

# 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.**

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# 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



In my last editorial I listed some of my choices for “Thought for the Day” in a daily newspaper, given the chance. But it seems that one of my selections, the one reading “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*, actually does not exist! I am indebted to one of our Tasmanian members for pointing this out. My source for this quote was Jack Huberman's book *The Quotable Atheist*. My first reaction was that if this quote is not actually in the Bible, then it should be! My apologies to the members – next time I will have to do my homework.

I was recently in the Philippines for a total of nearly three weeks on several separate work-related visits. I was in the city of Batangas, about a three-hour drive south of Manila.

The Philippines is well known around the world for the Jeepney – a kind of aluminium and stainless steel brightly decorated bus, which was originally manufactured from US military jeeps left over from World War II. Each Jeepney has its own unique name, presumably at the whim of the owner, which is emblazoned across the top of the vehicle, just above the front window (and sometimes across the back as well) and the names are as varied as *Scorpio, Bernadette, Barb Wire, Ignatius, Ice Castles, Boss, April Rose*, and even *California Dreaming*.

I even saw one that was called *Darwin*, but somehow I don't think it had anything to do with Charles, because quite a large number of them have names with a religious flavour, such as *Jesus is Never Wrong, Gift of God, My Sweet Lord, God Is With Us, Lord of Pardon, Jesus is Lord, Jesus Saves Us, God Given* and so on. I have to confess that at one point I had a mental image of two of these things in a head-on collision (with no-one hurt of course) with the name *Praise The Lord* peering down over the crumpled front end of one and *In God We Trust* swinging from one rivet on the other.

These religiously named buses are just one outward sign of a country that is steeped in religion. “There are more baptisms in the Philippines in any one year than in France, Italy, Spain and Poland combined.” (from *The world is their cloister*, Angela Shanahan, *The Weekend Australian*, 13-14 Jan 2007).

Yet the signs of a dysfunctional society are everywhere. There is abject poverty, many streets have little or no lighting, the pavements, where they exist, are in total disrepair, crime is a problem (the hotel in which I was staying had a sign out the front stating the hotels firearms policy – you had to check in your gun at the security desk before checking in), corruption is rife and there is a gaping chasm between rich and poor. Opulent looking churches stand in stark contrast to miserable looking tin shanties. Of course I only experienced Batangas and parts of Manila, but there is no reason to expect things to be too much different elsewhere.

Perhaps the seriously wealthy religionists in the Philippines should be doing more to better the lives of the seriously impoverished. When it comes to reality it would seem that greed wins out over religious conviction. Or, if I can take a chance on another quote from *The Quotable Atheist* by Jack Huberman, perhaps this definition from Ambrose Bierce (American satirist, poet and critic) is closer to the mark:

“*Christian*: One who follows the teachings of Christ insofar as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin”.

*Dennis*

Greetings,

The month of June was the busiest the AFA has encountered in its 37-year history. The reasons for this revolve around the culmination of factors related to religion interfering in affairs of state on the local and international level, a literary onslaught against the idea of faith, and a survey we have sent to our political leaders.

On the 26 April the AFA despatched the Survey on Social Issues by e-mail to most sitting politicians involved in the upcoming Federal Election. The survey, which is on Page 5 of this magazine, sets out seven propositions answerable by Agree, Disagree, or No Comment. The Prime Minister was sent a hard-mail version with a stamped self-addressed envelope enclosed. We have not received a reply. When the names of aspiring politicians become known, at the calling of the election, they will also receive the survey. The estimated two minutes needed to fill it out would give voters greater information about those intending to represent them than is presently available.

The survey has been resent twice to those who have not answered. We may resend it on a number of occasions, right up to the election. Only three of [approx.] 200 have responded. The survey results with names and political parties can be viewed at the following URL: <http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au/survey.htm>

If democracy is to have the best chance of working in a manner where justice and equality is guaranteed, then the private 'beliefs' that control political decisions must be known to the electorate. It is a shameful act of betrayal by our representatives, to enter parliament whilst hiding or not openly disclosing personal religious agendas from the public. These have the capacity to influence voting on laws related to the survey. (and other matters)

It is our right to know how our politicians think about these very important social issues. It is their duty as our leaders to openly disclose to the voter any extraneous ideas held that may influence decisions made for and on our behalf.

Atheism and indeed, the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC, have been represented in print and on the airways to a greater extent than is normal of late. The spate of books by authors such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Tamas Pataki and Michel Onfray, which critically examine the faith concept, are responsible for this change of status, along with the wider knowledge of the aforementioned survey. Bishop Shelby Spong has also entered the fray with a recently published book, *Jesus for the Non-Religious*.

A few of the interviewers continue to look for flaws in the logic clearly laid out in these literary masterpieces. Finding none, misrepresentation seems to be the default position taken. In one such article on three occasions, the ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC was named as the 'federation' instead of the 'foundation' – lower case was used in the first letter of Atheist and Foundation and the article heading indicated only one Atheist was involved. Those and other little negatives emanating from some media quarters have come to be expected and are nothing compared to the publicity for Atheism and the small fright delivered to polities. There is no guarantee, nor is it expected, that the battle is going to be clean or short.

The 2006 Census figures were released on the 27 June. Figures on falling numbers of religious adherents and a substantial increase in the godless over three consecutive Census appear on Page 10 with the AFA media response on Page 11. This is most heartening good-news for Atheism and portends well for the future.

Until we meet again,



# SURVEY TO POLITICIANS

	Agree	Disagree	No comment
1 Australians should have the right to Legal Voluntary Euthanasia			
2 All citizens should be equal before the law regardless of gender or sexual orientation			
3 The termination of pregnancy up to 22 weeks after conception should be at the sole discretion of the woman.			
4 'Intelligent Design' or 'creationism' must not be taught as a scientific alternative to the theory of evolution in any Australian school.			
5 Comprehensive sex education should be compulsory in all schools.			
6 Religious instruction, whether by chaplains or any other means, has no place in the education of minors.			
7 Church and state must remain separate.			

From the Sydney Morning Herald - June 8, 2007

## IN THE NEWS

### **Atheist asks politicians to nail their beliefs to a wall**

**John Huxley**

ALARMED by increasing evidence of the involvement of religious groups in politics, the Atheist Foundation of Australia has launched a survey of the beliefs of candidates in this year's federal election.

Questionnaires on issues such as abortion, sex education and voluntary euthanasia have been sent to several hundred MPs and candidates. More will be sent as challengers emerge.

"Citizens should be able to make an informed choice on election day," said David Nicholls, the president of the Foundation, yesterday. "Religion should have no part in politics. Church and state must remain separate."

The Foundation, which refuses to disclose how many members it has, claims to speak on behalf of as many as half of Australians, though it concedes that the figure is difficult to prove.

Famously, more Australians claimed to be Jedi [Knights] than atheists in the 2001 census, while 27 per cent of Australians professed no religion. Mr Nicholls argues that the figures are grossly misleading.

"For one thing, people feel they have to tick a box in answer to a question that is premeditated, that presumes they have a religion. Not surprisingly, they answer robotically."

"For another, whoever fills in the form - father or whoever - speaks for their children. That is unacceptable. Children have not made a choice, they are incapable of making a choice," said Mr Nicholls. The Foundation insists that religious instruction has no place in the education of minors.

The atheist initiative coincides with the intervention by the Archbishop of Sydney, George Pell, in the stem cell research debate, and the statement by Tony Abbott, the Minister for Health, that his Catholic faith did not drive his decision-making.

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(Continued from page 5)

It also comes amid a surge of interest in faith, belief and God, prompted by the growth of religious extremism, the rise of the so-called religious right and a rush of books by writers such as Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*.

The Atheist Foundation is hugely encouraged by the debate, which it hopes will lead to pressing world problems being solved through the application of reason rather than faith, superstition and dogma.

By last night, [7 June] though, only three candidates had responded to the questionnaire. Mr Nicholls is not altogether surprised. Politicians, he says, prefer to evade committing themselves rather than acknowledging the largely silent atheist community.

So does the media, he suggests: "They're always seeking out the views of the churches, never those who will speak on behalf of the millions of non-believers in Australia." ♣



From the Sunday Herald Sun - June 24, 2007

## Call for religious item ban

Mary Papadakis

**RELIGIOUS items such as crosses, hijabs and skullcaps should be banned in state schools, a parliamentary inquiry into uniforms has been told.**

Sikh turbans and ceremonial kirpan swords also have no place in classrooms, according to the Atheist Foundation of Australia and the Secular Party of Australia.

The opposition comes as state school parents have raised concerns about uniform costs.

Atheist Foundation of Australia president David Nicholls said school dress codes should reflect Australia's secular status.

The Secular Party of Australia warned that allowing school children to wear crosses, hijabs, skullcaps or turbans was "unnecessary and undesirable".

But Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission CEO Helen Szoke said the submissions did not take into account Australia's diversity and the right to express religious faith.

"Things like crucifixes and the hijab and so on should be accommodated within the context of a school uniform," she said.

School uniform costs are a growing concern.

Some Whittlesea Secondary College parents are angry a \$170 blazer is compulsory for Year 7 students.

Karen Rolands, whose daughter is in Year 7, is one of about six parents taking the matter to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal on appeal after a complaint to the Equal Opportunity Commission claiming students were being discriminated against was not upheld.

Ms Rolands and other mothers Bev Johns and Leanne McCurdy said excluding the blazer, school uniform costs were about \$500.

School principal Avril Salter said the school was selling the blazer for close to cost price, had provided struggling families with secondhand blazers and also had lay-by options. ♣



## Prayer 'a waste of time': Atheist MP

Nick Henderson, POLITICAL REPORTER

**A Labor MP has described parliamentary prayers as an "archaic practice" and a waste of time, angering fellow politicians.**

Legislative Council backbencher Ian Hunter wrote a letter to The Advertiser after it was reported he was reading a book during prayers.

"Of course, as an atheist, I don't say prayers," he said. "I see them as just one more example of an archaic practice which wastes the time of MPs." "However, I am a polite fellow generally, and rather than cause a fuss for my colleagues who may take some comfort in such practices at the commencement of each parliamentary session, I prefer to improve my mind by reading."

His comments follow criticism last month of Liberal frontbencher David Pisoni, after he was accused of mocking MPs during prayers.

Senior Labor MP Tom Koutsantonis demanded Mr Pisoni - who denied the accusation - issue an apology. The prayer takes about a minute to be read out at the beginning of each day and MPs generally bow their heads, remain still or occasionally read documents during this time.

Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith yesterday said parliamentary prayers were important for all MPs. "I think it is very worthwhile in both Houses of Parliament," he said. "I think it is very appropriate for MPs to take an oath and those who wish to, to make an affirmation."

Family First leader Dennis Hood said prayers had been read in Parliament since the Westminster system began and there was no reason for them to be removed. "Many people in the community regard having prayers in Parliament as an essential part of the process and not a waste of MPs' time in any way at all," he said. "I think it is important to continue having prayers in Parliament because they offer MPs the opportunity to reflect on the history and tradition and importance of the decisions they are making and the debate they will be undergoing." ♣

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Respect our unique Christian heritage

FESTIVAL of Light has surveyed South Australian candidates in state and federal elections for more than 20 years.

We ask 10 questions on topical issues, including: "Do you support the current practice of opening each day of Parliament with Christian prayers?"

The two brief prayers, including a prayer for guidance, are not compulsory. They are a reminder that we are ultimately accountable to a higher authority for our decisions and actions.

In the past, most candidates - Liberal, Labor, Nationals, Family First - have answered yes to our prayer question.

Greens and Democrats have often answered no.

I pray that MLC Ian Hunter (The Advertiser) will reconsider his bitter

words and recognise the unique contribution of SA's Christian heritage to parliamentary democracy.

**ROSLYN PHILLIPS**

**Research Officer, Festival of Light**

#### SA's proud history

APPARENTLY atheist MLC Ian Hunter is not aware of SA history in his view of prayer in Parliament.

"Father, Founder and Faithful Friend of Adelaide", George Fife Angas, chairman of the SA Company and sincere Christian, drew up prescriptions for the new colony. Besides the well known exclusion of convicts, Angas also sought young settlers and "especially men of piety". Many leading citizens, including governors since then, have been Christians, as well as many other South Australians. It was not by accident that Adelaide welcomed religious refugees as early as 1838, and that it became known as "the City of

Churches".

Christian congregations regularly pray for Parliament that God would give it wisdom and awareness of its responsibility for all citizens.

It seems appropriate that Parliament should pray for itself as well.

SA will certainly fare better under God's blessing than deprived of it.

**(Rev) DAVID PAECH**

#### Silent reflection

IF MLC Ian Hunter and some MPs do not wish to participate in prayers (The Advertiser), then perhaps they could use that very short time for a moment of silent reflection on why they are there and how they can best do their job. It might be a very valuable exercise.

**K.M. GUNN**

#### Ungodly place

SHOULD prayers be said in

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Parliament? Of course not. It is hypocrisy. Heads are bowed in make-out humility, then as soon as the amens are uttered, it's all-out verbal insults, abuse, ridicule and slander. Parliament is in fact a most ungodly place and prayers have no place in such a modern hellhole.

**PETER JEWETT**

### **Be very afraid**

MR HUNTER (*The Advertiser*), you are entitled to your opinion regarding prayer as I am to mine. If your beliefs are right and I am wrong, that there is nothing following this life, then when we get there I guess I won't be worried. But if I am right, that the Bible is true about death and judgment, then, man, you have a problem!

**JOHN D. SMITH**

### **May God help them**

PRAYERS in Parliament are needed. If the hypocrisy and appalling standard of behaviour from the majority of its inhabitants are anything to go by, then they need all the help they can get.

**MORRIS TERRELL**

### **Quotes, not verses**

PRAYING to what atheists see as a non-existent god can be worse than a waste of time (*The Advertiser*, 11/6/07). Some members of religious groups actually use it as a buck-passing exercise, by assigning the blame for any of their errors or omissions to this non-existent being.

Wouldn't it be more acceptable, to atheists and non-atheists alike, to replace these prayers with advice from real beings on how to conduct the business of the day?

Quotes from famous statesmen, philosophers or writers, for instance, might be far more relevant.

**ROBERT BURKE**

### **We are blessed**

IT is disappointing to see that we have politicians, like the ALP member Ian Hunter, who have no regard for or

understanding of the Christian foundations that undergird our country and its system of government and which guarantee the freedom that we all take for granted.

One only has to look at the recent history of the Soviet Union and its atheist philosophy and read the tragic accounts of men like Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who suffered in the Gulag because of the anti-God atheistic philosophy dominant in Russia, to know where such philosophy leads.

We are blessed in Australia with a biblical heritage and prayers in Parliament are important. It is not a waste of time as this politician infers.

**MALCOLM EGLINTON**

### **Age of reason**

TRADITION is not nearly good enough reason to retain Christian prayers in Parliament. The proven benefits of pluralism are hampered by grimly hanging on to this particular world-view relic.

Customs come and go depending on the changing circumstances. One would assume that in the 21st century our leaders are relying on reason, instead of mythology, to enact laws on behalf of all South Australians.

If politicians feel the need to pray for divine guidance, then they should do so before clocking-on, in their own time and not at the expense of the taxpayer.

**DAVID NICHOLLS**

**President,**

**Atheist Foundation of Australia**

### **Silent prayers**

THE public might have more belief in politicians' sincerity if they followed prayers with behaviour that reflected the spirit of such prayers.

I suspect, for most MPs, the process is perfunctory and, for some, downright hypocritical. For those for whom the prayers have meaning, they could pray in silence whenever they choose.

If there is a god, she/he will hear them. To those who refuse to go along with the farce, hear, hear!

**HELEN WYATT**

### **Christian values**

PRAYER in Parliament is fully appropriate as our civic system owes its values and institutions to Judaeo-Christian principles, and since a majority of citizens and MPs self-identify as believers.

Imperfectly, our heritage has produced peace and prosperity that are admired by people in the nations of non-Christian foundation.

The arrival in Australia of people fleeing war, starvation and repression in such nations must surely evidence the value of our historic approach to running society.

Further, it is always prudent for the people, as well as their representatives, to be "humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God" as stated gloriously in the preamble to the Commonwealth Constitution.

**DAVID d'LIMA**

### **Intolerance**

IN defence of MLC Ian Hunter, he is acting consistently with the Labor Party's commitment to atheism. However, as someone who has urged people to be tolerant of diversity, he is hypocritical in his intolerance of those who have the humility to acknowledge their need of divine guidance.

I would have thought the recent rains would have been almost enough to turn Premier Mike Rann's atheistic Cabinet members into a thankful prayer group.

Ironically, at the same time as Ian Hunter is mocking prayer, *The Advertiser* reported on the healing power of prayer.

**ROBERT ILES**

### **Shall we pray?**

IF we have to have prayers at the beginning of parliamentary sessions, at least make them optional, and allow non-believing MPs to remain outside the assembly until the prayers have been dispensed with.

I personally think there is nothing more hypocritical than the MPs bowing their heads in reverence one minute, and be-rating their opposition as scum-bags the next.

**JOCK GREIG**

From The Tumut & Adelong Times - July 6, 2007

## Backpackers argued over evolution at hotel

THE man accused of murdering Scottish back-packer Rudi Boa at a Tumut caravan park in January has pleaded not guilty, with his defence team saying in court that York acted in self defence.

The trial in the Wagga Supreme Court of Alexander York, 31, from Essex, England, moves into its fifth day today (Friday).

York is charged with stabbing Mr Boa, 28, from Inverness, at the Blowering Caravan Park in the late hours of January 27 last year.

The girlfriend of Mr Boa, Gillian Brown, one of only two eye-witnesses to the murder, gave evidence at the trial on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Ms Brown told the court that during a five hour drinking session at the Star Hotel on the night of Mr Boa's murder, York made insulting comments to her and Mr Boa.

On their arrival at The Bowering Caravan Park, he called them over to the tent.

She said York knocked a pizza out of her hand, pushed her to the ground and threatened to stab Mr Boa.

Ms Brown said Mr Boa then collapsed at her feet.

Despite her attempts to keep him alive by mouth to mouth resuscitation, he died.

Ms Brown denied suggestions from York's barrister, Mr John Weir, that she was more than slightly affected by alcohol at the time of the incident.

Mr Weir put to Ms Brown that York did not call them over to his tent, but rather, it was they who approached him without invitation.

Mr Weir said York heard them whispering outside his tent and using direct and colourful language, and asked them to leave.

Mr Weir put to Ms Brown that Mr Boa had charged at York, who had attempted to duck and shield himself from the approach.

Ms Brown denied those sequence of events.

Earlier, a video recording showed Ms Brown and Mr Boa in a taxi which drove them from Tumut to the Blowering Holiday Park about 11pm.

The tape recorded Ms Brown saying their night out on the town had been ruined by York, who she said "went mental on us".

"He's really nice, but tonight he went absolutely crazy on us," Ms Brown said.

In his opening address on Monday, prosecutor Peter Barnett said he would produce police recordings just after Mr Boa's death in which York is heard to say: "I did it. He came at me. It was self defence."

Mr Barnett told the court that Mr Boa and Ms Brown had been in Tumut picking fruit as part of a year-long trip. The prosecution argued that on the day of Mr Boa's death, he and Ms Brown had been drinking with York when they got into a disagreement about creationism and evolution.

The Scots, both biomedical scientists, were on the side of evolution, while York argued for the biblical version of events.

York left the hotel at about 10.25pm and caught a taxi back to the holiday park.

The Scots returned to the caravan park with a pizza.

The court heard that as they were walking back to their campsite, York yelled out to them, asking the whereabouts of a book he had loaned Mr Boa, and the pair approached him.

Ms Brown asked York why he was behaving in such a manner, and York knocked the pizza out of her hand. The court heard that Ms Brown slapped York in the face, and he grabbed her by the throat and pushed her to the ground.

Police allege they later found the weapon that had inflicted the fatal blow, a black-handled kitchen knife with a 15cm blade, near York's campsite.

A post-mortem examination found a deep wound in Mr Boa's left chest that had injured his left lung and pulmonary artery.

Mr Weir said the single stab wound which killed Mr Boa was inflicted by York but was done as an act of self defence and not with murderous intent.

The judge, Justice Michael Adams, told the jury of seven men and five women - later reduced to 11 due to a male juror's illness - that the case would probably centre on whether York had acted reasonably in self-defence, and he told them they could find him guilty of murder or the lesser charge of manslaughter.

Mr Boa and Ms Brown were in Australia as part of a round-the-world trip. Friends at his funeral last February said he had been "living the dream". One, Stephen Macmillan, 26, said: "He was the happiest he had ever been, travelling the world and experiencing a multitude of cultures."

The trial, which is expected to last for three weeks, continues.♣

# CENSUS STATISTICS ON RELIGION

<b>YEAR</b>		<b>1996</b>		<b>2006</b>
<b>No Religion</b>		<b>16.6%</b>		<b>18.7%</b>
<b>Not stated</b>		<b>8.7%</b>		<b>11.2%</b>

## 2006 Census: Religious affiliations by state/territory

	<b>NSW</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>QLD</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>WA</b>	<b>TAS</b>	<b>NT</b>	<b>ACT</b>
<b>Religion</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christianity	67.7	60.5	66.3	59.8	59.3	64.2	54.6	60.2
Buddhism	2.6	2.7	1.2	1.5	1.8	0.5	1.5	2.2
Hinduism	1.1	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.3	1
Judaism	0.6	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.3	0	0.1	0.2
Islam	2.6	2.2	0.5	0.7	1.2	0.2	0.6	1.3
Other Religions	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.4	2	0.7
Inadequately described	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.8
<b>No Religion</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>23.4</b>
Not stated	10.1	11.2	11.7	12	12.8	12.2	17.1	10.2

## 2006 Census: Religious affiliations by capital city

	<b>Syd</b>	<b>Melb</b>	<b>Brisb</b>	<b>Adel</b>	<b>Perth</b>	<b>Hob</b>	<b>Dar</b>	<b>Canb</b>
<b>Religion</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christianity	64	58.9	65.4	59.6	59.8	63.9	53.4	60.3
Buddhism	3.7	3.5	1.8	2	2.2	0.7	2.2	2.2
Hinduism	1.7	1.1	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.4	1
Judaism	0.9	1.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.2
Islam	3.9	2.9	0.8	0.9	1.5	0.3	0.9	1.4
Other Religions	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.7
Inadequately described	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8
<b>No Religion</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>23.3</b>
Not stated	10.4	11.1	11.1	11.6	12	12	16.6	10.2

# MEDIA RELEASE

## LIES, DAMN LIES AND STATISTICS!

The release of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census figures on religion has reinforced that the observance of faith in Australia is in continual decline. The categories of 'no religion' and 'affiliation not stated' have risen sharply to approximately 30% of the population.

20% of the population (four million) are children under the age of 14. They do not possess the mental maturity to make decisions on the complex issue of religious belief.

Participants robotically stating a birth-religion even if no longer practised; one parent aligning other members of the family to their particular faith, again, even if not true shows the figures supporting religious belief are grossly overstated.

The question itself presupposes a religious view is held.

Important political decisions using the premise of high religious observance by Australians is clearly based on a falsity.

That the leaders of all religions do not attempt to rectify the situation of specious Census figures reveals the morals they so vigorously espouse, are sadly lacking.

This kind of demographic deception is unhelpful to democracy.

The question on religion in the next Census form must alter to reflect reality instead of giving erroneous numerical support to what is most likely, a minority opinion. ♣

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### SBS TELEVISION

Coming up on INSIGHT 24th JULY 2007

### ATHEISM

It's no secret that atheism is a rising talking point. The best-selling book, *The God Delusion*, by scientist Richard Dawkins, was a call-to-arms for atheists.

He asks atheists to denounce religion boldly.

Since his book was released last year, a slew of other thinkers have joined the fray: Journalist Christopher Hitchens, French philosopher Michel Onfray, and Australia's own Tamas Pataki have all released their own books.

We're asking you to start thinking about our upcoming program. What purpose does religion serve? Social cohesion? Something versus nihilism? Is it a power for good? Is it based in fact? Does the theory of evolution counter religious theory?

We'll talk to believers, non-believers, philosophers, theologians and scientists to discuss the role of religion - and the case against it - in contemporary society. ♣

# Submission to the Consultation Committee for the Proposed Western Australia Human Rights Act

Thank you for the opportunity to express the *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.* opinion on this very important matter. The *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.* is the largest organisation of its type in the Southern Hemisphere. The views expressed are representative of our members. The AFA is prepared to meet with the Committee if necessary.

Herewith our submission:

- **Should WA have a Human Rights Act?**

Yes. All societies need to have citizens' rights clearly itemised and safeguarded by law.

- **What rights should be protected in a WA Human Rights Act?**

All the rights declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- **What form should a WA Human Rights Act take?**

They must be enshrined in a constitution.

- **How should a WA Human Rights Act require human rights to be protected?**

Everyone must be entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, whose decisions receive the full backing of the law.

- **Who should be required to comply with the human rights recognized in a WA Human Rights Act?**

Every individual; every organization; every club; business; religious organization; government department...with *no* exceptions.

- **What should happen if a person's human rights are breached?**

The matter should be reported immediately to the independent and impartial tribunal for speedy investigation, followed by appropriate action according to the law. Reporting must be simple and easily available to everyone.

- **If WA introduced a Human Rights Act what wider changes would be needed?**

*All* laws that presently discriminate against individuals or groups, either positively or negatively would need to be rescinded and then rewritten to comply with the Act.

- **What else can the Government and the community do to encourage a culture of respect for human rights in WA?**

Introduce Human Rights awareness courses in schools from year one; inform the public through all media of the changes and the legal ramifications of failure to comply. Respect for the rule of law is the only guarantee of respect for human rights.

- **Do you have further comments about human rights laws for WA?**

Yes.

(Continued on page 13)

1. Human Rights laws should guarantee *equality* for all individuals. **Equality is compromised if individuals, groups or organisations are given special treatment or exemptions.**  
Examples:
  2. Either everyone must pay taxes, or no one. It is unfair that religious organisations pay no tax – this poses an unfair burden on individuals, businesses and organisations not associated with religion.  
[b] Schools must be free and secular and have no dispensation from Human Rights requirements. Thus: No school should be permitted to discriminate in the selection of pupils on the basis of religious belief or disbelief, gender, sexual orientation, ability to pay, or intellectual ability, and staff must not be discriminated against on the basis of religious belief or disbelief, gender, or sexual orientation. Any school that does so discriminate, or promotes any particular religion, must not receive any monies from the public purse. {It is especially galling that schools run by religious organisations should receive enormous grants of taxation money when, despite huge annual profits, they pay no taxes!}
  3. All persons must be equal before the law and entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground... *Article 26, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.* **This means that no group or organisation may be given exemption from discriminating or special permission to discriminate against others.**  
Example: No groups, such as religious organizations, may be given exemptions to discriminate against same-sex-oriented people, or to incite people to discriminate against such individuals by publicly proclaiming religious dogma that presents negative discrimination as good.
  4. No girl or woman should be forced or coerced to either continue or terminate a pregnancy. Control over one's body must be the sole responsibility of the individual concerned.
  5. The definition of a person, in human rights legislation, should *not* include: - a foetus, a blastocyst, an embryo, or zygote.
  6. Whilst the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that: *'Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.'* This should *not* be taken to mean they have the right to indoctrinate their children with belief systems that, as non-indoctrinated educated adults, they would be unlikely to accept as rational. Parents/guardians/schools must *not* have the right to present supernatural beliefs and superstitions as a correct interpretation of reality. Instead, wide-ranging discussions and classes in comparative religion and philosophy – subjects that will assist children to make rational and informed decisions when they reach adulthood, should be compulsory.
  7. The only way to guarantee the human rights of all citizens is to ensure the total separation of religion from government. No religion, sect or creed should receive special protection from the state, or any assistance other than that which is freely available to every individual.

{Apropos of this, we view with alarm the inclusion of a senior clergyman on the committee. He has a serious conflict of interest, as he is compelled to put his faith before individuals, and cannot agree to remove the unfair fiscal advantages enjoyed by religion, nor their exemptions from discrimination and human rights as outlined above. If his removal cannot be obtained, we sincerely hope the Consultation Committee for the Proposed Human Rights Act take special care to ensure that it is the **rights of individuals** that are guaranteed, *not* the so-called 'rights' of religious institutions.}

David Nicholls  
President  
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

I often hear from most “moderate” religious people that the zealots, i.e. the suicide bombers, the evangelical, homosexual hating right etc, are not the true believers and do not actually follow the teachings of the Koran, or the Bible.

Well, they’ve had 2000 years or so to get it right and ensure that the next generation of Christians or Muslims or whoever don’t interpret their respective holy books in the same way as the previous generation.

I don’t see that happening. All I see is the same bigotry, violence, petty, small minded, closed minded rubbish being passed on and ENCOURAGED.

Step aside religion...you had your chance to get it right for the last 2000 years or more and you have failed.



The wars, in the world, most of them, if not all of them, are based on religion, BECAUSE MY GOD IS BETTER THAN YOUR GOD, and as for the way religion treats women, I can’t believe that women, any women, freely follow any religion, when ever I see those televangelists, with thousands of poor misguided fools, I just cringe, you know the more money you send, the more religious you must be, and somebody is getting richer and richer, if you must be in any religion, then I suggest catholic, because, no matter what you do or have done, as long as you confess, everything is OK because he will forgive you, GIVE ME A BREAK.....



I started reading ‘The God Delusion’ about a month ago and, for me, the logical explanations provoked a huge step forward in my personal ‘evolution’.

For most of my 42 years of existence, I’ve looked for answers to ‘Why am I here?’ and ‘What is my purpose?’, thus subconsciously accepting that there must be a ‘Greater Plan’ for me beyond the diabolical misery this world has to offer. I’ve done my stints with the new Christian movement (the toxic Potter’s House), the Buddhists (who are probably the closest to atheists amongst ‘believers’), new age spirituality (a very clever, well developed marketing machine that preys upon people’s insecurities), and finally Judaism (because they DO question everything and - at least in Reform Judaism - update their thinking to suit the modern world). I’d never felt spiritually sated with anything any of them had to offer, until now.

I, too, have struggled with depression for many years and perhaps my dissatisfaction with the ‘answers’ religion provided me has contributed to this. How? Because I AM an intelligent, thinking being who needs my mind to be challenged, fed with concepts that expand my abilities, not ones that shrink them. Accepting the existence of this omnipresent being, for which there is NO evidence (other than a book of tales that was written and assembled by a committee of self-appointed ‘experts’ after several hundred years of Chinese Whispers style story-telling) just doesn’t have a place in my reasoning mind. No more than believing the Magic Faraway Tree is a real place that I might visit one day to relive the fondly remembered moments of my childhood.

Perhaps depression is a symptom of our biological evolution in progress - being torn between what the masses are prepared to accept, and what we individually know, at a genetic level, to be true? God doesn’t exist.

Surely, if there was a god as powerful as has been described, our prejudices, hatred and anger would be kept in check? What perverse creature would sit back and allow this devastation of each other and our world to happen, and for what purpose?

No, the bitter pill we need to swallow is - we ALONE are responsible for our actions. The child abuse, the violence, the wars, the rape and pillaging of the planet - it’s all our own doing. We’ve proven very well what we are capable of - unspeakable evil - and most of it committed in the name of religion. We are also capable of incredible and wonderful achievements, but sadly give all credit for this to that invisible, remote god.

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On a personal level, this revelation that I am truly alone in this world is very liberating, and yet very frightening, too. I can give myself credit for having lived my life with considerable moral fibre, compassion, and integrity, and for having survived such a brutal world thus far. I can look at others who behave in a less appropriate manner and know that they've chosen their evolutionary path and have no external sources to blame. My predisposition to depression is genetic, not a spiritual affliction, and I am seeking guidance and help from science.

I believe it takes a lot of guts to accept sole responsibility for your actions, and that's what so many religious zealots lack - courage. It will be a far better world when we reach a critical mass of brave, intelligent, problem-solving, morally evolved atheists.

## ODDITIES



Published by the Sea of Faith Network in Australia

### The Japanese Jesus

Where was Jesus in the “lost years”? Why, in Japan, of course. Which is also where he returned to marry and live to the ripe old age of 106.

To this day you can visit his tomb in the farming village of Shingo, northeast of Tokyo, where the annual Christ Festival celebrates the legend with chanting, dancing and plenty of sake. It seems Jesus (a.k.a. Daitenku Taro Jurai) wasn't crucified — somehow his younger brother, Isukiri, copped that instead — but rather high-tailed it to Japan via Vladivostok and Alaska, where he took to farming garlic, married local girl Miyuko and sired three daughters.

A copy of his last will and testament, discovered nearby in 1935, can be seen at the Village of Christ Legend Museum next to the tomb. *Time* online talks to local politician Masayo Tanabu, who calls the legend a “symbolic version of history,” and says that “for us people in Shingo, we don't really care. We just celebrate all the possible stories in our festival.” ♣

### God escapes day in court

Posted Thursday July 12, 2007

A Romanian murderer who sued God for “fraud” and “betrayal of trust” for failing to answer his prayers has had his case dismissed in court, a newspaper has reported.

The daily *Evenimentul Zilei* says 40-year-old Mircea Pavel brought charges against “the defendant God, who lives in the heavens and is represented in Romania by the Orthodox Church” for failing to free him from evil.

Mr Pavel, who is serving 20 years in jail for murder, accused God of “fraud, betrayal of trust, corruption and influence peddling”.

“At my christening, I made a deal with the defendant aimed at freeing me from evil,” he wrote.

“But the latter has not respected that agreement until now, although he received from me various assets and numerous prayers”.

The court in Timisoara, in western Romania, dismissed the case, ruling that “God is not subject to law and does not have an address”. ♣

Do you think that human beings are too smart for the own good? For example, domestic dogs probably know they exist and simply just enjoy existing.



Regards,  
David Mac

PS Great Website.

Dear David,

Your question is - *“Do you think that human beings are too smart for the own good? For example, domestic dogs probably know they exist and simply just enjoy existing.”*

Well this is more a philosophical question than any thing else. You are best to read *Essays* by Michel De Montaigne (1533-1592) as he deals a lot with this. He notes just how comfortable most animals are with their bodily functions and such, yet we have cases of humans committing suicide because they farted at an important public event and so felt embarrassed and ridiculed. Or indeed human males duelling to the death because someone said something which offended their person or public esteem.

However, I don't believe we are too smart for our own good, but I do think as Montaigne says most of us “do not know what knowing is”, i.e., we get arrogant and lose sight of the small insignificant blips we are in the history of time. Truly wise and knowing people appreciate that they really know very little in the grand scheme of things, they are humbled by the wonders of nature which are only slowly being unlocked and partly understood through scientific endeavour. Unfortunately some scientists do get overly arrogant and excited because they have made an important discovery of nature and forget how it is the long sequence of work by many, many, many scientists which very slowly unlocks greater and deeper understanding. Sure there are eureka moments, but even these, in the overall scheme of things are small individual beer. The important thing is to keep exploring, to keep discovering and researching. And also to keep thinking about what are the right questions to ask in the first place - now this is very hard work indeed.

In another way it is hard for humans in the sense we can contemplate our own death, and as we age this can become an increasing area of concern. I think this is where religion can sell us short with ridiculous and unsubstantiated offers of a blissful afterlife with all our loved ones or countless virgins etc. I find this very deceitful and dishonest, it would certainly not pass any advertising ethics committee which required proof of product, demonstrated product delivery and measurable product quality. But I guess the lie is so appealing and relieves people's tension and worry that many, many, many fall for it, whatever the bribe (religion). But to me it robs them of greater depth and meaning in day-to-day life, in making the most of every moment and enjoying the experiences of humanity and developing compassion for our fellow human in this difficult journey called life.

So in one sense it can be a problem (being too smart) because we can easily become too smart for our own personal good, but this need not happen to us if we live an analysed life based on critical thinking as suggested by Socrates.

I hope this helps.

Richard  
Public Relations Team



While I am a devout atheist, there is one thing that leaves me perplexed and I cannot find an answer for. If the Big Bang theory is the reason why every thing as we know it started and not the Garden of Eden as my Sunday School would have me believe, how do I understand this theory. From my reading only a handful of theoretical physicists truly understand the theory. I have no hope, so I have to believe what I read without understanding it. Now

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that is what all religious teachers eventually say when you question them about their religion, “My son, you just have to believe it.” Well I certainly do not believe any religious doctrine, or any of their beliefs about heaven and hell or the Creation and the Garden of Eden. I do believe and have a good understanding of evolution and Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, and am a great fan of Richard Dawkins, but how can I get a true grasp of the Big Bang Theory without simply resorting to “You Have to Just believe it My Son.”

Yours Truly,  
David P

Hi David,

Thank you for your email.

There are many scientific theories that are simply too difficult for the non-scientist to understand in any depth. (Fortunately that is not true of Darwin’s theory of evolution). But the fact that we accept these theories as being an accurate description of the real world is not the same as believing something that is put forward with no evidence. Scientific theories are the result of a proven method of getting at the truth, through a process of collecting evidence, observation, investigation, experimentation, testing and peer review. Sceptical enquiry is an integral part of the scientific method. Religions actively discourage enquiry, and for good reason - an enquiring mind will very quickly discern the absurdities and contradictions of religious beliefs.

So when you accept the Big Bang Theory you are not just “believing” something with no basis - you are accepting the fact that this theory is the culmination of an enormous scientific effort and is soundly based on facts and evidence.

I have read a number of popular science books written for the non-scientist, and they have helped me to get some grasp of the theory, not in detail of course but at least a rudimentary understanding. John Gribbin’s *In the Beginning - The Birth of the Living Universe* is probably as good as any. My understanding was helped quite a bit by a discussion of the formation of black holes in the above book.

A star such as our sun is fuelled by nuclear reactions. If the star is big enough, then when it burns up all of its nuclear fuel it loses the heat source needed to maintain its internal pressure, and starts to collapse under its own weight, forming a pulsar, or neutron star. The density of a neutron star is a billion metric tons per cubic centimetre, the same as the density of the nucleus of an atom. The pulsar is basically comprised now of neutrons, and hence the name ‘neutron star’. If a star is massive enough (more massive than about two of our suns) then when it runs out of nuclear fuel it will continue to collapse, with the density approaching infinity, and forming a black hole. Mathematically this is described as a singularity, but it is by no means certain that this means an infinitely small point. Scientists do not know what exists on the “other” side of a black hole. That black holes do exist is no longer disputed, however, as their gravitational effects on surrounding stellar bodies can be observed.

If you play the movie of the formation of a black hole in reverse you would see something that is somewhat analogous to the formation of the universe - a large mass emerging from a singularity. Now the mass of a single sun is miniscule in comparison with the mass of the universe, but if you are prepared to accept that black holes exist, and that a black hole has in effect an infinite density, then the concept of the mass of the universe emerging from a singularity is a little easier to grasp. Quoting from John Gribbin’s book, “The bursting-out of the Universe from the Big Bang is precisely equivalent, within the framework of the general theory of relativity, to the time-reversed ‘mirror-image’ of the collapse of a massive object into a black hole.”

I hope this has been of some help.

Best Regards,  
Dennis  
Public Relations Team



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Hello,

I have been an atheist since high school and am now looking at how to school my children. I am worried that sending children to a religious primary school will inadvertently set them on the road to theism while sending them to a secular public school may not give them the best quality of education. A private secular school would of course be the best option but I do not think the high fees are worth it for a primary school education. In the opinion of the foundation, what is the best course of schooling?

Cheers,  
Anthony

Dear Anthony,

I am a Junior Primary teacher of many years experience and the mother of three children who have been through the state school system. So, if not an expert, I have at least an informed perspective on the issue.

Like you I was concerned for the educational future of our children but my view of an educated person is not merely one who performs well in standardised tests or examinations. I want a compassionate, tolerant well-rounded young person who has experienced a range of situations, economic and social circumstances, attitudes and teaching methodologies. I certainly do not believe the private system will deliver such a person. Financial restraints limit the entry possibility for most families, thus creating a false impression of reality. The teaching style used is narrow and old fashioned and aims to produce the children who merely perform well in tests. In a world where the jobs many children will perform do not even exist yet I think we need to teach children how to think, analyse, access information, know themselves, get along in a social setting, be flexible, solve problems, develop their creative potential and become happy, confident well adjusted adults. I don't believe the rarefied atmosphere of the private system achieves this.

Now all that soap boxing is a position I take on the issue before the question of religion is even considered. There are no private schools that I am aware of without a religious affiliation. In some, the religious side is very prevalent with morning prayers, religion as a subject, regular visits by a priest, involvement in church services and an overtly religious curriculum. My current school shares the campus with a catholic primary school, so I speak from experience. However, even the schools that promote their educational rigour and who accept all comers (with the cash) are influenced and limited by their theist view of life. I found it morally untenable to subject our children to a system, which implies they are better, more worthy, and more deserving of the goodies in society than the rest of us.

Finally, in answer to your concerns, I think the partnership of loving, supportive parents and a range of dedicated teachers who enjoy their job is essential. The best teachers in the world have limited efficacy if the family is dysfunctional and disinterested in their child's welfare. In my own life, our eldest spent three and a half years in a primary school in France. It was in a horrific area with every social and economic problem you can imagine. The French system is appalling, with the most funding and the best teachers being employed in the wealthy areas. The methodology used was rigid, inflexible and unimaginative, and schools in the poor areas were badly under resourced. Despite this, our daughter is a highly intelligent, politically aware, compassionate young woman. She has a doctorate, is multilingual, articulate and impressive. The other two are confident and adventurous with the skills to try new things and the humility to be grateful for their pleasant lives.

We returned from France and our children spent six years attending a school in a really tough area of Adelaide. I was teaching there at the time. We all loved it! Okay, I was careful to vet the friendships and discourage sleep-overs when I felt it was unsafe but they found wonderful families who were struggling to do their best despite the financial and personal restrictions. I loved the honesty of the children, their enthusiasm and appreciation of small things and the joy they showed for the least reward or treat. Teachers who thrive in this environment are usually brilliant!!

In conclusion, I would not recommend the private school pathway for the reasons I have outlined. I believe the state school system with all its limitations of funding has by far the best opportunities for your children *but*, as a parent, you will be aware of what is going on, check out the teachers and have a say in where your children best

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fit. You will be there to discuss the aspects that you disapprove of and to support the school while involving your children in a fantastic family life.

Just a word of warning, however, should you choose the state school pathway. Religion has also managed to slime its way into our government schools through the institution of “school chaplains” and in a few places programs called “Christian Options.” While these latter lessons are not obligatory, and parents are able to opt out, in my experience the providers of such programs are extremely clever. For small children, the opportunity to receive brightly coloured freebies and be involved in lively musical and theatrical events is most appealing. One puppet show I attended some years ago had the black bad guys and the white heroes! As for the school chaplains, the danger is that the deliverers of the service are extremely kind, thoughtful and warm-hearted people. Their Christian message is all the more influential because of this. They are being asked to counsel families in terrible crises with only limited training. I am aware that school chaplains have been dealing with issues such as suicide, anorexia, sexual abuse, domestic violence and financial problems. The government is sadly remiss in not providing fully trained school counsellors in all primary schools. Instead they ignore the precepts of the separation of Church and State and see chaplains as a cheap alternative. What sort of value do they accord an impressionable child?

Good Luck.  
Lyn Longo  
Vice President



Hi Peter,

I just read your article *Why Am I an Atheist?* and found it fantastic! You have so eloquently put in words what a lot of us don't have the courage to admit we believe. I agree with all you wrote and a lot of it I have said to my brother, but the rest of the family think I've lost my way because I am an atheist.

After looking through your site, I don't feel like such a 'rebel' because I know I'm seeing reality while my family stills prays to god to make their life better. Thanks again, I hope to be a member soon.

Kind regards  
Teresa

Dear Teresa,

Thanks for the praise, I'll be grinning all day.

As for courage, you clearly have plenty as you are willing to face your family with your convictions. That's usually the most difficult thing to do. From here on it gets easier.

Believe me, you haven't lost your way – you might get a bit confused from time to time with all the conflicting messages from those who want to 'save' us, but not as confused as they are with their invisible superman in the sky .

There's a great satisfaction to be gained from the realisation that you are your own master – or should I say mistress? Wretched sexist language! It's revealing that there's no feminine equivalent for master – we can lay that at the door of religion too, with their insistence that women and wives must obey the male members of households.

Remember not to lecture your family or try to convince them they are wrong – that's what religionists do. All you have to do is live your life as well as you can, and thus demonstrate that a life without gods can be as happy, fulfilled and purposeful as one lived in fear of a god. Eventually, you might alter their views, but it doesn't really matter if you don't, as long as you love and respect each other's notions of how to live, then that's all that can be expected.

You will be very welcome as a member, but even if you don't join, feel free to write to us if you encounter problems that seem insoluble, or just need to get some irritating thing off your chest.

Best wishes,  
Peter.



I sn't it funny how people assume because you are a "nice" person then you must of course be a Christian or go to church or believe in God or at least a "higher power."

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

I often find it amusing that people assume one of the above when meeting me. If I choose to tell someone that I am not a churchgoer there is a rush to assure me that "that's okay – you're still going to heaven because you are a good person." I laugh and tell them "I don't believe in heaven." But that's okay too "because God has looked in my heart and decided you are one of the 'saved'." I protest that I "don't believe in God" and am met with a long look of disbelief, as if I surely can't be a good and kind person and not believe in God. More often than not the person either thinks I'm joking or am really a closet Christian. Until you actually say the 'A' word they are unconvinced about your lack of faith and the conversation turns into something like this:

Me: "Well actually no, I'm not a Christian or believer in god, I am an atheist."

Them: "But how do you expect to get to heaven if you don't believe in god?"

Me: "I don't believe in heaven."

Them: "Aren't you afraid of going to hell?"

Me: "I don't believe in hell."

Them: "But you're such a *nice* person! How can you be good and not be a Christian?"

Me: "I go to McDonalds; it doesn't make me a hamburger."

Them: "Very funny. But no, seriously you must believe in a higher power or an afterlife."

Me (thinking): What part of A.T.H.E.I.S.T. don't you understand? But instead I smile and say, "I believe in evolution and Darwin's theory of survival through natural selection."

Them (scoffing): "So you believe we all come from monkeys? How ridiculous is that!"

Me: (smugly) "No more than believing in talking snakes and talking donkeys."

It's usually at this time the conversation takes a different tack.

Them: "Did you *ever* go to church or believe in god?"

Me: "Yes, I was raised in the Catholic faith, baptised, confirmed, made my holy communion, confession on Saturday, Sunday school and church on Sundays. Pray, Pay and Obey - all of that."

Them (looking as if a light bulb has gone off in their head): "Ah so something happened to make you this way. What was it that was so bad that made you turn away from god?"

Me: "Nothing. The priests and the nuns were all very good to me. I started to lose my faith when I started to study the Bible as an adult."

Them: "Ah yes, there are a lot of things in the Bible that we don't understand that give us trouble ..."

Me (cutting in): "Yes, but it's the bits that I *do* understand that gives me trouble!"

Them: "I'm praying for you."

Me (thinking): Whatever.

The point of all this is that at the end of the day each person can debate their point of view *ad nauseam* and will still reach the same stalemate. Actions speak louder than words and I hope that I am a good role model of a free-thinking atheist.

Anyway that's it for now. I'm off to bed with Richard Dawkins. The book not the man.

Until next time.

Yours in Darwin and Dawkins,

Linda

# The Clock's Ticking, Victor!

By Harry Edwards

At the time of writing there has been no response from Victor Zammit to my articles rebutting his claim to have irrefutable scientific evidence for an afterlife. Rather than provide him with the excuse that he did not receive my letter (See May issues INVESTIGATOR MAGAZINE and THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST) I followed up with the following:

May 1, 2007.

Dear Mr Zammit,

On March 6, 2007, I advised by ordinary mail, that a series of articles repudiating your claim to have scientific evidence of an afterlife had been published in two magazines.

In the absence of a response, readers have been left to draw their own conclusions in respect of your silence.

In the unusual event that you did not receive that letter, I am sending this by registered mail with an acknowledgment of receipt card requiring your signature.

The two magazines in which the articles appear are:

Investigator Magazine, Nos: 111, 112, 113 and 114.  
Obtainable from

Investigator Magazine,  
P.O. Box 3243,  
Port Adelaide, SA 5015.

and

THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST, January-February, March-April and May-June issues.  
Obtainable from

Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc,  
Private Mail Bag 6,  
Maitland, SA 5573.

Yours sceptically,

Harry Edwards

On May 7, the Delivery Confirmation card bearing the recipient's signature 'V.J. Zammit' was returned. In view of this, it is not unreasonable to assume that Mr Zammit also received my initial letter and for reasons best known to himself chose not to respond. Of course he might have been too busy helping medium David Thompson in the zombie hatchery of the Circle of the Silver Cord! In the meantime the clock\* is ticking.

Zammit records on his website the number of days that have elapsed since "the closed minded Miami materialist debunker, James Randy" was challenged to rebut his claims of "irrefutable scientific evidence". My clock was started on August 26, 2005 when Zammit declined to publicly debate me. It's already on the way to 1000 days. Although Victor J is long on name-calling he's a bit short when it comes to accuracy. According to the business card given to me by the world-famous magician and skeptic to whom Zammit refers, James comes from Plantation in Florida not Miami and spells his name Randi not Randy!





# The Secular Party of Australia

Standing for separation of church and state

**Calling all atheists - we need a voice in politics!**

- 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

**The Secular Party has been established to give the non-religious a political voice.**

**We need 500 members to become registered as a political party in Australia.**

**Just download the membership form from the web site and mail it in.**

*Membership is free.*

*Join us today!*

**info@secular.org.au**

**www.secular.org.au**

**The Secular Party of Australia.**

**P.O. Box 6004,**

**Melbourne, Vic. 8008**

**For information, contact John on 0411 143 744.**

## **New Richard Dawkins TV show coming**

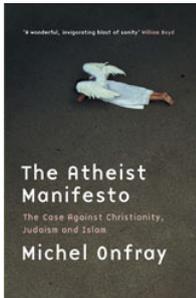
Following the success of Richard Dawkins' controversial TV programme *The Root of All Evil?* Channel 4 has commissioned a follow-up entitled *The Enemies of Reason*. The two-part series is described by its makers as follows: "Is it rational that the dead can communicate with the living and give sound advice on how they should live their lives? What about sticking pins into your body to free the flow of Chi energy and cure your illness? Or the bending of spoons using your mind alone? Is that rational? Richard Dawkins doesn't think so, and feels it is his duty to expose those areas of belief that exist without scientific proof, yet manage to hold the nation under their spell. He will take on the world's leading proponents in their field of expertise, meet the victims who have used them and expose the history of the movements – from the charlatans who have milked these practices to the experiments and testing that have failed to produce conclusive results."

Apparently, the show was originally scheduled for a July airing, but has now been postponed. Richard Dawkins thinks it may be in August or September.

**From National Secular Society *Newsline*  
www.secularism.org.uk**

# THE ATHEIST MANIFESTO

By MICHEL ONFRAY



Review  
by Julian S.

Critical Atheists can be delighted with the publication of this book. Another book to propagate Atheism. The new millennium has a philosopher who has given enough evidence that the three monotheistic religions have factors in common that hinder future psychological progress in the world.

Michel Onfray has written chapters that encourage the Atheist reader to enthusiastically go to the next one. There is no doubt that the religionists reading this book will learn that most of their life has been hindered by unproven stories, myths and restrictions, also known as sins, which have impeded their desire to enjoy themselves.

Every theocracy is a denial of democracy. Even better: the smallest hint of theocracy neutralises the very essence of democracy. That is why religion must stay away from the secular state. For thousands of years, religion and the name of God were used to invade, divide and conquer.

The case of Christianity proves what happened after the fall of the Roman Empire. Christians were a persecuted minority and later turned out to become a persecuting majority. The emperor Constantine became one of them. Pagans were killed, converted or sent into exile. All pagan buildings were converted or destroyed.

With religious myths, it is easy to manipulate ignorant people to commit atrocities. The three religious books are not the words of God but were written by ignorant, narrow-minded men. The Talmud, Koran and the Bible are full of contradictions. Each chapter or sura is an impediment and a hindrance to reason and intelligence. These books have an answer to justify committing any form of crime.

God is simply a concept. The Bible has a section to prove how to keep people ignorant: "As for knowledge it will pass" (1 Corinthians 13:8).

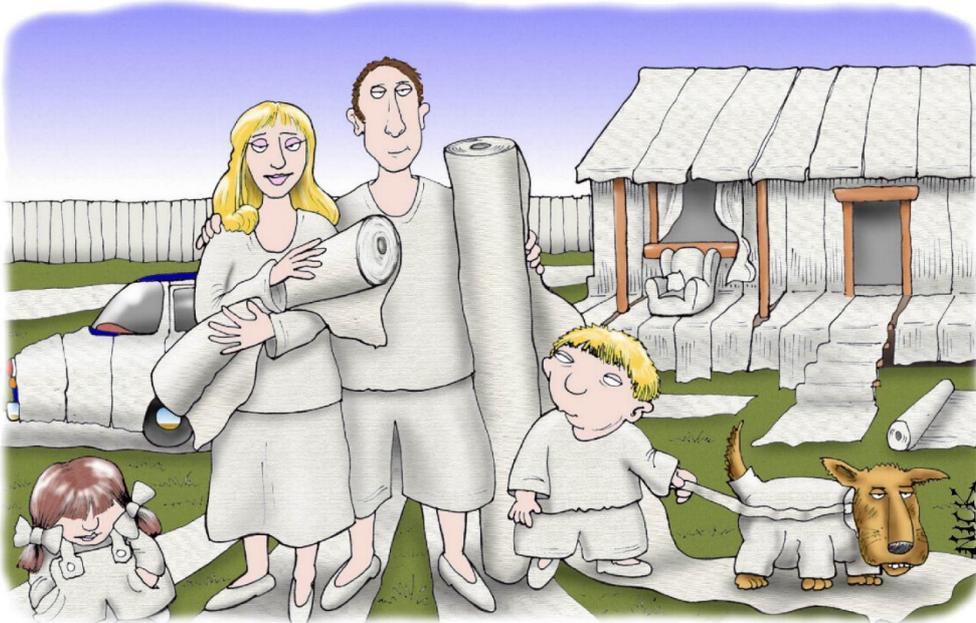
These books seem to prove that they were inspired by ignorant elders living in the desert. Islam means submission.

Global terrorism. Religion is a good excuse. Fanatical Muslims will commit a terrorist act in the name of Allah, Muhammad and their group. The Christian Fundamentalists will use the name of God as an excuse to commit a crime. The Jews will use the name of God to gain lost territories to improve Israel. The Martyrs are brainwashed that they will be better in the "next life" because they are brainwashed to suffer in the only life in the here and now.

People do grow physically out of Infancy. But religion keeps people in a permanent state of psychological infancy. The three Monotheistic religions have contempt for reason and intelligence, individual freedom, sexuality and pleasure, and for science.

These three religions demand blind faith, belief, obedience and submission. This applies to the followers but not the leadership.

Michel Onfray has written a wonderful, educational and informative piece of literature that atheists need to protect their sanity in an age of religious unreason. ♣

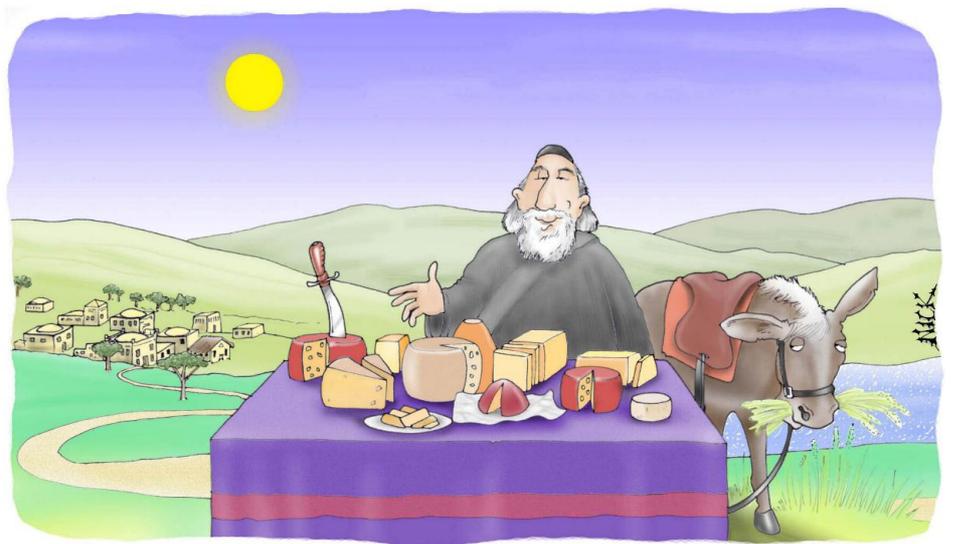


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Muslin Fundamentalists.

A man suffered a serious heart attack and had open heart bypass surgery. He awakened from the surgery to find himself in the care of nuns at a Catholic Hospital. As he was recovering, a nun asked him questions regarding how he was going to pay for his treatment. She asked him if he had health insurance. He replied, in a raspy voice, "No health insurance" The nun asked if he had money in the bank. He replied, "No money in the bank" The nun asked, "Do you have a relative who could help you?" He said, "I only have a spinster sister, who is a nun." The nun became agitated and announced loudly, "Nuns are not spinsters! Nuns are married to God." The patient replied, "Then send the bill to my Brother-in-law."

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Cheeses of Nazareth

# “QUOTES”

We would be 1,500 years ahead if it hadn't been for the church dragging science back by its coat-tails and burning our best minds at the stake.

- Catherine Fahringer

Of all human beings a woman should spurn the Bible first.

- Helen H Gardener

People who believe in a divine creator, trying to live their lives in obedience to his supposed wishes and in expectation of a supposed eternal reward, are victims of the greatest confidence trick of all time.

- Barbara Smoker

God is a comedian playing to an audience too afraid to laugh.

- Voltaire

The time appears to me to have come when it is the duty of all to make their dissent from religion known.

- John Stuart Mill



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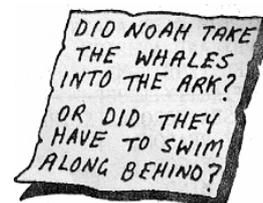
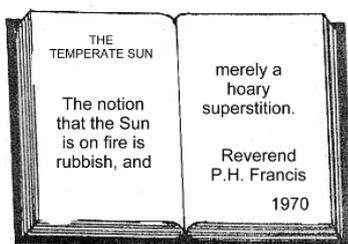
The Foundation has a number of books for sale at very reasonable prices.  
[Prices include postage and handling]



<b>The GOD Delusion</b> - Richard Dawkins	<b>\$30 - 00</b>
<b>Letter to a Christian Nation</b> - Sam Harris	<b>\$28 - 00</b>
<b>The End of Faith</b> [Paperback] - Sam Harris	<b>\$23 - 00</b>
<b>The Wrath of Allah</b> - Robert Burns	<b>\$20 - 00</b>
<b>To Hell With GOD</b> - Steve Cooper	<b>\$12 - 00</b>
<b>Parenting Beyond Belief</b> - Dale McGowan	<b>\$30 - 00</b>
<b>Was Jesus the Essene Teacher of Righteousness?</b> - David Taylor	<b>\$14 - 00</b>

## Booklets

<b>The Unpleasant Personality of Jesus Christ</b> - Colin Maine	<b>\$1 - 50</b>
<b>The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ</b> - Gerald Massey	<b>\$1 - 50</b>
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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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