

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

We all know that irrational thinking goes hand-in-hand with belief in the supernatural. There have been many examples of it over the last few months, but the one that caught my attention was the opening in May this year of the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky.

The US\$27 million museum is the result of the irrational thinking of (I am almost embarrassed to say) an Australian, Ken Ham, the creator of the group called Answers in Genesis. The basis of this group is a literal interpretation of *Genesis*, meaning belief in a 6,000-year-old earth, Noah's Ark, dinosaurs walking the earth alongside humans, and many other such stupidities.

In an article in *New Scientist* (26 May 2007) Lawrence Krauss, director of the Centre for Education and Research in Cosmology and Astrophysics at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, writes "Since Genesis is incompatible with essentially all of modern scientific knowledge, Ham concludes that modern scientific knowledge must be incorrect...While renouncing scientific knowledge, Ham and his colleagues...have created a museum that appears scientific but doesn't tell anything close to the truth about science." The museum "takes advantage of the technical wizardry of science to get its point across, with a series of dazzling animatronic displays and explanations". The damage done to the minds of children who are unfortunate enough to visit the museum (those not already exposed to the same nonsense in church or elsewhere) is incalculable, and Krauss argues that such injury might be the basis of an argument of scientific fraud.

It doesn't take too much rational thinking to see through any of the ridiculous claims of the museum. Warwick McFadyen, in an article in the *Age* newspaper (1st June 2007) asks the simple questions "how the heck did Noah get that *T.rex* on board his ark?" and "why didn't *Tyrannosaurus rex* eat the other ark animals?" Try to picture Noah pushing an 80 tonne Ultrasaurus up the gangplank, not to mention the later waste disposal problems! How about the fact that the Sumerians invented glue about a thousand years *before* the so called creation event? Of course there is ample geological and other evidence against the 'Great Flood' story, but all that is needed is a bit of simple logical thinking. For example, since the 'Great Flood' totally covered the whole world, including Mt Everest, the sea would have to be 9 km deeper. That's a lot of water, and there is no way to explain from whence it came. Those same clever Sumerians invented writing about 1000 years *after* the so called creation event, yet didn't think that dinosaurs were worth a mention!

The overwhelming scientific evidence against the creation myth has not deterred creationists to date. They continue to lie and misrepresent scientific data to suit their own ends. But there is some scientific work now taking place that may simply be too powerful to refute. On 25 August the *Adelaide Advertiser* reported that scientists are close to creating life from scratch. There are three major steps involved: making a membrane to form the walls of the cell, developing a "genetic system that controls the functions of the cell" and developing "a metabolism that extracts raw materials from the environment as food then changes it into energy". The report added that "Scientists in Italy are on the verge of creating the first step – the outside membrane of a single cell". The next steps may seem daunting, but the plan is to use Darwinian evolution itself, by introducing nucleotides in the right proportions and letting evolutionary processes do the hard work.

In the evolution versus creation debate, the mechanism for the very beginning of life is the big argument. Creationists argue that science has not been able to demonstrate how life springs from inanimate matter. Of course the current work is quite a few years away from success, but if science can actually create life starting from nothing but inanimate molecules the creation myth is blown out of the water once and for all. We look forward to that day.

Dennis

Children are naive - they trust everyone. School is bad enough, but, if you put a child anywhere in the vicinity of a church, you're asking for trouble.

Frank Zappa

The following two narratives demonstrate how members of the *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* can make positive difference in matters related to Atheism.

New South Wales member, Peter Richardson, rang head office informing us that the local newspaper had a letter to the editor asking of John Howard and Kevin Rudd, after their cosy encounter with the Christian Community: “When are you going to address a group of Atheists?” Peter asked that we write to the paper. Half an hour later, a letter was dispatched to the Newcastle daily, *The Herald*. It appeared the next day on the letters page, in centre position with an accompanying photo of Christians in ‘ecstasy’ mode. The letter is on page 23. The newspaper has a large readership and we received a number of telephone calls and emails congratulating the AFA. One caller and others by email are now new members and we welcome them to the fold. Peter Richardson can take the credit for the positive feedback and I am sure our readers will learn a valuable lesson in always keeping alert to opportunities such as this.

The second story concerns another NSW member, John Dillon, who happened to see an advertisement which is on SBS, Channel Nine and possibly other television stations, depicting insurance salespeople knocking on someone’s door. The household occupant, who answered, was of dishevelled appearance and obviously intoxicated by alcohol or some other drug. Assuming they were religious zealots he declared he was an Atheist. John Dillon was understandably outraged by this misrepresentation of our kin and rang the AFA with his concerns. As we had not viewed the commercial, we advised John to write to the stations concerned and complain about this unseemly portrayal. John will give a full account in an upcoming issue of *The Australian Atheist* and let’s hope for a positive result. We would appreciate contact from other readers who have seen the same advert.

The highly agitated flutter caused by the spate of anti-religious books of late seems to be dying down. The media have possibly made a conscious decision to lay off the clergy for a while but I would suggest to them, it is too late, the horse has bolted. All that is needed to spark the public’s interest is an occasion of overt faith-based interference in politics or a despicable act of religious violence aimed at a Western nation. I say Western, as many parts of the planet are experiencing these kinds of horrors and injustices right now. Somehow, the parochial mindset of humanity finds it difficult to equate and empathise with the problems of other cultures and it will take a closer-to-home situation to cement the idea that we are not immune. Unfortunately, both the mentioned scenarios are not cases of if, but when.

Long-time Victorian Member, Peter Plane has donated to the AFA a 1500-page book published in 1958. It is aptly titled, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. The book is in very good shape, though showing signs of age as one would expect of a publication of 50 years since printing. For those unaware of the purpose of a *Concordance*, allow me to include the Word Web definition: “An index of all main words in a book along with their immediate contexts.” All words in the Bible are examined in alphabetical order with references to where they appear. For instance, the name *Jesus* has hundreds of entries. On behalf of the Committee of Management and myself, I thank Peter for this most generous and valuable inclusion to our library. Be assured it will be put to good use.

Atheism as a philosophy is in rapid ascendancy and it does not look like stopping. For some, to live at this instance in history is indeed a lucky happenstance. Glancing back at any other time really brings home the advantages most of us are experiencing in countries operating with democracy as the political ideal. Even though equality and fairness still elude various groups and individuals, the die has been cast and it is groups such as the AFA which make sure that the template of the freedoms experienced is continually wrestled out of the manipulative hands of, in Al Gore’s words, the “reality challenged”. With members the calibre of Peter Richardson and John Dillon keeping a watchful eye on our mischievous foe, and Peter Plane supplying the ammunition with which to combat the Achilles’ heel of humanity, how can we not, in the long term, succeed?

To top that off, a **free no obligation** membership to the *Secular Party* (Details Page 22) is worthy of the consideration of all Atheists. It needs members to get it over the 500 signatures for official recognition. This is one instance where it cannot be left to someone else. Just imagine, at the next federal election, a voice at last in the senate, and it may have been **your** decision to join, which made it possible. Wow! — How could you beat that?

Until we meet again,



Hi,

My name is Dizem and I'm a journalism student from RMIT University in Melbourne. I'm currently working on a feature article about the increase in people identifying as atheists. If you or someone from the foundation could assist me by answering the following questions, it'd be greatly appreciated.



- ◆ When did you first start to identify with atheism?
- ◆ What prompted you to come to this realisation?
- ◆ Were you brought up in a religious family?
- ◆ What impact did this have on you growing up?
- ◆ Do you have any children?
- ◆ If so, how did you introduce them to the concept of atheism?
- ◆ Did you discuss individual religions with them at all? Why/why not?
- ◆ What do you find to be the biggest drawbacks of organised religions?
- ◆ What do you think about the figures from the last census, which show that the amount of people choosing “no religion” has risen to 19% of the population?
- ◆ What do you think the implications of this will be?
- ◆ What do you think about claims made by some people that in place of a god or deity, atheists worship money and material possessions?
- ◆ How about those that claim an absence of religious beliefs makes someone “evil” or “immoral”?
- ◆ With recent world events, some religious groups are being increasingly discriminated against. Have you (or someone you know) experienced any discrimination due to identifying as an atheist?
- ◆ How much of a difference has it made to your life (as opposed to being religious)? In what areas/ways?
- ◆ How about to children? What difference do you think it makes to their worldview to be introduced to the concept?
- ◆ What are your main ambitions?
- ◆ How would you describe yourself?
- ◆ Also, what is your position within the Atheist Foundation? Do you have any other jobs?
- ◆ Anything else you'd like to add?

Thanks so much for your time and assistance in advance.

Regards,
Dizem

Hi Dizem,

My name is Richard and I have been asked to address your questions.

When did you first start to identify with atheism?

In my early 30s I began to question religion and became agnostic. It was not till my late 30s when someone challenged me with a “fence sitting” argument I really thought it through, did some research on atheism and realised that as there was no reliable evidence for any deity...I was an atheist.

What prompted you to come to this realisation?

Science and in particular geology and evidence for the theory of evolution. The training in critical thinking provided by the scientific method was also very useful.

Were you brought up in a religious family?

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(Continued from page 5)

Very much so...I was brought up as a strict Catholic with all the trimmings including weekly mass, Catholic education, christening, holy communion, confirmation, altar boy, worked in a Catholic retreat house, had priests and brothers regularly at our home, both mum and dad active in the church, all my siblings married in churches and all with baptised children and godparents — basically THE WORKS.

What impact did this have on you growing up?

Basically brainwashed me with a load of absolute nonsense, quite ridiculous ceremonies and I nearly began training to become a Catholic priest. The basic education I got at school was OK, but all the religious training was a real guilt load up.

Do you have any children?

Yes, two, aged 2 and 4 years.

If so, how did you introduce them to the concept of atheism?

I will...but better still I will teach them to think critically, to be sceptical and to rely on data, facts and causal relationships. Also I teach them to demand a logical reason or explanation for all things and to in NO way be swung over by authority, ceremony or old tales — go with the facts and data.

Did you discuss individual religions with them at all? Why/why not?

Not as yet - but yes we will. We will show them that many people have superstitious beliefs in various deities or gods but these all remain unproven and rely on that person just believing or having “faith” that the stories of these gods are real — but without fact. We will show our children just how many religions there are - all claiming to be the one and true path/god - but how can that be reconciled? They can't all be right! We will explain that these religions are very enticing with there music, friendliness, group events and supposed salvation and afterlife, but that this is a sad and cruel joke as they have no proof whatsoever of the glorious promises they make. Really this is false advertising for an unproven product and should really be before the Australian Consumer Commission for false advertising.

What do you find to be the biggest drawbacks of organised religions?

Dulls the senses, in particular critical thinking. Also I am tired of religions claiming the moral high ground continually when most global violence is on religious grounds. Human morality has nothing to do with religion. The data continually show the religious are over-represented in crime, divorce, violence and prison statistics as compared to non- religious persons.

What do you think about the figures from the last census, which show that the amount of people choosing “no religion” has risen to 19% of the population?

Great news! And in reality the biased structure of the question means the numbers are far higher. The question should first ask if one has or does not have a religious belief, then if one does go on and ask about which religion. As it stands the question assumes you have a religion, lists them all and only after that are you given the option of no religion. I mean— really — what kind of arse-about-face question is that!

What do you think the implications of this will be?

More, rather overdue, questioning and challenging of all religious dogma. Bring it on!

What do you think about claims made by some people that in place of a god or deity, atheists worship money and material possessions?

Absolute rubbish! I worship nothing! But I do cherish my life, love my wife and children and enjoy my job which is in science education. This is a false idea and is a scare tactic used to keep religious followers signed up and fearful lest they become materialistic heathens.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

How about those that claim an absence of religious beliefs makes someone “evil” or “immoral”?

Oh dear! Not this old chestnut. Once again absolute pile of nonsense and not supported by the facts. As I said above, the statistics show it is the religious doing the greater amount of sexual abuse of children, filling of our prisons and perpetrating violence across the planet — all this and still having the nerve to claim religion provides moral guidance. What a con!

With recent world events, some religious groups are being increasingly discriminated against. Have you (or someone you know) experienced any discrimination due to identifying as an atheist?

No, I must say I have had no problems here. I think most Australians are still reasonably tolerant of each other, although the Christian right and the Howard government are doing great damage to this at present. I certainly embrace multiculturalism and believe it is in all our best interest to get along. Live and let live. But all important moral decisions need to be based on the facts before us and on a basic premise of freedom of choice.

How much of a difference has it made to your life (as opposed to being religious)? In what areas/ways?

Really opened me up to live this one and only life I have in the fullest possible way. I think the promise of a wonderful afterlife if you are a good person on earth is a sick joke. We should look after each other because we are all human and share the same basic needs and desires and we all wish to be treated openly and fairly, i.e., treat others as you wish to be treated. I think atheism strongly affirms this and makes each individual life more precious. Think of all those poor brainwashed suicide bombers robbed of their one and only life by some literary ramblings claiming to offer 72 lustful virgins when the bomb goes off. — I mean — really!

How about to children? What difference do you think it makes to their worldview to be introduced to the concept?

I am fine with a broad and basic education on the various religions of the world — this is as much about culture as anything. But the brainwashing of children, who know no better, with one religious dogma I see as child abuse and it takes a lot of mental work to get over, I can tell you. Thus children need to be fully informed that religions are simply beliefs or feelings people have and are not based in scientific, replicated, testable fact. The idea of atheism should be introduced in this context — as a challenge to religions to prove their case or take a back seat to proper education based on data and facts.

What are your main ambitions?

Many and varied. But basically live a full and long life, enjoy my family and to engage in as much critical thinking as I can and to work toward the growth and development of my fellow citizens - in particular my students.

How would you describe yourself?

As a citizen concerned for the future of our nation, making it sustainable and better for all. I am committed to critical thinking and personal growth for myself and others.

Also, what is your position within the Atheist Foundation? Do you have any other jobs?

I am on the Public Relations Team and I occasionally write to people and to the newspapers.

Anything else you'd like to add?

You are kidding — after all those questions! Maybe next week.

Cheers

Richard
Public Relations Team
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Hello,

I have a great interest in the promotion of atheistic thought and a growing belief in the need to bring an atheistic influence into an increasingly theistic political landscape in Australia.

To that end I am giving serious thought to joining your group.

Unfortunately I do have a problem with your constitution and it hinges on the assertion that “No personality or mind can exist without the process of living matter to sustain it.” Due to a personal experience some years ago following the death of a relative I cannot, in good conscience believe or promote this with absolute certainty.

Atheism, as I understand it, centres on the non-belief in a god or gods. Are other areas that might be considered speculative necessarily out of bounds for the atheist? I note that you quote the late, great Frank Zappa correctly and rationally deriding a belief that the spiritual experience of church-goers rests on the attentions of “The Cloud-Guy”. Zappa was thoroughly atheistic but on the very same page from which your quote is drawn in *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, he goes on to say, “What people call ‘prayer’ could just as easily be an unknown (or improperly described) psychic phenomena which manifests a tangible physical result. Any group of people, focused on the same goal, might be able to aim an unknown amount of an unknown energy at some specific ‘target.’ Presto: ‘Prayer That Works’.”

This is a different notion to that of mind existing independently of living matter but it does raise the real probability that there are psychic phenomena that are impossible to accurately or properly describe within the bounds of a strict scientific framework using the descriptive tools of spoken or written language. It doesn’t mean they don’t exist.

Can atheism not be properly limited to the non-belief in a god or pantheon of gods?

Jason

Dear Jason,

Thank you for your e-mail which has been passed to me as a member of the AFA Public Relations Team for comment.

First, without knowing the circumstances of your personal experience, it makes comment difficult. However, I feel it safe to assume that in the absence of a rational explanation the acceptable substitution of a supernatural one caused you to doubt.

Regarding the power of prayer. The word ‘prayer’ as I understand it, is the audible or silent expression of words addressed to a supernatural being - a god or gods.

Audible prayer implies a receptor - that someone or something is listening. Silent prayer implies mental communication otherwise known as telepathy.

The former can be ruled out for several very obvious reasons. The latter likewise, particularly in view of the fact that telepathy has been the subject of stringent investigations for over 100 years and no conclusive evidence to support the concept has yet been discovered.

As for prayer being an unknown psychic phenomenon manifesting tangible results, we see ample evidence every day proving the opposite. Mass prayers for rain that never comes; mass prayers for peace while armies go on slaughtering each other, and prayers for the terminally ill who still go on to die.

Back in the 1980’s, the late Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh organised a mass public meeting of his followers to demonstrate the power of ‘concentrated thought’. It achieved nothing.

Incidentally, atheists do not claim that there is no God for the simple reason that one can’t prove a null hypothesis. What we do claim is that there is no credible or reliable evidence for the existence of a god or the supernatural.

Harry
Public Relations Team
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

SPONG SPRUNG?

By Glennis and Brian Patterson

Glennis and I went to Bishop John Shelby Spong's talk on "Jesus for the Non-Religious". We must admit he certainly attracts a crowd: the venue in Hindley Street (Adelaide) was packed.

We kept an open mind on what he was to present. John Spong started by outlining many of the inaccuracies in the Old and New Testaments, pointing out that it was the work of ordinary human beings written over many centuries. He highlighted the cruelty that is portrayed especially in the Old Testament and to a lesser extent in the New Testament. Bishop Spong does know the Bible very well — we suspect he has studied it over and over again. Because of the perception by religious folk of an abundance of 'sinning' they are being told by the conservative and evangelical churches that the only way to heaven is to repent or end up in hell. Spong finds this an alarming tactic as it frightens the flock; he feels that his God is more a god of love without the frightening aspects, as told by many ministers of religion.

So far so good. Then I began to analyse all that he was saying; something seemed to be wrong. Firstly he acknowledged that the stories were handed down through the centuries, written by men, with many inaccuracies. The assertion was that a great deal of the Old and much of the New Testament was not to be believed. But when he came to talk exclusively about the New Testament he changed and began to waffle on about his God and Jesus and how his faith meant a great deal to him. The emphasis was on the stories especially of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the NT.

A question time was held at this point of the proceedings. I just had to ask him how he disbelieved the Old Testament, but was taking as near 'gospel' the New Testament. If it was written by men then the whole of the Bible would be filled with falsehoods, especially about his beloved Jesus. I basically told him I thought the whole thing was fake with no truth in any of it. (How can he disbelieve the Old Testament then believe the New Testament?)

He then realised that I was an atheist and consequently spoke for a time about Hitchens and Dawkins. I believe he was a little stunned because it really was not the type of question he was used to. The audience seemed to like my comments, and many congratulated me afterwards.

Admittedly, he sold a bunch of his books and was busy signing them when we left.

It was an interesting night and we are glad we made the effort to attend. ♣

Quotes From John Shelby Spong

I don't know how to say that God is real anymore than say it. All I can say is that I am consumed with that reality. If I had to name what I really am, and this would really surprise my critics and my friends, but I really am a mystic.

The claim historically is that somehow through Jesus, God has been experienced. Then you get to the theology that says he came out of heaven and had a virgin birth and went back to heaven - but that's the mythological framework that tries to make sense of whatever the experience was.

The story hasn't worked since 1724, when we discovered that women have an egg cell. So Jesus is half God and half human - not fully God and fully human - which is what the early church leaders were trying to say. And if God is really a biological father, then Jesus can't be human.

British astrophysicist Stephen Hawking has revealed his desire to make “real science as exciting as science fiction” as he publicised a book for children about the cosmos.

“It is easier to explain things to children because they have open minds,” he said on Monday. *George's Secret Key to the Universe*, the first book in a planned trilogy, explains the workings of the solar system, asteroids, black holes and other celestial bodies.

It will be released in French tomorrow and in English a week later (Random House will release the book in Australia on October 1). The second book in the trilogy will be published next year.

The book was written with his daughter Lucy, who came up with the idea, and Christophe Galfard, the first Frenchman to write a doctoral thesis on Professor Hawking's scientific observations.

Lucy Hawking, a journalist, told the news conference that one of her father's common refrains was: “That's too much science fiction, we do science fact”.

The trio wanted to “provide a modern vision of cosmology from the Big Bang to the present day”, without presenting it as magic, Galfard said. “All of what we see (in the universe) corresponds exactly to what has happened already,” he added.

The sole element of fiction in the book involves Cosmos, a supercomputer that opens a door allowing George and his friends to travel in space on an asteroid.

Professor Hawking, is Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, a post once held by Sir Isaac Newton.

His work has centred on theoretical cosmology and quantum gravity, looking at the nature of such subjects as space-time, the “Big Bang” theory and black holes.♣

Goats sacrificed to ‘fix’ airlines plane troubles

Nepal Airlines has acknowledged that it sacrificed two goats to appease a Hindu god following a spate of technical problems with one of its aircraft.

The goats were slaughtered in front of the Boeing 757 at Kathmandu airport.

The persistent faults have not been specified but they had led to the postponement of a number of flights.

An airline official says after the ceremony, the plane successfully took off to Hong Kong.

“The snag in the plane has now been fixed and the aircraft has resumed its flights,” said Raju KC, a senior airline official, without explaining what the problem had been.

Local media last week blamed the company's woes on an electrical fault.

It is common in Nepal to sacrifice animals like goats and buffaloes to appease different Hindu deities.

- BBC/Reuters

RELIGION'S ORIGINAL SIN

by John Warren

The Bible records the Judaeo-Christian belief that sin, knowledge of good and evil and the source of all the misery in the world, came about because Eve disobeyed her god, Yahweh, and bit the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

A long time before the rise of Christianity, Egyptians were being told a similar story. In their case the culprit was Pandora who disobeyed her god, Osiris, and opened a forbidden box to release all pestilence and poverty into the world.

Apart from the fact that, in this day and age, such a story can be seen as an example of sexually discriminatory propaganda, it has other connotations. It tells us that human beings are responsible for their own misery. The gods had tucked away all possible sins, except curiosity, safely in the fruit or the box.

Why was it the women who broke the taboo and destroyed an otherwise happy existence? Maybe the stories are so old, that they represented the mythical interpretation of the time when matriarchal social relations changed to patriarchal. Men have had the upper hand ever since and women have been denied full participation in the rites of many religions, even to the point that, in some, they have to be hidden behind veils and cloaks — punishment indeed for releasing sin and its knowledge of nakedness.

The stories also tell us that if one breaks the rules laid down by the ultimate authority then all hell breaks loose. Be it on your own head! And that's a very useful lesson for keeping social good order in the hands of the rulers of society.

It is even interesting that, in Eve's case, it was a fruit on The Tree of Knowledge. Biting it was a heinous crime and the echo of that rings out, even now, in the oft-expressed attitude that too much knowledge can be a dangerous, if not evil, thing. Look what problems have arisen because we looked too deeply into the atom and what might come about if we continue to delve into the origin of life. It is a sound religious base for anti-scientific attitudes. Don't look into the box any further — who knows what may lie at the bottom? Are we still disobeying the One who secreted evil in fruit or box?

But wait, there's more. The real "sin" of those ancient compilers of myths was their loading of all sin onto the individual. That sin lasts to this day and bedevils our whole political understanding.

A new-born baby exhibits no sin, and if it grows to maturity alone on a desert island it can commit no sin. Sin is a social phenomenon and arises when one individual exploits another for their advantage. How true that it takes two to tango.

By attributing sin to the individual, and then going on to say that it could only be corrected if the individual would expiate it by personally seeking forgiveness from his or her god, those ancient scribes have diverted attention from the social sources of sin ever since.

To effectively attack sin and its worldly horrors, any post-Bible bible should aim to raise the consciousness of human beings to the fact that they have the solution in their own hands through changing the relations between people, not by throwing themselves on the mercy of an unearthly being. ♣



Immortality -- a fate worse than death.



“QUOTES”

“Most people can't bear to sit in church for an hour on Sundays. How are they supposed to live somewhere very similar to it for eternity?”

Mark Twain

“Religion - it's a powerful healing force in a world torn apart -- by Religion.”

Jon Stewart

“Ethical people will do what is right, no matter what they are told. Religious people will do what they are told, no matter what is right.”

Unknown

“So far as I can remember, there is not one word in the Gospels in praise of intelligence.”

Bertrand Russell

FREETHINKER BIRTHDAYS

SEPTEMBER

1st	Chapman Cohen	1868-1954	Atheist/Writer
10th	Stephen Jay Gould	1941-2002	Geologist/Palaeontologist
12th	HL Mencken	1880-1956	Journalist/Critic
14th	Margaret Sanger	1883-1966	Birth Control Advocate
26th	Charles Bradlaugh	1833-1891	Social Reformer/Atheist
30th	Geoffrey Robertson	1946 -	QC/Human Rights Advocate

OCTOBER

1st	Annie Besant	1847-1933	Social Reformer
3rd	Gore Vidal	1925 -	Writer
8th	Mark Oliphant	1901-2000	Physicist
13th	Lenny Bruce	1925-1966	Satirical Comic
15th	Marie Stopes	1880-1958	Family Planning advocate
23rd	Michael Crichton	1942-	Sci-Fi Writer
29th	Edmund Halley	1656-1742	Astronomer

MEDIA RELEASE

The moral mess of “*Christian values*”.

John Howard and Kevin Rudd are both appealing to *Christian values* in an effort to enhance their status as worthy leaders. But what are these *Christian values* we're supposed to admire? As neither Howard nor Rudd are keen to spell them out, the *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* decided to take a look. We discovered it's easier to gain an understanding of *Christian values* by looking at the things they *oppose* rather than the things they reckon they support.

1. *Christian values* oppose granting relief from misery and unremitting pain to terminally ill patients who desire to die with dignity.
2. *Christian values* oppose equality for women; by (a) maintaining they should be subservient to their husbands, and (b) insisting they have not the right to decide whether or not they are able, emotionally and/or financially, to give a child the best possible upbringing. To this end they oppose both legal termination of pregnancies and the availability of RU486, thus denying the benefits from its widespread introduction that have been observed in advanced Western nations.
3. *Christian values* oppose equal rights for same-sex couples.
4. *Christian values* oppose anti-discrimination legislation, by demanding exemptions for all activities in which they have some interest.
5. *Christian values* oppose broad comprehensive sex education for all students, despite voluminous research proving it is the best way to prevent unwanted pregnancies, premature sexual experimentation and sexually transmitted diseases.
6. *Christian values* oppose stem-cell research which has the real potential of leading to cures for many intractable health problems besetting humanity.
7. *Christian values* oppose strong opposition to the teaching of creationism; so-called “intelligent design”, thus undermining both science, and the development of rational thinking in students.
8. *Christian values* oppose a balanced approach to teaching about religions. Instead of a broad-based study of human religions, beliefs and values throughout history, they want to indoctrinate young minds with their own unsubstantiated belief system.
9. *Christian values* oppose the right of state school students to be free of religious indoctrination, by demanding access to state schools through tax-payer funded Christian chaplaincy programs, thus replacing properly trained School Counsellors – a social disaster!

Christian values oppose a fair deal for everyone by refusing to pay tax on the profits of their enterprises, thus creating an enormous, unfair burden on honest taxpayers who haven't this right to evade their moral duty.

The AFA has sent a Questionnaire on a number of these matters to all federal politicians. It is alarming how few have responded! Are our representatives with no ‘faith’ frightened to be honest because of a possible religious backlash? Or are they merely the lap-dogs of political power-brokers, fearful of repercussions for non-compliance?

Whatever their reasons, **it is inexcusable that those touting for votes by pushing *Christian values* are so contemptuous of the electorate that they refuse to state them in the *Atheist Foundation of Australia* survey.** <http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au/survey.htm>

Our parliamentarians enact laws binding on all Australians. **If they are using *Christian values* to determine what makes a good law, then it is high time these values were written down clearly, and published for everyone to see.** How else can we learn to trust political decisions? By concealing their values and motives, politicians undermine our fragile democracy. **More than half the voting population has no interest in religion,** so to continue pretending that *Christian values* are somehow better than, or different from the universal ethical guidelines that have kept humanity going for a couple of hundred thousand years, is stupid and unrepresentative.

The *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* president, David Nicholls said; “If the citizens of Australia want to keep their society democratic, secular and pluralist, then **they should demand answers from would-be politicians,** whether they represent a political party or are ‘Independents’ – far too many of whom are merely front men and women for religious organisations. **This is the only way to make your vote count.**”

ANNUAL G.O.D. AWARD

Without any hesitation, from a plethora of contenders, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and George W Bush were the lucky recipients chosen by the full Committee of the *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* for the annual prestigious **G.O.D. Award**. (Grossly Outlandish Deficiency)

Both are self god ordained sabre rattling antagonistic leaders; one has nuclear weapons at his whimsical disposal and the other is hell bent on trying to obtain them. George takes direction unswervingly from his personal saviour and Mahmoud often states that Israel should be wiped from the face of the earth.

Language from each side depicts the more 'colourful' side of religion and is exemplified by terms such as the 'Great Satan' and the 'Axis of evil'. These men make the planet immeasurably more unsafe and unstable than any presently in power. Their individualistically opposite theocratic notions of reality are a danger to all life on earth.

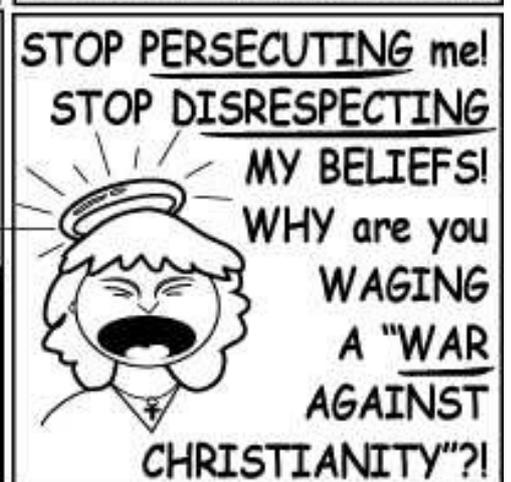
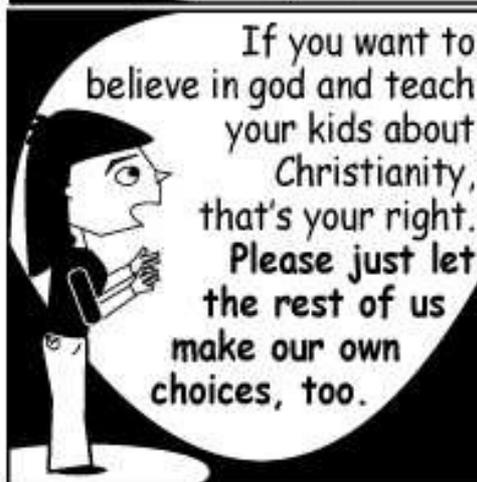
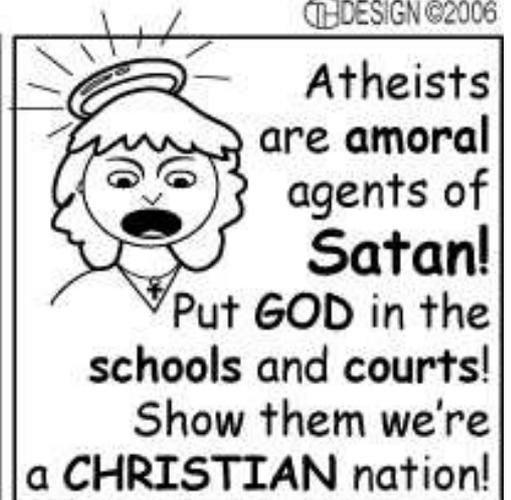
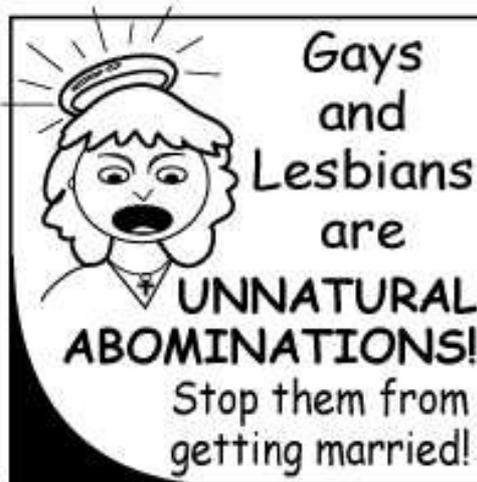
The volatile parts of the Middle East and further a field have tensions fuelled to levels well beyond a rational dialogue when the messages passed between Bush and Ahmadinejad are underlined by or overtly promote hatred.

President of the AFA, David Nicholls stated; "The tenseness of the standoff between Iran and the USA is now a matter of one having super-weapon power over the other. What will be the result when this becomes more equal?"

Once again, as is usual with this award, in it having no substance and being ethereal by nature, in line with religious convention, this should pose no problem to the beneficiaries. ♣

ATHEIST EVE

DESIGN ©2006





Now...here's a good idea from AFA member, John Dillon!

On my infrequent overnight excursions to other parts, wherever I lay my weary head at night, whether hotel or motel, I look for the lamentably usual Gideons' Bible - into which I insert a note something along these lines:

“As it is not possible to prove the existence of ‘God’ it follows that the Bible can’t be known to be the infallible and immutable ‘word of God’. In any case, the Bible is riddled with contradictions starting in Genesis 1 & 2 with, for example, the chronology of ‘creation’ and other absurdities, etc. It was selectively compiled from all available myths and superstitions by vested interests. Its authorship, notably of the Gospels, is largely unknown – and what was their authority anyway? Cherish your intellectual integrity, and the TRUTH; as in scientific process.
Contact... (And here I add Atheist and Humanist contacts)”

If this isn't already common practice, maybe others could be encouraged to do likewise.



.....And some accolades from a visitor to our website

Hi,

Just a short note to say many heartfelt thanks for your wonderful website. As a person with a severe visual disability, I am just overwhelmed that you have taken the time and consideration to create a website which is so accessible. It is so easy to navigate around using my screen reader (JAWS).

I will certainly be registering this week to join your foundation

Many thanks for making this website so user friendly.

Cheers,
John B



Two hands working can do more than a thousand clasped in prayer.



Another “mega-church”, this one right here in Florida, is now having some, shall we say, un-Christian like activity within its walls. Randy and Paula White are co-pastors of the 23,000 member Without Walls International Church. In May, the *Tampa Tribune* featured two stories exposing some of their shady behavior. According to the initial *Tribune* article the couple failed to repay a \$US170,000 loan that they borrowed in 1995 from an elderly widow as a down payment on a house. The house was sold in 2006 for a substantial profit, but they still had not paid the woman back, until the story hit the paper. The other incident was about a young single

mother with four children who won in a widely publicized church contest in 2002 where the prize was a new home. She received nothing until August this year. Once again, it took the *Tribune* story in May to get the church to respond.

Apparently it didn't take too much research to find various businesses that had run-ins with the Whites. Since 2000, court records show that there have been five business deals that have resulted in legal action when the Whites didn't pay up. Apparently these two representatives of God, along with many other pushers of religion, think it's an honor for YOU to donate to their cause, especially when it could result in “bonus points” at judgment time. Unfortunately, they seem to always come up with enough dupes to keep the money rolling in. Speaking of money, according to Alick Clarke, an Australian-born (!) businessman now living in the US, who has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the White team, their church is \$22 million in debt despite revenue at \$40 million last year. According to Clarke “That's just not right”. Well, no shit Sherlock! Even an Atheist such as myself knows fighting off the wickedness of Satan shouldn't cost *that* much! Unless of course, you own a private jet, a \$2.2 million home in Tampa, a \$3.5 million condo in New York, a \$680,000 home in San Antonio, Texas, Randy's rented beach front condo in Malibu, California, and a few other properties in Florida, etc. According to Randy, much of their wealth comes from 23 separate business ventures. Hmm, all these “successful” ventures, \$40 million last year alone, and *still* \$22 million in debt? God certainly does work in mysterious ways!

This story may now prove to be only the beginning, since the couple just revealed that they are in the process of getting a divorce. Apparently Paula wants more time for her TV ministry and Randy will continue to run the church. At least that's the story we have for the time being. What remains to be seen is will many of their sheep desert the flock, or will they actually cough up more donations to help each of them in this “time of need”. After all, the devil is always working to divide god's followers. Rebuke Satan! Send Randy and Paula your ‘love gift’ now!

Warning: Be careful of that false Hindu god, Vishnu, or whatever the hell his name is! In early July, the US Senate had for the first time, a Hindu cleric, Rajan Zed of Reno, Nevada deliver an opening prayer. Of course, the US Congress is apparently powerless to act unless the blessing from an invisible deity is called upon whenever it's in session.

Fortunately, several members from Operation Save America were there to save the day and shout down the Hindu blasphemer. Here in the US, we can have only the one REAL god at the seat of power in Washington, DC and his initials are JC! Here's the press release from the OSA group. It kind of says it all:

WASHINGTON, July 12 Christian Newswire - Ante Pavkovic, Kathy Pavkovic, and Kristen Sugar were all arrested in the chambers of the United States Senate as that chamber was violated by a false Hindu god. The Senate was opened with a Hindu prayer placing the false god of Hinduism on a level playing field with the One True God, Jesus Christ. This would never have been allowed by our Founding Fathers.

“Not one Senator had the backbone to stand as our Founding Fathers stood. They stood on the Gospel of Jesus Christ! There were three in the audience with the courage to stand and proclaim, ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me.’ They were immediately removed from the chambers, arrested, and are in jail now. God bless those who stand for Jesus as we know that He stands for them.” Rev. Flip Benham, Director, Operation Save America/Operation Rescue.

After the arrests, the cleric was able to finish his prayer, and was not struck down by lightning.

That's all for this month...and please don't forget to send that Love Offering to Randy and Paula White!.....

Bill

MIRACLES

by Harry Edwards

After reading the Editorial in THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST - NUMBER 4, I started to reminisce. Married to a Filipina with a brother-in-law in Batangas I've had plenty of time to acquaint myself with Philippino culture, customs, religion and superstitions.

The Philippines is an archipelago of some 7000 islands with a land area not much bigger than Victoria. It struggles to support a population approaching 80,000,000.

The Filipinos have nothing for which to thank the 400 years of Spanish colonialism that ended in 1899, only a 'faith' that has resulted in a burgeoning population condemned to live in the poverty its dogmas have created.

Religious icons and paintings of an imagined Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary can be found in every home. Miniatures festoon the dashboards of buses and the ubiquitous jeepneys and signs everywhere promise that Jesus will save, the Lord will provide and all we need is faith. Superstition and a belief in miracles abound and barely a week goes by without a religious festival in one province or another being seen with the parading of religious icons .

Before my first visit to the Philippines, my only experience of a miracle was at the onset of puberty. Embarrassed with teenage acne I went into a church, bathed my face in 'holy water' and prayed for a Palmolive complexion. My prayer was answered. Five years later my pimples had gone! While this event is unlikely to cause Hume to rotate in his grave and reconsider his reasoning on miracles, it does demonstrate that a prerequisite of faith is patience -- infinite patience!

My next encounter with a miracle was in 1976 in a modest suburban house in Manila. It was here I met 'psychic surgeon' David Elizalde and his Australian assistant Helen Morgante. In a small room devoid of medical equipment, a male patient stripped to the waist lay on his back on a kitchen table. I was told he was off a Russian cruise ship and suffering from a stomach ulcer. From my position by the side of the table immediately opposite the 'surgeon' I had a completely unobstructed view of the proceedings. After a few words of prayer the sign of the cross was made on the patient's forehead and he was told that he would feel no pain.

A karate chop was made across the man's abdomen in which the hand did not quite touch the flesh. Immediately below appeared a 15cm line of what seemed to be blood. Deftly kneading the stomach, the 'surgeon's hands seemed to disappear up to the wrists in the patient's body. Seemingly from within the stomach, a piece of bloody tissue was removed, held up for all to see and then tossed into a bucket. The blood was swabbed off, the 'operation' complete. There was no scar or any sign of an incision. No fee was charged but it was suggested that a donation be made to continue 'the Lord's' work.

Despite what I had perceived, convincing though it was, my common sense told me that I had been deceived. It was in fact a well-known illusion and can be performed by anyone with a little practice. Unfortunately, the credulous poor, who can ill afford it, queue to be taken in by this fraudulent practice and have false hopes raised.

As recently as 27 August 2007, a 'psychic surgeon' by the name of Chris Cole was exposed on Sydney's TV Channel 9 program, *A Current Affair*. Unlike those doing the 'Lord's work' Cole charges \$145 for an eight-minute session.

Touring the fertile superstitious fields of the Philippines was evangelist Wanda Casper. Her glossy posters could be seen on every wall proclaiming her forthcoming 'Healing Miracle Crusade' during which she promised 'free miracles' enabling the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the crippled to walk. That Ms Casper can perform more miracles at her meetings than Jesus Christ performed in his entire ministry doesn't seem to have fazed anyone. To my mind the real miracle is that she can afford to travel the world performing them 'free'.

It begs the question, of course, that if such cures were at all possible why would we need doctors, specialists, nurses and hospitals?

It is said that if you scratch a Filipino, beneath you will find a believer. The same can be said of Mexicans, Central and South Americans and others whose faith has been nurtured with uncompromising Catholic dogma embedded in the supernatural.

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Easter in the Philippines produces what appears to be a concerted effort by the print and electronic media to propagate the feasibility of miracles. Some of them are so pathetic in their conception that they border on the ludicrous and inspire as much credence as a bald hairdresser selling hair-restorer. Among them, a walking, crying Madonna for example - an expensively garbed wooden carving standing on a semi-solid circular plinth which, when stood on an incline, will waddle along like a duck. I recall having a similar toy as a kid. Another highly venerated icon to which prayers are directed is a piece of highly polished wood mounted in an ornately gilded frame. It is said to be part of a tree in which the BVM was once imprisoned. The question of how someone who died 2000 years ago could reappear in a 50-year-old tree on the other side of the world and for what reason doesn't seem to have arisen.

While some of us may have seen pink elephants after consuming a drop too much one believer interviewed testified to seeing a full-sized normally supine statue of a saint get up and walk!

While the church officially declines to confirm or deny these happenings as miracles, it has no reservations when it comes to collecting donations from those who queue, light a candle and pray for a miracle.

Every Holy Week hundreds flock to Mount Kanlaon, an active volcano in Negros Occidental where witch doctors, faith healers and psychics gather to rejuvenate their powers. How? By hurling animal sacrifices down the crater either to appease or venerate the spirits said to occupy the place.

Following the appearance of an odd-shaped cloud formation and a 'dancing sun' over the town of Agoo in Northern Luzon there have been reports of miracles occurring. Among the estimated 500,000 pilgrims who made their way to Apparition Hill on 6 March 1993, was a sceptic. He asked two ladies what they had seen. They replied, "A cloud that was very white and that looked like the Virgin Mary with her arms outstretched." Asked exactly where this cloud was seen the two ladies pointed up and in opposite directions! Others saw 'the sun change colours', 'a crucified Christ', 'angels', 'the infant Jesus' and 'three bearded men'. Mr Pineda, a former town mayor, saw the sun 'appear like a ghost' and in red, orange, blue and yellow colours; his wife, however, saw nothing. Mr Pineda was subsequently seen purchasing a pair of dark glasses and a white cane! Agoo has now taken its place with the other shrines around the world and commercialism has moved in for the kill.

The appearance of apparitions is generally taken by believers to be a sign raising hopes of miracles to follow. Why God cannot speak for himself is unclear although it reflects the pecking order to which the Catholic Church has relegated him.

What are we to conclude? Sceptics will no doubt dismiss all the foregoing as hallucinations brought on by overwrought imagination. Given the right environment and conditions conducive to enhancing expectations, people will see what they want to see.

There is in men a hunger for belief, the will to believe. Religion - the opium of the masses? Perhaps the desire to believe is symptomatic of a growing despair among those who have ceased to have faith in human beings. If faith can move mountains, then the hunger for faith can conjure up visions.

MIRACLES GALORE

The following letter of mine was published in the *Manly Daily* on 18 May 2005. Not one instance was forthcoming!

Dear Sir,

During the 27-year pontificate of John Paul II nearly four hundred people were canonised as saints.

A prerequisite for sainthood is the authentication of two miracles performed by them during their lifetime. A miracle being defined as 'an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs'.

Of the nearly eight hundred alleged miracles (averaging one every ten days) attributed to these saints, surely some of the occurrences would have made media headlines. Can anyone advise me of just one?

Harry Edwards

HUMOUR

What Catholic Schools Do For You

Little Zachary was doing very bad in maths.
His parents had tried everything.
Tutors, Mentors, flash cards, special learning centres.
In short, everything they could think of to help his maths.
Finally, in a last ditch effort, they took Zachary down and enrolled him in the local Catholic school.

After the first day, little Zachary came home with a very serious look on his face.
He didn't even kiss his mother Hello.
Instead, he went straight to his room and started studying.
Books and papers were spread out all over the room and little Zachary was hard at Work.

His mother was amazed. She called him down to dinner.
To her shock, the minute he was done, he marched back to his room without a word, and in no time, he was back hitting the books as hard as before.

This went on for some time, day after day, while the mother tried to understand what made all the difference.

Finally, little Zachary brought home his report card.
He quietly laid it on the table, went up to his room and hit the books.
With great trepidation, his mom looked at it and to her great surprise, Little Zachary got an "A" in maths.
She could no longer hold her curiosity.

She went to his room and said, "Son, what was it? Was it the nuns?"
Little Zachary looked at her and shook his head, "no".
"Well, then," she replied, Was it the books, the discipline, the structure, the uniforms?
"WHAT WAS IT?"

Little Zachary looked at her and said,
"Well, on the first day of school when I saw that guy nailed to the plus sign, I knew they weren't fooling around."

ATHEIST STUDENT INTERVIEWS CHRISTIAN STUDENT

Hello to all!

My name is Desirée Jones, I am 18 years old and I attend a Christian College. The only contradiction in the story of my life so far is that I am an atheist. I was not raised as an atheist specifically, but my parents did not involve my two brothers and me in any religious affairs. We were raised to accept that others might have a different set of beliefs from ours, or trust in a particular religion, but to respect the difference and appreciate it.

To say that when I first met a unique student at my school was a shock would be an understatement. This individual was so devoted to Christianity that she left pamphlets and information on creationism in our Biology teacher's pigeon hole, tried to convert a guest speaker at a science lecture held in our gymnasium, and also told me that she prayed for my 'redemption' every Thursday evening.

At first I felt outrage that she thought she had the right to pray for my redemption, especially when I had nothing that needed redeeming. She told me that Jesus loved me, and knew that I would follow 'his way' in my own good time. My reaction then turned from infuriation to being intrigued. What would possess someone to change from being a wrestling fan who threatened to "beat [me] to a pulp" in Year 8, to suddenly following Christianity so intensely?

The chance to interview this religious soul came about by an English class. It was time to complete our SAC (School Assessed Coursework) in creative writing, and I chose to conduct an interview. I contacted the Atheist Foundation of Australia to seek an opinion on how to best handle the interview, and what questions to ask. I have been increasingly disturbed at the number of young people being trapped into religious fantasy thinking, and I jumped at the chance to conduct an interview, as I would like to become a journalist. I hope you will be enlightened and entertained.

THE INTERVIEW

When did you first discover religion?

I wasn't brought up in a religious household; my parents weren't religious, but I turned on the TV one day (about four years ago) and there was a verse from Revelations 3:20, and I said a prayer. You have to open up to Jesus; he wants to come in your life, but you have to pray and invite him in.

What was it that convinced you that Christianity was a rational system of belief?

After I prayed that prayer, it was interesting to go to school and listen to science on evolution. I thought there has to be more to it than that, something deeper. I looked deeper at evolution and found stuff that supports creation and I believed. I thought Jesus was real when he came into my life after I prayed and searched, and looked into evolution and creation, and found stuff to support my views.

Would you marry into another faith? Why/Why not?

No. According to the Bible – light doesn't go into darkness. Opposites are too different; Jesus wouldn't walk next to the Devil. Bringing up kids and morals, and life — it would be too hard to agree.

Are your parents religious?

No. My mother will attend church at Christmas, but my father doesn't believe. My relationship with my parents was

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strained; I didn't get along with Dad, and disrespected my Mum. They like the change in my character, and at first they resisted my beliefs, but accept them now.

How do you communicate with God?

I pray everyday, and I read my Bible. God communicates with me through my thoughts, in certain situations and through my heart. We communicate and it feels like I am talking to God, and God talks to me – it's very personal.

What keeps you involved in your faith and church?

Basically, because I have a relationship with Jesus. My faith and church inspire me, I want to keep going, keep running the race. I talk to God every day, he's the constant in my life. I sing at church, am a part of the band; but really, it's my relationship with him that keeps me going.

What is your view on other religions?

I believe Jesus is the only way, there is only one God. I pray for other religions and their followers, because their Gods are dead. But I don't hate them – I respect them as people. We are all essentially created by God, in the same way.

Do you believe that Christianity is more credible than other religions?

I want others to know about Christianity, about Jesus dying for their sins, and have people open up to God. I don't want to be greedy; I want to share my religion with others, because Jesus has done so many awesome things in my life and can do awesome stuff for others too.

Do you believe that our morals and sense of right and wrong have been developed and maintained through religion?

Yes, because of the Ten Commandments. If there is no God, there are no morals. It's through God we have a conscience. If there is no God, there is no right and wrong, so I believe they have come from God.

Do you believe that death is the end?

I believe everyone goes to eternity, and that if you believe in Jesus and accept that he died for you on the cross, for your sins, then you go to heaven. You're not judged by the Ten Commandments, because your sins are gone and forgiven, because Jesus has taken them upon the cross. But if you don't believe in Him and essentially reject him, you go to hell because you're judged by all the sins you've done because you have not been cleansed by Jesus' blood.

The 2006 Census figures show an increasing number of people rejecting religion. Why do you think this is so?

Some churches are increasing, like the Pentecostal Church. But some others go to places like the Catholic Church, but don't understand God. Generally numbers might be decreasing because of the 'boring, silent' stereotype of traditional churches. At our church, the Pentecostal, we sing, we dance, tell jokes. It's a lot of fun. I also believe that evolution is wrong but people just assume it to be correct, so they reject religion. But essentially they just don't know, and that is why they reject.

Would you marry an Atheist? Why/Why not?

Probably not – we'd be going different ways. Love is meaningless if it comes from the Big Bang. Atheists, I think, are purposeless and aimless. It would be too hard to connect with someone who believes in something completely different, and whereas my whole life is Jesus, an atheist's would be something else, and I don't think he'd like how I'm so passionate about God and involved in the church.

Are all faiths equal?

I think Christianity is the only way, but I don't think we're better. But it is the truth.

☆ ☆
Secular

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.

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.
Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.
Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?
Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

-- (Epicurus)

Appraise the Lord: Tax church property.

Letters to the Papers



The Herald, Newcastle 15 August 07

Andrew Martin (Letters *The Herald* 14/08/07) quite rightly asks John Howard and Kevin Rudd; “When are you going to address a group of Atheists?” With over 50% of voters having no interest in religion and many concerned with the increasing interference of faith in politics, such a request is timely indeed. Atheist, Humanist and other secular organisations broadly represent a consensus of the views of a majority of Australians who are frustrated that their concerns do not receive a fair hearing.

Howard and Rudd, in kowtowing to a minority view of the population, is having the tail wagging the dog. The 10% of Australians who are regular churchgoers appear not to have any concerns about keeping Church and State as separate identities. This is a dangerous path for our country to take. It is also a far cry from the representative democracy bolstering and keeping safe the ideals of a pluralist society.

David Nicholls
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Daily Telegraph, Sydney
Independent Weekly, Adelaide

Dear Mr Prime Minister and Mr Treasurer,

I would like to apply for a little bit of money. Nothing like the amount you are handing out to the Catholic Church for their celebration mind you. We are not that greedy. And besides we don't want a big 'do' in Sydney. Atheists are quite content carrying on with their social duties without any fanfare.

But I'd be grateful for a smidgen of the \$35 million being given by taxpayers to one of, if not the richest non-profit organisations in the world. Or don't you think that the promotion of reason and critical thinking worthy?

So can we have a little bit please....please?

Ms Lee Holmes
Treasurer
Atheist Foundation of Aust Inc

It really is wearing a little thin, continually reading anti-Atheistic phraseology the likes of godless Stalinism, Hitler's Nazi Germany and Pol Pot? All these and other similar unrelated propagandist examples have about as much relevance to Atheism today as does making responsible the Tooth Fairy for dental cavities.

Like frightened rabbits the faithful have mounted an overreaction by any means against investigation into their religions. Belief in supernatural concepts and the reasons for it is in need of critical examination like never before. The local, national and international oppressive and dangerous interference of religion into politics makes this essential.

Whether it be relative to prayers in parliament or any other topic with a religious flavour, there can be no doubt that Atheism has hit a nerve. Unfortunately a mythologically anaesthetised faithful have responded irrationally.

David Nicholls
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Don't pray in our Schools and I won't think in your Church.

My View of Islam

On holy war, apostasy and the rights of women in Islam.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Newsweek, Washington Post, 2 August, 07

The undisputed definition of Islam by all her adherents is “submission to the will of Allah.” This divine will is outlined in the Koran and in the teachings and deeds of Muhammad, as recorded in the Hadith or Sunna.

While the Koran is considered to be the true, undiluted word of God revealed to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel, the Sunna carry less weight and have always been a cause for disagreement amongst Muslim scholars. Theologians of Islam have, however, reached consensus on the authority of a set of six volumes from the Sunna called the Sahih Sita, or authentic six.

On the issues of holy war (jihad), apostasy and the treatment of women, the Koran and Sunna are clear. It is the obligation of every Muslim to spread Islam to unbelievers first through dawa, or proselytizing, then through jihad, if the unbelievers refuse to convert. It is the obligation of the unbelievers to accept Islam. Exempted from this edict of conversion are the people of the book: Christians and Jews. Both peoples have a choice. They may adopt Islam and enjoy the same rights as other Muslims, or they may stick to their book and lead the life of a dhimmi (lower citizen). Legally, the rights of the dhimmi are not equal to those of a Muslim. For instance, a Muslim man may take a Jewish or Christian wife, but Jews and Christians are not allowed to marry Muslim women. If a Christian or a Jew kills a Muslim man, they should be killed immediately. In contrast, the blood of a Muslim should never be shed in recompense for the blood of Christians or Jews.

It is also the obligation of every Muslim to command virtue and forbid vice. Apostasy, the worst possible vice a Muslim can commit, should be punished by death. The punishment need not be carried out by a state, but can easily be enforced by civilians. When it is a question of Islamic law, justice is in the hands of every Muslim.

As for the treatment of women, in the Koran and more elaborately in the Sunna, Islam assigns to girls a position in the family that requires them to be docile, makes them dependent on their male relatives for money and gives dominion over their bodies to these same male kin.

In Islam there is a strict hierarchy of subservience. First and foremost, all humans are required to be the slaves of Allah. In Muslim societies, all children must obey their parents. Beyond this, women and girls must obey and serve without question their male guardians and especially their husbands. This decree of marital obedience is not in any way reciprocal.

A woman in Islam is not competent and must always have a guardian. The responsibility of guardianship may pass from father to brother to uncle before a girl is married off, at which point she must answer to her husband. Marriage is typically arranged, with no choice given to the girl, and there is often an exchange of money in the process. Thus, under the religious rule of Islam, it is still common today that a woman's rights are essentially sold to a man she may not know, and most likely does not love.

As for education of girls under Islam, there is a clear program of indoctrination of inequality. Under Islam, education is the passing on of the rules of submission to the will of Allah. Intrinsic in this “education” is the dictation of gender roles. Girls are instructed in subservience first to God, then to the family and finally to the husband. There is strict emphasis on modesty, defined by virginity. A Muslim girl is taught to guard fiercely her virginity as an expression of loyalty to her creator and to her family and husband.

This form of education hampers her chances of ever becoming self-reliant or financially independent. A woman's lack of social equality and freedom is a direct consequence of the teachings of Islam. Under Islam, a wife must always ask her husband for permission and she must obey indefinitely. This stricture is lifted in the unique event that he asks her to forsake God, wherein she is allowed the right of disobedience. While it is true that in Islam, technically speaking, women have the right to trade and own property, the condition of total obedience to guardians makes this “freedom” hypothetical, at best.

The goal of education given to girls under Islam is the achievement of control over female sexuality. The result of this indoctrination is that Muslim girls believe it legitimate and often vocally defend their position of subordination. The

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lengths a Muslim society will go to in the pursuit of sexual control often cross into the territory of the absurd and, by western standards, criminal. In Islam the minimum age of marriage for a girl is after her first menstruation. Muhammad was engaged to his wife Aisha when she was six years old, and he married her (had intercourse with her) when she turned nine. Millions of Muslim men across the world follow Muhammad in this deed, one of the most prominent examples being the late Ayatollah Khomeini.

Under sharia law (Islamic law), such as governs in Saudi Arabia, Iran and parts of Nigeria, the civil rights of women are dramatically reduced. Threat of violent punishment in the form of whipping and stoning makes the prospect of financial independence and sexual freedom for women all but impossible. Miraculously, even in such harsh circumstances you will find women who are relatively well educated, have some say in choosing a husband and manage to earn a living. Let us be clear that these exceptions are due to the compassion and progressiveness of families who have been influenced by the West, and not to rules derived from Islam.

In the quest for reconciliation between Muslim and western societies, it is important to recognize that Muslims are as diverse as Islam is monolithic. Islam attempts to unify more than a billion people of different geographical origins, languages, ethnicities, and cultural and educational backgrounds into one religious tribe. And while I acknowledge that generally stereotyping believers is difficult since belief is subjective, for the sake of discussion I would like to distinguish between five types of Muslims.

The first group includes those Muslims who leave the faith because they cannot reconcile it with their conscience or with modernity. This group is important for the evolution of the Islamic world because they ask the urgent and critical questions believers usually avoid. Ex-Muslims living in the west are just beginning to find their voice and to take advantage of the spiritual and social freedoms available to them.

The second group is comprised of genuine Muslim reformers, such as Irshad Manji, who acknowledge the theological out-datedness of the Koranic commands and the immorality of the prophet. They tend to emphasize the early chapters in the Koran urging goodness, generosity and spirituality. They argue that the latter chapters wherein Islam is politicized and the concepts of sharia, jihad and martyrdom are introduced should be read in the context in which they were written, some 1,400 years ago.

The third group is made up of those Muslims who support the gradual perpetuation and domination of Islam throughout the world. They use the freedoms offered in democracy to undermine social modernity and, though initially opposed to the use of violence, foresee that once the number of believers reaches a critical mass the last remnants of unbelievers may then be dealt with in violence, and sharia law may be universally implemented. Ayatollah Khomeini used this method successfully in Iran. Erdogan of Turkey is following in his footsteps. Tariq Ramadan, deeply rooted in his Muslim Brotherhood heritage, is devoted to such a program among European Muslims.

The fourth group is the most obvious and immediately threatening. In this group we find a growing number of hard-line Muslims who have defined martyrdom as their only goal. This is an army of young men whipped into a frenzy of suicidal violence by power hungry clergy. These clergy have public platforms and work with impunity from institutions untouched and often funded by national authorities.

The fifth group is largely ineffective and only threatening in their refusal to acknowledge the truth. Here we find the elite clergy who make a show of trying to reconcile Islam with modernity. They are motivated by self-preservation and have no interest in true reform. They take selective passages from the holy books to make a case for a peaceful Islam, ignoring the many passages inciting violence, such as those verses which command the death of apostates.

It is through the first two of these five groups that progress and reform will come. As for the rest, the western world would be wise to recognize the realities of Islam, a religion laid down in writing over a millennium ago with violence and oppression at its heart. ♣

Born in Somalia and raised a devout Muslim, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is an active critic of Islam, an advocate for women's rights and a leader in the campaign to reform Islam. Her willingness to speak out and her abandonment of the Muslim faith have made her a target for violence and threat of death by Islamic extremists. She is currently a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, in Washington D.C., and is the author of the bestselling memoir "Infidel".

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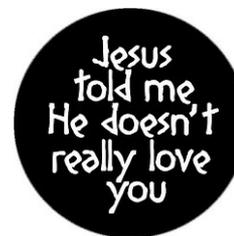
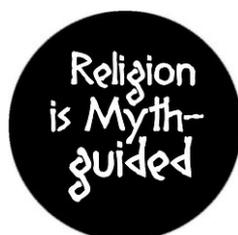
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