troops at Lexington and Concord in mid 1775. On 10<sup>th</sup> January 1776 Paine published the pamphlet *Common Sense*, showing why America should become independent of Britain, emphasising how unjust and foolish was the monarchical system of government. This publication paved the way for the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson has always been credited with having written the Declaration of Independence but evidence now available reveals that Thomas Paine produced the draft for this document. In *Common Sense* he argues that a manifesto be published which could be sent to other nations and would tell why America was forced to break ties with Britain. The causes which impel the separation are proclaimed in *Common Sense*.

On 11<sup>th</sup> June 1776 Congress voted for such a document. A committee of five was appointed but at the last moment one was obliged to answer a call to his home and Jefferson took his place. Paine produced a draft, of which the John Adams family still retains a copy. This carries a clause to end slavery and this clause was omitted from the Declaration. Had it been included, the Civil War, ninety years later, would not have been fought. Why was this clause significant? Because slavery appalled Paine but Jefferson, at his death, still owned 200 slaves and any draft from him would not have included this clause.

The phrasing in the draft and the peculiar use of capitals and the spelling of words brand it as the work of Thomas Paine. It was condensed, mutilated and then submitted to Congress by the chairman of the Committee, Thomas

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Jefferson. It is far easier to modify a draft on hand than to start with blank paper and, in twenty days, produce such a Declaration of Independence.

It was typical of the integrity of Paine that he never openly claimed the credit, although it was hinted. Paine enlisted, served as aide-de-camp to General Nathaniel Green and wrote a total of 16 'Crisis Papers'. In 1777 Congress appointed him Secretary to the Committee of Foreign Affairs, in which position he was obliged to reveal that Silas Deane was taking personal profit from war aid from France. Paine was dismissed but subsequent investigation proved that he was correct.

He was appointed Clerk of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania in November 1779 and that body, in March 1780, was the first to pass an Act for the abolition of slavery. The preamble is attributed to Thomas Paine. As Clerk, Paine was able to observe the suffering of the American soldiers because of the lack of supplies, and he took \$500 from his own salary of \$1690 for a fund, which led to the foundation of the Bank of America. In his pamphlet *Public Good* he called for a Convention to update the Articles of Confederation.

In 1781, together with John Laurens, he went to France, where Louis XVI "loaded him with favours" which were instrumental in Washington's final victory. For this service Paine received neither payment nor acknowledgment.

George Washington endorsed a petition to Congress for financial assistance but Paine's opponents buried it until December 1784 when a payment of \$3000 was made, an amount less than the cost of his journey to France. However, Pennsylvania gave him \$500 and New York presented him with a 277-acre farm at New Rochelle, so he was able to concentrate on his plans for a 500-foot iron arch bridge and other inventions. Later he was granted patents in Britain for his bridge. At least one was built but he was cheated out of any remuneration therefrom.

In 1786 Paine's principles of a republican government, as opposed to monarchical rule, were enshrined in the Constitution, in which the term "sovereign" has "subject" for its correlation. This concept was later rejected by the Eleventh Amendment.

Paine returned to Europe in mid 1787 and spent time in both France and England, where he was recognised and feted as the author of *Common Sense*. Paine's vision of a Europe without kings was enhanced by the French Revolution and by his being asked to take part in the writing of the French Constitution, which included many of his concepts, such as the abolition of slavery.

The degree of honour accorded Paine was shown when M de Lafayette gave him the key to the destroyed Bastille for presentation to President Washington and later Paine was elected to the French National Convention.

In England he warned Prime Minister William Pitt against involvement in a war against France over Holland.

When, in November 1790, Edmund Burke published *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Paine was outraged and replied with his celebrated *Rights of Man*. Paine published *Rights of Man Part 2* in February 1792.

In this work he analysed the reasons for the political discontent in Europe and spoke out against the evils of arbitrary governments, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and war. He argued against hereditary rights, in favour of republics over monarchies and advocated a progressive income tax to finance education, relief for the poor, aged pensions and public works for the unemployed. The ruling class of Britain was outraged. The books were banned and the publisher jailed.

In May 1792 Paine was issued with a Royal Proclamation for 'seditious writing'. He left for Dover where the Collector of Customs subjected him to a thorough search. Among his letters were those from the Secretary of State in America and from President Washington. When the Collector began to read, Paine's friend Frost retrieved the letter and rebuked him for reading such a private letter. Frost then read aloud the last sentence above Washington's signature "...and as no man can feel a greater interest in the happiness of mankind than I do, it is the firm wish of my heart that the enlightened policy of the present age may diffuse to all men those blessings to which they are entitled and lay the foundation of happiness for future generations." The letters were returned and

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Paine and his friends sailed to France. Twenty minutes later the order for Paine's arrest reached Dover.

On 18<sup>th</sup> December 1792 Thomas Paine was charged at The Guildhall, London, that he "being a person of a wicked, malicious and seditious disposition" etc "did publish that the crown of this kingdom was contrary to the rights of the inhabitants" and so forth. The Attorney-General, who prosecuted, said that he would not read out the many "false, wicked and scandalous assertions" but would read only a few more, such as "to inherit a crown is to inherit the people, as if they were flocks and herds." The famous Thomas Erskine defended Paine but the carefully selected jury, which received two guineas each and a free dinner for a conviction and nothing otherwise, decided to return a verdict of guilty. Laws were passed to restrict free speech and publication.

He returned to France to take up his Convention seat with the applause of the crowd and through triumphant arches. He recommended the end of the monarchical system. He strongly opposed the killing of Louis XVI and this was used against him when Robespierre gained power.

Paine realised that killing Louis could lead to invasion by the European countries that had ties to the deposed monarch. Some of the nobility appealed to William Pitt for money to secure the life of Louis but Pitt refused to attempt to save the life of America's friend. If Louis and his family had been banished to America, as Paine proposed, how different the history of Europe would have been.

The political scene in France was determined by specific parties and when Robespierre came to power Paine was arrested and imprisoned on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1793. He was just able to arrange for the publication of *The Age of Reason* before his incarceration. Anticipating his arrest, he had finished this work six hours previously. His reason for writing it was "lest we lose sight of morality, of humanity and of the theology that is true."

Paine became very ill in the Luxembourg prison, while outside France suffered the Reign of Terror and prisoners were taken away daily to the guillotine. Paine wrote letters to try to secure his release but was frustrated by the American Minister in France, Gouverneur Morris, who was his enemy and stood to gain by his death.

Morris wrote to Secretary, Thomas Jefferson, "Lest I forget it, I must mention that Thomas Paine is in prison, where he amuses himself with a pamphlet against Jesus Christ."

Each day a chalk mark was made on the outside of the doors of those to be taken to the guillotine. Because Paine was so ill, his door was left open during the day and so the chalk-mark was made on the inside, but his door was closed when the condemned were collected. The next day Robespierre was removed from power but Paine was not released until 4<sup>th</sup> November 1794.

James Monroe was the new American Minister in Paris. *The Age of Reason Part 2* was written while Paine was being nursed back to health by Mrs. Monroe at the Monroes' home in Paris. It was in James Monroe's house he now read what were reported as his dying words before his execution. They were a rejection of all his words and principles. When his health improved he was readmitted to the National Convention.

In the pamphlet *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* dated 8<sup>th</sup> April 1796, Paine predicted the suspension of the Bank of England that occurred the next year. The proceeds of this pamphlet he devoted to the relief of the prisoners in Newgate prison held for debts.

In 1797 he published *Agrarian Justice*, which attacked the inequality of property ownership.

His pamphlet entitled *Maritime Compact* was published in 1800. It includes ten articles for the security of neutral commerce to be signed by the nations entering the "Unarmed Association" which he proposed.

Paine was consulted by Napoleon Bonaparte but this dialogue ended when Napoleon rejected republican principles and declared himself Emperor.

As Britain exercised control over the sea routes, Paine delayed returning to America until September 1802.

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During this time, he maintained cordial relationships with several families, including the Bonneville and Sir Robert Smith, for whose wife he wrote the poem *The Castle in the Air* as a tribute to her kindness during his imprisonment.

On 30<sup>th</sup> October of the same year, Paine landed at Baltimore to a mixed welcome of praise and abuse.<sup>[1]</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> December he wrote to Jefferson suggesting the purchase of Louisiana and how it should be done. Jefferson replied that he also was contemplating such a purchase.

Paine was a deist and it was his conception of the nature of a perfect god which was the basis of his attack on the Bible, on “Christianity” and all book-based religions. Of course his statements could not be allowed to go unchallenged. The Bishop of Llandaff made an attempt at a challenge but sank the Church deeper into the quicksand, for Paine’s observations were devastating and have never been proved to be faulty or false. Religious leaders, such as Bishop Spong, are slowly recognising the validity of *The Age of Reason*, but they can only go so far without admitting that Christianity is morally bankrupt and completely fraudulent.

The Church has never forgiven Paine, has continued to oppose his principles and has downplayed his enormous contribution to human rights and to the living standards which are recognised today.

The Bonneville migrated to the United States and a complete file of Paine’s writings and letters were given to Madame Bonneville to assist in proposed folio works. She became a Roman Catholic convert and the project never proceeded. This invaluable collection was destroyed in a fire.

Paine was ostracised and died on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1809. He could well be described as the Creator of Modern Democracy but the Christian world rewarded Paine with abuse and vilification. Theodore Roosevelt described Thomas Paine as a “filthy little atheist” – three lies in three words. He was not filthy, was five feet ten inches tall with broad shoulders and was a deist.

The tide is turning. On 30<sup>th</sup> January 1937 *The Times* of London referred to him as “the English Voltaire” and on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1962 his bust was placed in the New York University Hall of Fame.

Atheists honour Thomas Paine for his contributions to the concepts of liberty and equality of citizens before the law, and for his condemnation of the Bible and Christianity.

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<sup>[1]</sup> **Editorial Footnote:** The abuse was large-calibre nasty: “The *New England Palladium* attacked Jefferson for daring to welcome a ‘lying, drunken, brutal infidel, who rejoiced in the opportunity of basking and wallowing in the confusion, bloodshed, rapine, and murder in which his soul delights’. One enraged editor bellowed: ‘Let Jefferson and his blasphemous crony dangle from the same gallows’.” (James Allen, Introduction to *Thomas Paine: Selections from His Writings*; N.Y., 1937).



## FROM CHRISTIAN PREACHER TO ATHEIST By Charles Cornwall

In his book *Human Instinct* Robert Winston poses the question “how is it that so many people still hold religious views and profess belief in God when the notion of an all-powerful being is irrational?”. How indeed? The root cause of this phenomenon is surely to be found in that arch-enemy of freethinking – childhood indoctrination.

History demonstrates that people tend to cling to the religious beliefs to which they were exposed as a child. As Bertrand Russell said in his book *Why I Am Not a Christian*, “What really moves people to believe in God is not any intellectual argument at all. Most people believe in God because they have been taught from early infancy to do it, and that is the main reason.” On this point there is agreement from both sides of the fence, as witness the famous Jesuit boast: “Give us a child until he is seven and we will have him for the rest of his life.”

In my own case, I was indoctrinated into the Christian faith – of the fundamentalist variety. Seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year, throughout infancy, childhood and adolescence I was fed on a diet of fundamentalist Christianity. Like all children through the ages, I accepted as true what I was taught. So I became a fundamentalist Christian. It is now apparent to me that, had I been similarly indoctrinated in a Muslim home, I would have become an equally convinced Muslim.

Taking my religion seriously, I entered Theological College where I completed the required course of studies and was ordained as a Minister of the Baptist Church. Twelve years and several pastorates later I resigned from the ministry. Not yet an atheist, I was already heading along the road in that direction.

The path from total belief to total disbelief is a long, tortuous one. It is a gradual, continuous process. You can't leap directly from one state to the other by a sort of reverse of Paul's so-called Damascus road conversion. Thus it was that over the years following my departure from the ministry I edged, through a period of agnosticism, closer and closer to complete atheism.

Then one day, about 15 years ago, I read Bertrand Russell's *Why I Am Not a Christian*. With a huge sigh of relief I took the final step and acknowledged to myself that I was an atheist. Reading Dawkins' *The God Delusion* recently simply reaffirmed my position. In March 2007 I formally joined the Atheist Foundation of Australia, an act of significant psychological importance to me – a sort of nailing of my colours to the mast. If I may be pardoned for quoting Luther, this was my “Here I stand, I can do no other.”

What brought about this complete reversal in my thinking? As strange as it may seem, it was the enforced study of the Bible in Theological College. If the reason why people believe in a certain religion in the first place is due to childhood indoctrination, the reason why they continue to cling to that belief in later life is because, as adults, they never bother to critically examine their faith in the light of reason and hard evidence. They are too busy with other things – living their lives, educating themselves, working, raising a family, entertaining themselves. They simply tuck their religion away in some corner of their minds – a comfort zone, an insurance policy, a big brother to turn to in need.

In retrospect, it seems that, even when I was a loyal Christian, I possessed an unrecognised, latent scepticism so that, bit by bit, as I studied the Bible, I became aware of the contradictions and absurdities of its teachings. It began at the beginning. God made the universe in six days. On the first day he made light and dark and called them day and night. On the fourth day he made the sun – hey, wait a minute, a day and a night before there was a sun? And so it went on from there.

It eventually dawned on me that not everything in the Bible can be taken literally. Second problem: how can you know what to take literally and what not? If you can't take literally that God made the world in six days, or that Jesus turned water into wine, can you take literally that he rose from the dead? And that's the pivotal doctrine of Christianity! And so the process went on. Space won't allow a more detailed outline of the process, but I hope you get the picture.

Recently I reached my Biblical allocation of “three score years and ten” — with an ironic twist in the tail. Having started out as a fundamentalist Christian I achieved the aforementioned Biblical milestone as an atheist! While I'm glad

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about the final outcome, I deeply regret those intervening years that could have been better spent. All of which were the result of well intentioned but misguided childhood indoctrination.

**Endnote:** After leaving the ministry I entered the social work profession and, for 25 years until my retirement, worked as a Probation & Parole Officer with the Dept of Correctional Services.



## RELIGIOUS SURVIVOR by Michael H.

As a Marist Brothers survivor I'm aghast to see the damaged and brainwashed kids I recognize from my youth clinging to their superstition as politicians or high priests today. The chauvinist, bigoted and bullying culture they grew up in is indelibly etched on their psyches. This probably explains their career choices. The central tenet of their delusion — god is love — is totally absent in their xenophobia.

In my struggle with alcohol — yet another product unscrupulously flogged to the young to get them addicted — I was frustrated to find help came only with “salvation” (Alcoholics Anonymous). It was through the advice of a general practitioner who recommended a psychiatrist (also a recovered alcoholic) that got me through this dark period and saved what was left of my brain and body — science, rationality and the Hippocratic oath to the rescue. The conflict which led me to obliterate myself was a direct result of the hypocrisy I had grown up in — Catholicism.

It is tricky curing yourself. Try being an atheist despite your whole large family (whom you love) from age 12. I have great sympathy and understanding for gays in this similar situation. This seriously *is* child abuse. The religious issue has wrecked my entire family.

Richard Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion* is fully justified in his shrillness against such superstitions, if only because of the suicidal damage they continue to wreak on our only planet. Religions are leading us to destruction and we just cop it.

Our Prime Minister John Howard refers to God as justification for mining uranium and sits in a church with another so-called leader, whilst waging war on Muslims. The Pope, an ex-Hitler Youth member, urges more babies while the earth groans. History repeats!

The Middle East is permanently stuffed. Yet we're already planning to colonize other worlds. Fix things here first please.



## THE GRAND DELETE By Kevin D.

It was during the war years of 1939-45 that I attended St. Patrick's School at Lithgow, New South Wales. This is where I received most of my religious training. My learning ability was poor to say the least, but strange as it may seem it was for religion that I received the best marks.

At present I am reading the book *The Vatican Exposed* as well as other books. I can't get enough of the information fast enough for fear I may come to my full stop before I read all there is to study.

During my learning years I was of the opinion that we Catholics (I had no choice in that branding) being on the Allied side, were doing our part for the war against the horrors that were taking place in other parts of the world. Little did we know that the people we were trying to suppress were being supported by our so-called church leaders.

I am now trying to delete all the guilt and filth that I knew nothing about from my brain.

The one thing I am happy about is the fact that I have found the Atheist Foundation and it is steering me on the right path.





It looks like June will be a lucky month for all of us here in the USA who are yearning for the “truth of the Bible”! If all goes according to schedule, the Creation Museum near Cincinnati, Ohio, will be opening just in time for the summer vacation season. So far, about 26 million dollars has been wasted on this project by founder Ken Ham and his investors.

About 250,000 people are expected during the first year of operation. The dozens of exhibits will attempt to convince all visitors that the earth is 6,000 years old, dinosaurs existed along with humans, Noah’s Ark and the flood actually happened, and evolution is just some sort of crazy theory unsupported by science. With over 80% of the American population suckers for *Christinsanity*, this museum should have easy pickings when the sheep arrive!

In April it became obvious that George Bush has done damage to the US that will extend well beyond the end of his term next year. In a 5 to 4 vote, the US Supreme Court ruled to outlaw all so called “partial birth” abortions. This may be just the opening round in an attempt by the religious right to overthrow the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision that affirmed a women’s right to privacy, or freedom to choose. In years past, there was always a majority on the court to uphold laws allowing no restrictions on abortion. However, in the last couple years, Bush has had the opportunity to make two appointments to the high court resulting in a change in court philosophy. Now, thanks to George Bush, we have FIVE Catholics in the majority. The last time I looked, the Catholic Church was still vehemently opposed to any and all abortions.

Also, the Bush Court may now also hear the 18-year-old Mt. Soledad, California, cross case. This case, which is a perfect example of the absurd workings of the US “justice” system, keeps bouncing around from court to court, with every decision so far in favor of the plaintiffs. The city of San Diego keeps trying new twists on the facts of the case in order to allow it to stand on public property. In two previous attempts to get the Supreme Court to rule, they have declined to hear the case, which lets the lower court decision stand. Now, with the 5 Catholics running the show, they have decided to hear it. Guess what their decision will be? This folly has dragged on so long that the original plaintiff in the case, Phil Paulsen, died last year and was replaced by another interested party with standing. A lesson to be learned here is how tenacious religionists can be. They will stop at nothing to advance their dark-age agenda.

Speaking of the Bush administration, it’s recently been uncovered that they have been filling many administration positions with graduates of TV evangelist Pat Robertson’s Reagent Law School. Amazingly, 150 graduates of this Christian school have been given jobs by the Bush gang! About one out of every six of their graduates is now working in government at some level. Pat Robertson is elated about this because it’s his goal to break down any separation of state and church and turn the US into a theocracy. We will probably be hearing a lot more about this in the upcoming weeks during Congressional hearings regarding underhanded firings of US Attorney’s in the Justice Department.

Corruption and incompetence in the heavily Christian Bush administration just never ends!

*Bill*

*“I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours.” - Stephen F Roberts*



## The Secular Party of Australia

*Standing for separation of church and state*

As our society has become more technically advanced, it has not become more rational. Reason is losing ground to superstition and blind faith.

- Religious intolerance and violence is increasing
- Religion is being forced into public education
- Religion is increasingly intruding into political decision making
- Religious extremists are demanding that their beliefs be imposed by government legislation
- Taxes are increasingly being used to promote religious dogma
- Our civil liberties are being eroded to placate religious beliefs
- The rule of law is being subverted

The Secular Party of Australia stands to reverse these trends.

- Religious bias has no place in politics or in the institutions of state
- Members of parliament should only use critical, rational thinking in their deliberations
- Morality is best being based upon honesty, compassion, freedom and justice

Adherence to religious dogma subverts these principles.

*As religions increasingly divide us, more than ever, we need a "brotherhood of humanity".*

**The Secular Party has been established based on these principles and this vision. If you believe in reason, not superstition, join us. For information, see below or contact John on 0411 143 744.**

**info@secular.org.au**

**www.secular.org.au**

**The Secular Party of Australia. P.O. Box 6004, Melbourne, Vic. 8008**

## Letters to the Papers

Many commentators have been unkind to Bill Heffernan for his out-of-date remarks. Whilst that may appear on the surface to be justified, a closer examination reveals a side of Australian culture that actually promotes such outbursts. Bill is, after all, the end result of a mutually inclusive misogynist 'holy' upbringing. He has merely put into words indoctrinatory messages of, 'procreate or join the priesthood', implanted in youth. Many religious adherents cocooned by rural isolation or who live in an enclave social setting, think along similar lines, even though not many tend to enunciate it publicly.

The fault of this faux pas lies at the feet of patriarchal religion not with those who are victims of its well-honed methods of brainwashing. There is a message in this sorry saga if we would but accept it. Children should be taught about the historical relevance of religion, its divisive nature, its un-evidenced status, its harms and dangers. Specific religious childhood indoctrination with the threat of hell or the promise of heaven is mental child abuse.

The start of this re-education should be disbanding religious instruction and chaplaincy programs in State Schools and cancelling government funding to private faith driven education.

David Nicholls

President

Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

# Life after Death? Part 3

By Harry Edwards

This is the third and final article refuting the so-called “irrefutable scientific evidence” offered by lawyer Victor Zammit to support the concept of an afterlife.

In his book and on his web-site he refers to Thomas Edison (1847–1931). Edison was an incessant inventor who took out over 1000 patents during a period of 50 years. They included, an electrical vote recorder, stock tickers, duplex and quadruplex, and automatic telegraph systems. The electric pen (forerunner of the modern duplicating machine) and the carbon transmitter. In 1877 he patented the ‘phonograph’ or speaking machine and later, the ‘kinescopic camera’ for taking motion pictures.

Edison believed in telepathy and was easily taken in by professional mountebanks. After seeing Dr. Bert Reese, whose mind reading ability was no more genuine than any other stage mentalist, Edison wrote to *The Evening Graphic*, in New York City, in which he stated his conviction that Reese was a genuine psychic.

According to *Diary and Sundry Observations of Thomas Alva Edison*, Edison also expressed his belief that in the human brain are millions of submicroscopic intelligences that he called ‘little peoples.’ They rush about performing the desired mental functions, and are under the control of ‘master entities’ who live in the fold of Broca!

The concept of “little men” rushing around in the brain inspires in a rational mind as much credence as L. Ron Hubbard’s “engrams” – (alleged) aberrations imposed on the brain that could be “cleared” by his pseudo-scientific Dianetic [ or “dianetic”] therapy.]

Before he died in 1931, Edison was working on a sensitive piece of apparatus for communicating with departed spirits. It seems rather odd that, over seventy years later, if it was at all feasible it has not been developed. Without in any way wishing to deprecate Edison’s inventive genius, one must admit that he was a believer and easily taken in. Believing in something doesn’t make it true, particularly such things as ‘little people’ rushing around in one’s brain!

Contrary to Zammit’s claim, there is no evidence that Edison contributed any scientific validation of an afterlife. Also mentioned by Zammit is Dr Konstantine

Raudive who, in more recent times, has allegedly recorded the voices of the dead. They have become known as electronic voice phenomena or more colloquially – the Raudive Voices.

Originally, spirit voices were the work of Dr. Jurgenson who had noticed that some tape recordings that he had made contained some ‘extra’ voices, which would speak a few words at a time. He published a book about it in 1964. Dr Konstantine Raudive read it and began experimenting himself. He recorded no less than 70,000 phrases speaking in Swedish, German, Russian, Latvian, French and English and in 1968 published his own book.

Because of the novel new technology used *what* was said seemed unimportant. The fact that Winston Churchill, for example, is alleged to have spoken a few words in each separate language when his linguistic attainment was only that of schoolboy French doesn’t seem to have phased anyone.

The fallaciousness inherent in quoting ‘phantom voices’ as evidence of an afterlife is that they are recorded with conventional radio equipment. This implies transmission by normal electro-magnetic propagation methods. By determining the frequency of the signal and a direction finding exercise, locating the source is a simple matter. As human beings, dead or alive, have no anatomical means of transmitting electro-magnetic waves, it begs the question, how would they do it? It’s true that a *live* brain generates brain waves; but that they do not radiate beyond the skull is evidenced by the requirement of electrodes and an amplifier attached to the skull to detect them.

David Ellis, a young member of the British Society for Psychological Research who was assigned to study the phenomena at first hand, confirmed that these voices undoubtedly emanated from a variety of radio stations. He pointed out that some of the voices tallied with an announcement in English from Radio Luxembourg; that others could have come from different radio signals; and that many of the sounds interpreted as words could have arisen from indistinct transmissions, mechanical noises and the imagination. “The listener” he wrote, “does seem to develop the practice...a faculty for producing interpretations by a process of guesswork.”

Once again, by quoting unconvincing claims like the Raudive voices, Zammit provides no definitive scientific evidence for an afterlife. Zammit doesn’t seem to have done too much homework on his

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characters either because he also includes Mr. George Meek, the founder of the Metascience Foundation Inc., of Franklin, North Carolina. In 1982, Mr. Meek claimed to have established two-way communication by means of electronic-etheric technology with those "who had crossed over to another realm." He gave a demonstration and made public a technical manual and companion documents which, he said, "proved the feasibility of communication between different levels of consciousness", meaning people now living and the dead.

A reporter at George Meek's press conference described the recorded voices as, "Igor responding to Dr Frankenstein through a closed door on a windy night in Transylvania."

At a scheduled second press conference, Meek said no "live" demonstration of discussion with the dead would be possible because the machinery happened to be out of commission. How convenient!

The "telephone-like instrument" as described by Mr Meek can be ruled out, the requirement of physical connections in the form of wires precluding its use. Communication by chemical means or mechanical vibrations such as those used by some animals, birds and insects can also be ruled out, leaving either EUTS (energies unknown to science), or electro-magnetic propagation as possible transmission media.

The existence of unknown energies has yet to be proven, and in respect of the latter, if it were possible to communicate by this medium then its use would not be the sole prerogative of stage professionals such as the late Doris Stokes, J.Z. Knight, John Edward, Australia's Bridget Pluis and a host of others who have conned the public over the years. In 1996, Mrs Pluis turned down an offer of a half million dollar prize if she would subject herself to a test of her claims. (*Sunday Telegraph* Feb 25, 1996)

Although the electro-magnetic option may be the more feasible, it raises some awkward questions for scientifically illiterate believers. For example: do the spirits have access to conventional radio apparatus and therefore live in a yet undiscovered material albeit invisible world?

Are the vocal chords of the dead impervious to decay or the all-consuming flames of the crematorium? If so, in the absence of lungs, what causes them to vibrate and have they been miraculously altered to enable the fundamental voice frequency range of 80-2000 c.p.s. to be extended to include the megahertz band?

Either way these transmissions would be detectable with the most basic of radio receivers, and furthermore, the location of the transmissions could be pinpointed with ease using equally unsophisticated direction finding equipment.

With the advances made in electronic equipment since 1982 and the fact that audio and visual communication between Earth and far distant satellites is now commonplace, it begs the question why has no advance been made in the development of George Meek's "telephone-like instrument?"

Electronic communication with the dead has no scientific basis and any putative messages can be treated with the same suspicion as those laboriously received via an Ouija board.

Once more, Zammit's so called scientific evidence fails to stand up to scrutiny. Unlike Mr Zammit, who declined to accept my challenge to publicly debate his evidence, he will be informed of my refutation and invited to comment.

Don't hold your breath!



### **Iranian leader's kiss enrages Muslims**

TEHRAN

IRAN'S President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been accused of "indecent" after he publicly embraced and kissed on the hand an elderly woman who used to be his schoolteacher.

At a ceremony ahead of Iranian teachers' day, Mr Ahmadinejad was photographed and filmed by state media stooping to kiss the woman's hand and then clasping her arms in a warm embrace.

"The Muslim Iranian people have no recollection of such acts contrary to sharia law during Islamic rule," since the 1979 revolution, seethed the ultra-conservative *Hezbollah* newspaper on its front page.

The elderly woman, who was not named, wore thick gloves along with a headscarf and long black coat, meaning that Mr Ahmadinejad avoided any skin contact.

However, his action raised eyebrows.

According to sharia law, it is forbidden for a man to have any physical contact with a woman to whom he is not related.

A new breed of evangelical atheist is preaching a fiery gospel that rejects religion, writes **Thornton McCamish**

ON PALM SUNDAY, Dr John Perkins drove out to the Careforce Church in Mount Evelyn to tell its congregation that everything it believed and held dear about God was, sad to say, mistaken and even dangerous.

It wouldn't be everyone's idea of a fun night out. Finding himself in similar circumstances, Australian arch-atheist Philip Adams once described himself as "a lion thrown into a den of Daniels".

And the scene did appear set for a mauling: the modern community hall-style building can hold 1000 and the debate had sold out within 20 minutes of tickets going on sale.

But there was no blood spilt. The Careforce house band belted out a few numbers, including John Lennon's *Imagine* ("Imagine there's no heaven, and no religion too ..."), and then for nearly 90 minutes a mostly Christian audience listened intently while Christianity and atheism went 10 heartfelt rounds on stage. There was gracious applause at the end.

This slightly odd event is part of much wider phenomenon: the emergence of newly energised atheism centred around Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*. An unapologetic and even contemptuous attack on faith, the book has caused a storm in the US where it has been camped on the New York Times bestseller list for five months.

Dawkins' is just one of at least half a dozen popular books preaching an anti-religious message that have appeared in the past year or so. There are more to come, too. Connoisseurs of the heretical will be salivating at the prospect of Christopher Hitchens' *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, which is due in May.

This swelling of atheist literature is a reaction to a worldwide rise in fundamentalist religion. But in kicking back at extremism, the bestselling atheists don't discriminate between mainstream faith and the loony fringe. It's religion itself they object to.

Dawkins hopes to eradicate faith entirely. This immodest project has put the high-profile English biologist at the vanguard of what's being called — inevitably — "evangelistic atheism".

Dawkins has been on the cover of Time magazine. He even appeared on TV show *South Park*, where he was, as he himself grumblingly described it, "portrayed as a cartoon character buggering a bald transvestite".

Popular atheism is not new — Bertrand Russell's classic *Why I Am An Atheist* was written half a century ago — but the emphasis on mass conversion to common sense might be.

The "Beyond Belief" forum, at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in California late last year resembled, The New York Times reported, "the founding convention for a political party built on a single plank: in a world dangerously charged with ideology, science needs to take on an evangelical role, vying with religion as teller of the greatest story ever told."

It's also unrepentantly trenchant, eschewing the delicacy conventionally observed in religious discussion. "I'm utterly fed up with the respect that we — all of us, including the secular among us — are brainwashed into bestowing on religion," Dawkins has said. And so say an increasing number of thinkers for whom the fundamental absurdity of all religious belief has become non-negotiable. In a swingeing philippic against Islamic fundamentalism published in the Observer last year, Martin Amis wrote: "Today, in the West, there are no good excuses for religious belief — unless we think that ignorance, reaction and sentimentality are good excuses."

If this seems unnecessarily trenchant, says English philosopher A. C. Grayling, who has contributed his own irreligious tract, *Against All Gods* (2007), to the book shops, remember that religion started it. "Politeness and restraint have been banished by the confrontational face that faith now turns to the modern world," Grayling writes. "In the face of the growing volume and assertiveness of different religious bodies asking for preferential

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treatment, secular opinion has hardened.”

There were no traces of this rancorous mood at the debate in Mount Evelyn. Careforce senior pastor Dr Allan Meyer warmly congratulated Dr Perkins on having the courage to bring his bad news to the largest Church of Christ congregation in the country. In turn, Dr Perkins apologised in advance for any offence his views might cause. Proceeds from ticket sales went to the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday appeal.

The debate was an away fixture for the atheists. But then, it's hard to imagine what an atheist home game would look like, since a gathering of Australian atheists wouldn't fill the MCG's southern stand. In the 2001 census, barely one Australian in 2000 identified as atheist, though nearly 15 per cent claimed to have “no religion”.

Atheism seems to suffer from an odd Australian ambivalence about religion. In her book *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*, Marion Maddox argues that in Australia's “exceptionally secular culture” religion is still welcome, “but mainly as something we approve of for others, rather than participate in ourselves”.

It may be true that fewer Australians attend church than ever, says Dr Carole Cusack, chairwoman of the department of studies in religion at the University of Sydney, but Australians still view being religious positively. “If somebody says they're religious, it means they have principles and morals.”

The reverse seems to apply to atheists. “I think if you just say ‘I'm an atheist’,” says Dr Cusack, “people assume that you despise religion. People somehow think atheism is linked to being derisory.”

Or perhaps to being humourless. Some people with no time for God seem to prefer more mischievous alternatives than plain old atheism can offer. In the last census, the number of professed atheists was dwarfed by the more than 70,000 Australians who described their religion as “Jedi”, a la Star Wars. The *Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*, a parody religion created by American Bobby Henderson, has become a huge hit on the web in just a couple of years, and now offers its own gospel, nifty T-shirts and mock-commandments, the eight “I'd Really Rather You Didn'ts”.

Nearly 60,000 copies of Dawkins' book have sold in Australia, but it's hard to say whether it's producing a generation of atheist converts. It does seem to have galvanised existing atheists somewhat. Dawkins can take some credit for the Melbourne Atheist Meet-up Group, which was set up in June last year and now has some 60 members. One of its founders, Andrew Rawlings, an atheist activist, says *The God Delusion* was “very influential” in the formation of the group.

On Australia Day this year, 10 members of the group established an “atheist presence” outside a Catch the Fire Ministries prayer rally at Festival Hall.

There was a small scuffle when one rally participant tried to knock a copy of *The God Delusion* out of an atheist's hands, but no one was hurt. Probably no one was converted, either. Most of the Christians, says Rawlings, seemed not so much angered by the atheists as concerned for their souls.

Spreading the word against God has never been a priority for Australia's more established atheist groups. The *Atheist Foundation of Australia*, which provided Dr John Perkins for the Careforce Church debate, has been in existence for 37 years. Its most important functions, says its president, David Nicholls, are to promote secularism, and to argue that the indoctrination of children with irrational religious ideas is dangerous, and that indoctrinating children into a belief in eternal damnation is actually a form of abuse.

Still, Nicholls has high hopes for the new atheism. “Anyone who reads Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* and doesn't start questioning their faith really has not got a hold on reality,” he says.

Melbourne philosopher Tamas Pataki is soon to add another book to the growing pile of popular atheistic literature. His *Against Religion* is due out next month, but he has no interest, he says, in being part of “some

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movement to defeat or repel religion". He too sees the boom in atheist thought as a reaction to the rise of fundamentalism. "But I think what intellectuals find more offensive than Islamic fundamentalism is probably what's happening in George Bush's America, and the influence of the Christian right."

The particular stridency of the new atheism in America probably reflects a stronger sense of embattlement among scientists there — Dawkins' book speaks directly to controversies over stem cell research and teaching creationism in schools — and also to the greater role religion plays in public life.

David Nicholls admits that religion doesn't have nearly the cultural power here as it does in the US. "But, having said that, we now have many parliamentarians expressing religious views in an attempt to be either truthful to themselves or to catch the religious vote which they think is out there. I think it's a very dangerous path that we're treading. A democratic society shouldn't take the risk."

In Australia, the differences between the faithful and non-believers has mostly taken the form of this proxy war over secularism — though, of course, it's not only atheists who consider the intrusion of religion into politics a public nuisance. The main reason atheists turned out at Festival Hall on Australia Day was the fact that the Prime Minister had sent a formal message to the prayer rally, something they strongly objected to.

But the new atheism is about more than defending secular political arrangements: it's about sweeping away all religion with the firm broom of reason, and doing it fast. "Global religions are global tribes," argues John Perkins. "People pretend that there's not religious conflict ... There's too many people out there who have access to very powerful weapons whose beliefs are inconsistent with the beliefs of other people with equally powerful weapons."

What atheism believes it offers is the only universal alternative to dangerous unreason. "There seems to be a kind of darkening of the world in many ways," Pataki says. "We're becoming more politically conservative and morally regressive, and at periods like that in the history of civilisation, religion and superstition always come to the fore."

Atheists who see scientific standards of evidence as utterly incompatible with religion look with dismay at the rise not just of fundamentalism, but religion generally: to them, it's as if a long-eradicated disease had returned to afflict the human mind anew. When hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans last year, Sam Harris says, a survey found that 80 per cent of survivors said the events had only strengthened their faith in God.

Harris is astonished by this. Yet maybe what this shows is that a hurricane, like everything else in creation, is a religious Rorschach ink blot: whether or not we divine the hand of God in what we see says more about us than what we're looking at.

Atheists can't leave it at that relativist impasse, though. "The question of truth is important here," Pataki argues. "Is religion true? I think it's not. I think religion is in discord with common sense. Not so much with science but with common sense."

But perhaps a confident, evangelising atheism based on reason just doesn't seem reasonable to many people now. "The naive atheist seems to believe that a sophisticated seminar in godlessness is all that is required to eliminate religion, showing a grateful people that they can be liberated from an oppressive and debilitating illusion," writes Alister McGrath in his book, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*. "What atheists don't get is that people actually like their faith, and find it helpful in structuring their lives, and actually believe it's true." Western culture, he says, has "long since recognised the limitations of reason".

The stats suggest he might be on to something. The Australian 2001 census showed that mainstream Christian denominations were shrinking; but so was the "no religion" category. Both sides represented at Careforce, atheists and church-goers, are shrinking categories, both losing support to what scholars of religion see as a shift towards a vague, non-committal openness to spirituality.

In this context, atheism's insistence on judging religion by scientific truth alone can seem like an arbitrary

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definition of terms. From there it's only a short step to indicting atheism for intolerance. Dawkins' "scientific materialism", concluded this newspaper's review of *The God Delusion*, is just a "dogmatic form of fundamentalist faith". It's an old charge, and one that atheists refute outright. But even some secularists wonder what's wrong with the old live and let live idea: lock up the dangerous loony fringe and let everyone else just rub along together.

In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins argues that heinous acts of religious terrorism should be blamed on "religion itself, not religious extremism — as though that were some kind of terrible perversion of real, decent religion".

Dawkins "can scarcely bring himself to concede that a single human benefit has flowed from religious faith," wrote Marxist critic Terry Eagleton in *The London Review of Books*. "The countless millions who have devoted their lives selflessly to the service of others in the name of Christ or Buddha or Allah are wiped from human history — and this by a self-appointed crusader against bigotry."

For Sam Harris, the challenge to religion depends on what he calls intellectual honesty. "Either the Bible is just an ordinary book, written by mortals, or it isn't," Harris writes in *A Letter to a Christian Nation*. "Either Christ was divine, or he was not ... If the basic tenets of Christianity are true, then there are some very grim surprises in store for non-believers like myself."

Grim indeed. The Pope recently reminded Catholics that unrepentant sinners can still expect eternal damnation. Hell "really exists and is eternal", he told parishioners in Rome, "even if nobody much talks about it any more".

Many of the people who contact the Atheist Foundation are struggling with the psychological residue of religious upbringings, Nicholls says. Especially in the winter months, "we get many people who can't get over the fear of hell, can't escape it. Even though they're atheists."

And that's the main problem for atheist evangelisers: just because something isn't true doesn't mean it's not real.



## BOOKS FOR SALE

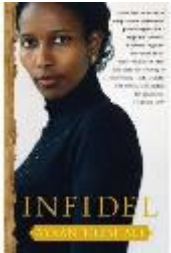
The Foundation has a number of books for sale at very reasonable prices. Here are a few titles and prices. [Prices include postage and handling]



### **Parenting Beyond Belief, Dale McGowan \$30-00**

*Parenting Beyond Belief* is a book for loving and thoughtful parents who wish to raise their children without religion. There are scores of books available for religious parents. Now there's one for the rest of us. Includes essays by Richard Dawkins, Julia Sweeney, Penn Jillette, Mark Twain, Dr. Jean Mercer, Dr. Donald B. Ardell, Rev. Dr. Kendyl Gibbons, and over twenty-five other doctors, educators, psychologists, and secular parents.

<b>The GOD Delusion - Richard Dawkins</b>	<b>\$30-00</b>
<b>Letter to a Christian Nation - Sam Harris</b>	<b>\$28-00</b>
<b>The End of Faith - Sam Harris</b>	<b>\$26-00</b>
<b>The Wrath of Allah - Robert Burns</b>	<b>\$20-00</b>
<b>To Hell With GOD - Steve Cooper</b>	<b>\$12-00</b>
<b>The Great Lie - Michael Kalopoulos</b>	<b>\$30-00</b>



## “Infidel”

**Ayaan Hirsi Ali , Free Press, New York 2007.**

**INFIDEL** is the remarkable autobiography of a courageous and admirable young woman. What is remarkable about it stems mainly from the cultural differences that she describes. In her early life, Ayaan Hirsi Ali had a strict and brutal Muslim upbringing within a rigorous clan system in war torn Somalia. She depicts her family life in vivid detail. While not unusual in that context, her account seems extraordinary from our cultural perspective. Included is a brief but rather excruciating description of the circumcision of her brother, and the excision, as she calls it of her sister and herself.

After spending most of her life as a refugee from war and poverty in Nairobi, at 23, Hirsi Ali went to Holland. At 33, she was elected to the Dutch parliament. As she describes this remarkable achievement, at each step it seems that she was only really doing what circumstances and her conscience compelled her to do. She did have the courage however, and the ability, to transcend her culture, and eventually, her religion. The tragedy that she highlights is that so few others, in similar circumstances, manage to achieve this transition. What happens after filmmaker Theo van Gogh is murdered adds a bizarre twist to the story.

For most of her book, Hirsi Ali is sympathetic to Islam, but as she leaves it after September 11 she fires some telling parting shots. Some of the most insightful views of Islam often come from ex-Muslims, and she is no exception.

For those that seek to explain the motives of the September 11 hijackers as being something other than religion she has the following. Regarding the letter left by Mohamed Atta: “Everything about the tone and substance of that letter was familiar to me. This was not just Islam, this was the core of Islam”. (p269)

In describing the strictures of Islam and the complete denial of reason they require, she says “we Muslims had been taught to define life on earth as a passage, a test that precedes life in the hereafter” (p271). This is not inconsistent with the proposition put by Sam Harris, that Islam, more than any other religion, is a “cult of death”.

On leaving Dutch Parliament she regarded her work there as largely done, because Islam was now part of the debate. “All kinds of opinion makers were now saying that it was irresponsible and indeed morally wrong to pretend that appeasing Islamic leaders would magically lead to social harmony” (p340). In the on-going freethought debate about whether it is better appease religion or confront it, it is clear where Hirsi Ali’s opinions lie.

*Infidel* is a compelling and moving book. It should be required reading for every Muslim schoolgirl. Although still proud to be Dutch, Hirsi Ali has begun a new academic career in the USA. We may safely assume that we have not heard the last from Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

**John Perkins**





An old lady, being a fervent Christian, went out on her front porch the first thing every morning and yelled:  
"Praise the Lord!"

An atheist moved in next door, and after a while, got tired of hearing this every day, so he began shouting in reply:  
"There is no Lord."

Toward winter, she came out and pleaded:  
"Praise the Lord! But, Lord it's getting cold and I don't have anything to eat in this house."

The atheist happened to hear this, and that night bought three sacks of groceries and put them on her porch.

In the morning, she yelled again:  
"Praise the Lord, I have something to eat!"

But the atheist then replied:  
"You fool, I bought those groceries and put them there!"

She instantly responded:  
"Praise the Lord for giving me food and getting the devil to pay for it!"

# HUMOUR



Much to their surprise, the Virgins awaiting Muslims in Heaven were not quite what they expected..

# President's Report to the AGM

Looking back over the records of the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC, for the preceding twelve months, clearly shows why the time has sped by. Local and international events involving a religious flavour have kept the AFA working at a frenetic pace. Letters to Editors and Media Releases promoting an alternative view based on the supremacy of reason rather than religious concepts have enhanced our position as a force worthy of respect in many quarters. Governments, both federal and state are realising they do not have a free-reign in implementing faith based initiatives without opposition. Our letters and submissions demanding a secular component to decisions they make, have on the whole, been well received and respectfully answered. Our observations in some instances have given rise to changing the policing of regulations. A tangible example is the recent correspondence with the South Australian Education Department, viewable on our web site under the heading Submissions.

Television, radio and the print media have sought out the Atheist viewpoint on many occasions especially after the publishing of an AFA letter undersigned by other similar organisations. There can be no denying that some interactions were less than proficient on both sides but overall the exercises have been very positive.

The debate in Launceston, Tasmania, sprang the AFA into the spotlight for a number of months. In combination with our television advertisement, which prompted the debate, brought our existence to the attention of the public who otherwise, through cultural shielding of Atheism, would not know of us.

Subsequently, the increase in E-Mail and phone inquires prompted the idea of a free Associate Membership to the AFA. In a few short months, this has attracted hundreds of members with no let up. Associate Members receive one electronic version of THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST magazine.

Due to a general increase in the workload, the AFA has outfitted a new computer system and will soon have access to the Australian version of 'broadband'. The slowness of 'Dial-up' and having only two slow computers available in the past, shared by Lee, Treasurer, good buddy and partner and me, has, shall we say, caused some tense moments in carrying out our 'godless' duties. Nothing serious mind you; but name-calling was involved.

The Internet has made the globe a smaller place. It has improved interaction and cooperation, especially between interstate groups, but also with those overseas. It is an expanding educational tool used in the wider battle for the minds of the most vulnerable citizens, the young. A powerful Internet presence is therefore essential. Richard Dawkins notes in his book, *The God Delusion*, that the indoctrination of children with the notion that religion is true, using the threat of hell if not 'believed', is mental child abuse. This is in accord with the AFA stance. Our commitment to maintaining a credible web site facility goes a long way in combating and exposing the harm of religious indoctrination.

A very positive happenstance involved the assisting with cash and materials, a final year science undergraduate at the Adelaide University, in setting up a student Atheist society in conjunction with 'Orientation Week'. Ashleigh Brook, present tonight, gained 64 members over the four days of OWeek. We hope to remain in friendly organisational contact to the benefit of both parties. The biggest, most organised and well financed group at the University is, yes, you guessed it, the evangelicals. What better place for the presentation of Atheism than amidst young people whose philosophical views have not yet completely solidified. I know you are all with me in wishing Ashleigh every success.

In a world where many faiths appear to be in rapid ascendancy, the value of the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA should not be underestimated. Head Office phone and computer receive a constant number of contacts from Atheists in distress over religious interference in their lives. From those feeling isolated in church based communities, from many just glad to know we exist and others asking for us to intervene on their behalf over various matters involving religion. Accommodating such requests, is time consuming but rewarding.

It is the members, who are the AFA, who make possible our positive response to difficulties experienced by groups and individuals. Without members willing to make the commitment of joining; the ATHEIST

*(Continued on page 25)*



(Continued from page 24)

FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA would not exist. Through the long history of civilization, most of the generations before this one, had no easily accessible Atheistically based organisational support to call upon, in times of overwhelming religious onslaught. Many here can attest to this, including me.

The backbone of the AFA is the Management Committee. All have contributed magnificently in their own way with making the necessary decisions on a whole range of issues. It is a considerable privilege and an honour to be part of this group. I would be failing in my duty if I were not to also mention the Public Relations Team. This is a unique service provided for those who correspond with the AFA. Having people of such high calibre from various fields of expertise, makes it a constant source of delight to read their replies. One of the PR members, Nigel Sinnott, has taken on the onerous task of proofreading the magazine. Nigel has our eternal gratitude for doing so.

There is every indication that Atheism is slowly losing the negativity placed on it by fearful religious leaders. Atheism is becoming not only an acceptable, but also a preferential outlook, especially amongst an ever-growing proportion of the populations in well-educated countries. The future must have us working towards a time, where a majority consensus of humanity accepts, as a most profound realisation, that we are alone in a universe impervious to desperate, irrational and harmful supernatural craving. Thank you.



## Life's like that ... with Linda

Last week I was strolling through the Fremantle markets when I came upon a stall selling books. As reading is one of my biggest passions I made a bee line for it and at once a booklet bearing the title *Where was God on September 11?* by John Blanchard caught my eye. I didn't realise it was a Christian book until I opened the cover and noticed it was published by Evangelical Press. The blurb said it is from the Popular Christian Apologetics Collection, a series of books, videos and audiotapes defending belief in God. Not one to be called closed minded and curious as to how the author can reconcile 11 September 2001 and defend his belief in a benevolent/omnipotent god, I bought the book and began reading it that night.

I was appalled at what I read within its pages and I was thankful once again that I have escaped the grasp of religious people with their intolerant, judgemental, arrogant and insensitive attitudes and ideas. The following are excerpts from the book that I found particularly distasteful and found offensive. I will let the reader make up his/her own mind.

*What problem?* (Pages 10 - 11)

"The Holocaust obviously raises huge questions for people who believe in God, *but why should it cause any problems for atheists?* [His italics not mine.] If the British philosopher Bertrand Russell was right to dismiss man as a 'curious accident in a backwater', why should it matter in the least whether lives are ended slowly or suddenly, peacefully or painfully? If an atheist like the Oxford professor Peter

Atkins is right in calling mankind 'just a bit of slime on the planet', why should we be remotely concerned at the systematic slaughter of six million Jews? Do we get traumatized when we see slime trodden on or shovelled down a drain? Why should the Holocaust raise any *ethical* problems for the atheist? In a godless universe, what one 'animal' does to another 'animal' is morally irrelevant — making it just as easy to commend the Holocaust as to condemn it. Logically, evil and suffering are problems only to people who believe in God."

**But wait there's more...**

In his concluding chapter, (Page 29) he writes that the lessons on 11 September are "crystal clear" and suggests that "On September 11, God withdrew his hand of protection and in his infinite wisdom allowed this evil attack to succeed as a warning of the judgement that is in store for all who reject his claims."

Like a lot of people I remember what I was doing when I heard the news about the planes being flown into the World Trade Centre. I watched my TV screen weeping, with my hand over my mouth in shock and disbelief at what I was seeing. I sent a financial contribution to an aid agency and made a decision that day to become a blood and organ donor. And I am an Atheist.

Mr. Blanchard: the attitudes and opinions you raised in your book says more about you than it does me.

Until next time,  
Yours in Darwin and Dawkins,

Linda

# **SOME FACTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, PLATFORMS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA**

The ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA is an Australia-wide organisation based in Adelaide, S.A.

The AFA has been in operation for 37 years. The first president was John Campbell. He was followed for the next 29 years by Keith Stanton Cornish, who died on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2007. David Nicholls, the current president, has held the office for just over 2 years.

The Management Committee meets monthly in Adelaide and is comprised of 11 hard-working and dedicated people. (The number of committee members varies.)

The AFA is a focal point for Atheists who feel isolated or powerless, or need help with personal situations where religion is adversely affecting their lives.

Public Relations are handled by 12 individuals of wide-ranging expertise who answer enquiries, are involved in public debates and speak on TV and radio. The PR Team is engaged in constant correspondence with the full range of adherents from many religions.

Writers in a number of states submit letters to the editors of newspapers, magazines and science journals expressing the viewpoint of the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA on matters of current interest and concern.

The AFA sends letters and submissions to government ministers and advisers, pointing out where religion interferes with democracy, equality or personal liberty.

The involvement of the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA in emotionally charged topics such as abortion and the intrusion of fundamentalist religion into daily life resulted in a Privacy Charter that prohibits management from divulging either membership numbers, or any information about members. However we can state, the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA is the largest Atheist organisation in Australia, if not the southern hemisphere, with members in all Australian states and territories, as well as Belgium, the Philippines, Ireland, England, New Zealand, and Germany. Membership of the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA is steadily increasing as more people become aware of present and future dangers to secular democracy posed by religion in Australia and elsewhere. Atheists are becoming intolerant of religion-inspired oppression.

The ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA considers the indoctrination of children with a particular religion to be child abuse. Instead of religious instruction in schools, we would like religions in general to be taught as a branch of philosophy that includes an historical perspective of the faiths and beliefs that have shaped our present culture. This education should also include information on the consequences of political decisions based on dogma instead of science, for example the pain, harm and death caused by the prohibition of condoms, the refusal to offer proper sex education to young people, and the devastating historical consequences of banning legal abortions in this country and elsewhere. Educators also should not shy away from pointing out that most religious beliefs are based on myths and 'old-wives' tales' rather than scientific research, and to believe without questioning is somewhat naive and potentially dangerous. It is the considered opinion of the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA that no one should be asked to take part in religious activities until they are mature enough to understand fully what it is they are required to believe.

The ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA is opposed to religious interference in political decision making, and points out and condemns such interference whenever and wherever it occurs. The AFA is a non-'prophet' organisation with no paid positions, administered by volunteers. Subscriptions are just enough to cover costs. (Magazine production – 6 issues per annum, photocopiers, office equipment, phones, Internet, computers and sundry expenses)

Other political positions include positive stances on: legal voluntary euthanasia; choice for women concerning fertility control; evolution to be taught as the sole instrument of natural growth and change; stem cell research; lesbian and gay social, financial and political equality; comprehensive sex education for all children etc.

We keep in close contact with other like-minded groups, both locally and internationally, and exchange information and magazines with them.

The ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA has an extensive library of books, bulletins, magazines and pamphlets relevant to our cause, and also negotiates the buying and reselling of books and pamphlets to our members at the lowest possible price.

# ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

I/We agree with the Aims and Philosophy of the Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc and hereby apply for Membership.

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**6 issues ....\$30-00pa ...\$ \_\_\_\_\_**

Please complete the above, enclosed with cheque/money order made payable to:

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It would be appreciated if members and friends made provision in their wills  
for the ongoing objectives of the Foundation.

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We welcome original articles, book reviews, letters to the editor, quotes and snippets for possible inclusion in

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All contributions are subject to Editorial approval.

The subject matter herein need not be taken as the official view of the  
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