

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
Private Mail Bag 6
MAITLAND SA 5573
AUSTRALIA

Phone (08) 8835 2269
International + 61 8 8835 2269
Email info@atheistfoundation.org.au
Website <http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au>

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 full development of their potential as human beings.

To promote atheism.

AndrewsJakeman Incorporating SHELLEY McNAMARA MATTHEWS	CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS BUSINESS ADVISORS MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS
Level 5, 111 Crown Street Wollongong NSW 2500 Phone (02) 4226 1000 Fax (02) 4228 0907	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accounting & Taxation• Strategic Tax Planning• Business Restructuring• Asset Protection• Capital Gains Tax & GST Advising• Negative Gearing Advice
 Chartered Accountants	www.andrewsjakeman.com.au

ATHEISTS PROVIDING FOR ATHEISTS

AFA Member
Anthony Pickham,
partner in the firm,
'**AndrewsJakeman**',
can assist with all your
accountancy, business and
management needs.

CONTENTS

Philosophy and Aims	2
Opinion	4
Letters to the Editor	5
Heretical Happenings	6
Our Credulous World – <i>Charles Cornwall</i>	7 – 8
Darwin Day Barbeque	8
The Religion Report	9 – 10
Religion and Ethics Guestbook	10 – 11
Celebrate Reason – <i>Peter Taylor</i>	12 – 13
Media Release	13
Humour	14 – 15
Annual General Meeting	16
Atheist Logo Competition	16
From the Inbox	17
View from America	18
A Religious Experience – <i>Lee Holmes</i>	19
How God and Bambi made Me Gay...and Atheist! – <i>Alexander Wallace</i>	20 – 21
Pope Prattle	22
Homophobia: An Australian History (New Book)	22
In the Papers	23 – 24
That Debate: a retrospective on the reverend contestant – <i>John Dillon</i>	25
Free Public Lecture ANU	26
New AFA Forums Active	27

We welcome original articles, book reviews, letters to the editor, quotes and snippets for possible inclusion in
THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST
All contributions are subject to Editorial approval.

The subject matter herein need not be taken as the official view of the
ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

PRESIDENT

David Nicholls

VICE PRESIDENT

Lyn Longo

HON. SECRETARY

Karen Joyce

TREASURER

Lee Holmes

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

David Bailey

Michael Boyd

Charles Cornwall

Bob Creek

Dean Dowling

Janine Gébert

Colin Kline

Glennis Paterson

Brian Paterson

Dennis Southam

PUBLIC RELATIONS TEAM

Charles Cornwall

Dr Mike Downes

Dr Richard Doyle

Harry Edwards

Lee Holmes

Michael McGrath

Dr Luke Murtagh

David Nicholls

Voula Papas

Dr John L Perkins

Nigel Sinnott

Dennis Southam

Peter Taylor

EDITOR

Lee Holmes

PROOF READER

Nigel Sinnott

ATHEIST FOUNDATION

OF

AUSTRALIA INC

is a member of

ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL



<http://www.atheistalliance.org>

There were two pairs of disparate news stories that caught my attention last year. The first two stories were from overseas. In Somalia a woman (some reports said a 13-year-old girl) was stoned to death. In Indonesia a man was being investigated for marrying a 12-year-old girl. These two seemingly unrelated stories have a common theme — both acts are allowable under Islamic law.

OPINION

The woman (or girl) in Somalia had been convicted under Sharia law of adultery. Her ‘adultery’ was reported to have consisted of being raped by three men, none of whom were punished. She was buried up to the neck then stoned by 50 men in front of a thousand strong crowd of onlookers. I cannot imagine anything more violent, brutal, barbaric or inhumane than this. The man in Indonesia was a Muslim Cleric. The girl’s parents had consented to the marriage because of a desperate need of money, and the man was only under investigation because he had broken Indonesia’s laws against the marrying of minors. He had also planned to marry a 7-year-old girl and a 9-year-old girl.

How is it that in the year 2008 one of the world’s major religions could allow such acts, which no civilised society would condone? The reason is simple. This religion, like both of the other Abrahamic religions, is stuck in the distant past. Behaviour that was acceptable or at least considered normal two thousand years ago is now considered abhorrent by all civilised communities, but since religious ideas are fixed and immutable, believers are unable to change without directly contradicting their particular ‘holy’ book.

The other two stories took place in Australia. Back in August a front page story in many newspapers concerned a distressed humpback whale calf, that had apparently become separated from its mother, and which was later found to have a number of life-threatening health problems. The story made the headlines because of the fact that wildlife officers put the whale calf out of its obvious misery, and various people and groups were protesting against that action, with one mysterious group, called the Divine Marine Group, even trying to take out a legal injunction against the National Parks & Wildlife service to prevent the whale being killed. There was a major outcry according to media reports, with some onlookers in tears.

Then in September came the story of Angelique. Quoting from *The Age* newspaper of 13 September 2008 “Just a month shy of her 31st birthday and half a lifetime since she was diagnosed with the debilitating Crohn’s disease at 15, Angelique Flowers was told she had colon cancer. It was so advanced and so aggressive, she was given only months to live...

“Frightened of a slow, painful death from a total bowel obstruction, this softly spoken Melbourne writer wanted her life to end peacefully and on her own terms.

“It wasn’t to be. She regretfully turned away from her loved ones and spent her final weeks searching for information about euthanasia and a dose of the lethal drug Nembutal. Her final hours were robbed of the dignity she had wanted as she died vomiting the content of her bowels.”

These two stories serve to highlight the euthanasia issue. Where was the public and media outcry for Angelique, for the fact that she was allowed to suffer unbearable pain without help? People had a right to protest against the killing of the whale, but in the end common sense had its day and the whale was put out of its misery. For Angelique the protest was also there; not as obvious but more than effective. This protest comes from Christians, and its objective is implemented by Christian politicians, against the will of the majority of Australians. These Christians would rather someone — Christian or not — suffer unbearable pain than transgress religious doctrine.

When it comes to abuse and atrocities Christianity is no better or worse than Islam. Perhaps we have to be thankful that it no longer stones adulterers.

Dennis

Just as I shall select my ship when I am about to go on a voyage, or my house when I propose to take a residence, so I shall choose my death when I am about to depart from life. — *Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hi David,

My name is Cath. I joined just the other week and enjoyed reading the magazine so much — what a celebration and exploration of life!

I thought I would write to you to tell you a little Christmas story. This weekend we had the Jehovah's Witnesses knocking on the door. In accordance with the Atheist Foundation's aim to promote atheism, I was pleased to offer them THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST, Magazine, which they took away with them — looking a little dazed and confused. ☺

Hopefully I have not just lost my magazine to the rubbish bin — though having been the child of Christian parents I never know what might even eventuate from a find in the dust bin!

Never has a visit from the JWs been so much fun!!!!

Best of luck with your work,
Cath

EDITOR'S NOTE. *Cath was a bit disappointed at giving her one and only copy of the magazine away. We sent a replacement.*

Dear David, Lee, et al

Thank you for all your work on not the easiest of causes to promote. It was disappointing to hear that the bus signs were blocked. As you say, religion seems to have gained an élite status where it is considered taboo to present and non-offensively promote an alternative.

I was raised as a Catholic, but also encouraged to think logically and seek evidence. I can remember being as young as eight or nine and sitting in religion class (we had as many hours of religion per week as science, maths or English) feeling guilty for not being able to make myself believe in what was being spoken of. A few years later I mentioned my lack of religious interest to my father, who had been raised by Catholic parents, and found he had 'seen the light' several years beforehand. Our family has taken increasing interest in the 'dark side' since then.

It often occurs to me that, as well as taking a direct approach by publicly debating matters concerning religion (and matters of personal choice that should not be the concern of religion), there is considerable value in taking an indirect approach by encouraging people to think independently, separate popular belief from evidence and 'celebrate reason'. How disappointing that even the softer of these approaches was blocked in the case of the bus signs.

All the best with the Tasmanian Anti-discrimination Commission.

Thank you again,
Anonymous

If you were to publish this letter in an edition of THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST, could you please make it anonymous as I have several relatives who are strongly religious that I would not wish to offend.

HERETICAL HAPPENINGS

Keeping you in the know

Comedian Ariane Sherine saw an advertisement on a London bus directing her to a religious web site. There she found that salvation was granted only to those who accepted Jesus the Christ as their personal saviour. Not doing so meant a fiery time for all eternity. So began the Humanist and Atheist involvement with placing a secular message on Britain's buses. The slogan was quite mild, even a little ambiguous. "There's probably no god, so stop worrying and enjoy life."

The campaign took a successful turn after Richard Dawkins underwrote it with financial assistance of some £5,000. AFA Members and others wrote to us wanting to know if we were going to mount a similar program. Well, we tried with a variety of differently worded phrases but as most of you know, the bus companies did not come to the party.

There is no consistency in statute law concerning this kind of discrimination in Australian states and, to complicate matters further, Federal legislation exists. However, in Tasmania it is possible that the state's anti-discrimination laws have been breached. The AFA has therefore retained a lawyer, James Crotty, to submit our case to the controlling commissioner. An official from the anti discrimination department has 42 days to investigate if the rules have been contravened by the Metro bus company. We are right now waiting for the deliberation.

Now, all this might sound as though we are wasting time and effort in fighting a losing battle. In purely legal terms, perhaps; but, before this, when people were pledging donations, and since the rejection, the AFA phones and computers have run extremely hot. It has been rather difficult to keep it under control. But we have.

It slowly dawned on us that even with the rejection and mainly because of it, the AFA bus slogan campaign has received more publicity than in any other enterprise it has considered. The AFA has been involved with interviews on about twenty occasions over a period of about a month. Most of them were via radio, some newspapers and even a stint on television news. Shon Walker of ABC News Radio interviewed James Crotty on the subject. The flurry all began after David Rutledge on the ABC Religion Report interviewed me.

This has been a most successful way of getting the name Atheism out there and into the public mind — to a greater extent than ever before achieved.

The AFA has made no firm plans whichever way the anti discrimination case goes. We ask all those who have pledged money for the bus advertising program to keep it in the pocket for the moment. It is unlikely we can equal the mild frenzy that has occurred so far even if we get the go-ahead to place the slogans on Tasmanian buses. The media reaction to the decision will be a big determiner in future directions concerning this matter.

As soon as we know something, we will inform as many members as possible by email.

Until we meet again,

David

A free press can be good or bad, but, most certainly,
without freedom a press will never be anything but bad. — *Albert Camus*

If we don't believe in freedom of expression for people we despise,
we don't believe in it at all. — *Noam Chomsky*

Free speech is life itself. — *Salman Rushdie*

Our Credulous World

by Charles Cornwall

Did you hear about the person who consulted a fortune-teller? After carefully studying the client's palm, the fortune-teller solemnly pronounced, "Your palm tells me you are very gullible." While we may laugh, it is a sad fact that we live in a very credulous (gullible) world. A fact? Yes. There are mountains of evidence on every side. In this article I will examine some of that evidence. But first let's make sure we know what we're talking about. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines *credulous* as "having too great a readiness to believe things." For example, believing an extravagant advertising claim, or some story of a supposed supernatural event, when there is no real supporting evidence. Now for some examples:

Consider product advertising on TV with claims like "60% less fat" (than what?), "clinically proven", "Its unique ingredients are guaranteed to..." etc. Take a random sample. A certain dental product is guaranteed to produce "Your brightest smile in just one hour." This amazing product, we are told, will "Whiten your teeth up to 14 shades." Really? Are there shades of white? And if so, how do you measure them; and to such a precise degree – 14, not 13 or 15? Do these ads, preying on the gullible, work? Of course they do. Would these profit-driven manufacturers pay the millions they do on this sort of advertising if they didn't? The answer is obvious.

In my local bookshop there is a section set aside exclusively for so-called New Age books. Among them are books on astrology, crystals, ESP, dream interpretation, aroma therapy, Tarot cards, signs and symbols, divination, psychic children, spells and charms, palmistry, personal angels, Chinese fortune telling, and many others.

None of these New Age teachings can produce a skerrick of factual, scientific evidence to support their beliefs. They are just that – beliefs. Like so much advertising, they prey on the gullible. Their claims (e.g. horoscopes) are so generalised they could apply to anyone at any time, and they support their claims with the anecdotal accounts of credulous people. Yet vast numbers of people pin their faith on them. If this were not the case would there be so many of these books in our bookshops? Again, the answer is obvious. Let's look at one of them in particular.

I consulted the horoscopes in two different same-day papers. One was attributed to astrologer Anne-Elisabeth, while the other was not attributed. Comparing the vague prognostications of the two, about the only resemblance I could discover between them was the generalised nature of their predictions and the lack of specifics. They could apply to anyone at any time.

Apart from the fact that the whole astrology bit is a great con, there is another reason for the inconsistent prognostications of different horoscopes for the same period. I have a friend who has been in newspaper journalism for many years. He tells me that when he worked for a certain state's evening newspaper (now defunct) they would obtain, in a piece of journalistic chicanery, the horoscope of a fellow Murdoch Press newspaper from interstate and re-use it two weeks later!

I did notice that Anne-Elisabeth had a Website so I looked it up. There I discovered this enlightening piece of information. "The position of the planets in the heavens on [the day a person was born] establishes pre-determined cycles and patterns which will be activated at certain times in that individual's life." Really? In his book *The Demon-Haunted World* (Random House, 1996) Carl Sagan, probably twentieth century's greatest astronomer, has a list of scientific facts

"This amazing product, we are told, will "Whiten your teeth up to 14 shades." Really? Are there shades of white?"

which completely debunk astrology. These include: "its neglect of atmospheric refraction"; "its list of supposedly significant celestial objects that is mainly limited to naked eye objects known to Ptolemy in the second century, and that ignores an enormous variety of new astronomical objects discovered since"; "inconsistent requirements for detailed information on the time as compared to the latitude and longitude of birth"; "the failure of astrology to pass the identical-twin test" and so on. Yet newspapers everywhere continue to publish these pseudoscientific astrology columns. Would they do so if people didn't want them? Again, the answer is obvious.

Yet another piece of credulity is the supernatural power sometimes attributed to certain numbers. "Misfortune always comes in threes." "Seven is my lucky number." Then, of course, there is that unlucky number 13. I was first introduced to the "Devil's number" as a boy of ten. With my parents we were having a week's holiday cruising the Murray aboard the PS *Marion*. I clearly recall asking my father why there was no cabin 13. There was a 12 and a 14 but in between the cabin number was 12A.

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

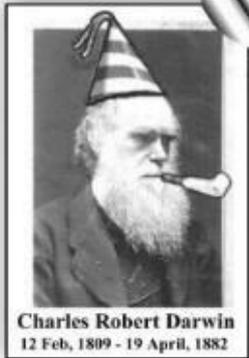
Worse even than just the number 13 is Friday the 13th. I once had a friend who was very superstitious about Friday the 13th. When I asked him why this was so he replied that he knew Friday the 13th was an unlucky day because he once lost his wallet on a Friday the 13th. When I pointed out that someone somewhere loses a wallet every day of the year and that meant someone has to lose one on Friday the 13th he was clearly unconvinced.

I'm a bit of a cricket fan. Now all my fellow cricket followers will know that 87 is the Australian team's unlucky number. Whenever an Aussie batsman is on 87 all his teammates must not move from their places otherwise the batsman concerned will surely be dismissed. This practice has been going on for many years. It is thought to have originated when someone, dismissed on 87, observed that he was 13 from reaching the prized century. So it is, in this age of great scientific knowledge, whenever a batsman is on 87, the viewer has to put up with Bill Lawry or Richie Benaud waxing eloquent about the Aussie unlucky number. And if someone does get out on that score we are assured that this happens with unnatural frequency.

The journalist friend I referred to earlier is, like me, a sceptic. Years ago, when he was a sports reporter, he decided to investigate this 87 issue. He studied the

Aussie test records for the past 15 years and discovered there was no statistical evidence to support this belief in 87 being an unlucky number. He wrote an article about it and submitted it to his editor. It was never published. It spoils a good story. And so this piece of superstitious nonsense prevails and cricket supporters continue to have their intelligence insulted as commentators continue to rabbit on about the risks associated with the score of 87.

This article would be glaringly incomplete without a reference to the world's religions for they are yet further evidence of human credulity. Having, in a former life, been a student of theology and ordained minister, Christianity is the one I know most about. It is a faith religion. For faith you can read credulous. It relies not on hard evidence but belief in ancient myths that have been entirely debunked by scientific and other factual evidence. I know many Christians — good, intelligent, well-educated people — who scoff at astrology and New Age teachings. They say, in effect, "These are all baseless superstitions. How can any intelligent person believe them?" Yet, is it any more believable that a star could guide some wise men with great precision all the way from a distant eastern land to the very stable of an inn in a country town in Judaea than that the star sign under which a person is born will have a determining effect on that person's life? The answer is obvious.



An Invitation

from the Atheists, Humanists, Rationalists & Skeptics
to celebrate Charles Darwin's birthday at the

Darwin Day Barbecue

on
Thursday, 12th February 2009

from
5:30 pm *till* 8:30 pm

at
Alexandra Avenue, Melbourne

All Welcome
Free BBQ facilities
available
BYO food and
drinks.

Since the early 1990s, Darwin Day has been celebrated around the world including in Melbourne but this year's celebrations will be the biggest party so far.

Come along and enjoy a summer's evening BBQ by the Yarra.

Melways, 2G D11
Just west from the Morell Bridge
and Anderson Street.
Next to the Botanic Gardens.

RSVP:

An RSVP is not required however it would assist with organising if you could RSVP (with **YES**, **NO** or **MAYBE** and numbers) to Andrew on **(03) 9894 1443** or email

ar2team@yahoo.com

The Religion Report

Transcript of the interview David Nicholls had with the ABC Religion Report on 26 November 08.

David Rutledge: Welcome to the program.

This morning we'll be hearing about a new book for inter-faith educators; we'll also be hearing about an ambitious new musical work that's been composed for the season of Advent.

But first, a story about what you won't be seeing on Australian buses over the new year.

SONG: 'It ain't necessarily so'

David Rutledge: Aretha Franklin with "It Ain't Necessarily So", a song expressing the kind of scepticism towards religious truth claims that you'd think would be completely uncontroversial in secular Australian society today.

But, that ain't necessarily so either. Just ask the Atheist Foundation of Australia, who have been refused permission to buy advertising space on public transport. You might have read in recent weeks that the British Humanist Association, assisted by crusading atheist Richard Dawkins, have been raising money to put their message on London buses. The ads, planned for January, will read, 'There's probably no god, now stop worrying and enjoy your life.'

And in Washington, buses are already trundling around with a Christmas message from the American Humanist Association: 'Why believe in a god? Just be good, for goodness' sake'.

Well the Atheist Foundation of Australia wants to mount its own campaign, and says that its members and supporters have pledged \$16,000 to fund advertisements on buses in Australia. So they've approached APN Outdoor, the company that manages public transport advertising in most Australian capitals.

According to the Atheist Foundation's president, David Nicholls, APN Outdoor said that they had problems with the wording of the proposed message. But then after the Foundation made two sets of changes to the wording, APN Outdoor said they simply weren't able to accommodate them.

David Nicholls spoke to us from his home near Adelaide.

David Nicholls: It's very difficult to get atheists to

agree to a bus slogan, but we started with 'Atheism, because there is no credible evidence'. We put that to the bus companies; they didn't like that and they said the wording wasn't to their acceptance, and then we changed that to 'Celebrate reason' — and we thought we'd make it a bit comical — 'Sleep in on Sunday mornings', but they refused that also. The end slogan that we've decided upon is 'Atheism - Celebrate reason' with a lot of smiley faces, and it's a very positive message.

David Rutledge: You've approached APN Outdoor, the company that looks after advertising on buses with these slogans one after the other. Have they given any reason why they don't like the wording?

David Nicholls: It has taken about three weeks to get any sort of answer at all. The end conversation I had was I asked why we were refused, and my answer to that was 'Well we'll have to refer this to our legal department' and the chappie hung up. Nearly immediately after that, he rang back with a message saying, 'Listen, this is all finished, we're not putting the signs on'.

David Rutledge: Can you speculate as to why they might be refusing to run this?

David Nicholls: Well it could be just cultural censorship. As Dawkins said, we're brought up to believe that religion has some sort of privileged status. To offer even a mild criticism of it is seen as something very strident, and that's out of bounds to do that. The Atheist Foundation is not a religion, we are not criticising religion, we are saying celebrate reason. So I think that there is a rejection of atheists having their name out there.

David Rutledge: Are you surprised by that? In a country like Australia, one of the most secular societies in the world, that this would happen?

David Nicholls: I'm disappointed, but not overly surprised. Religion has a very great hold on societies, even democratic societies and in fact it has too great a hold in democratic societies.

David Rutledge: The question about why you're doing this, as I said, Australia is a very secular society, atheism has raised its profile and you could say its respectability in recent years with very successful books by Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens among others. Why, in Australia, do you feel the need for a campaign? What is it in Australia that you're concerned about?

David Nicholls: In Australia, religion started off having

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

a lot of breaks way back when we were starting our society, and those breaks have continued through: religions are tax exempt, they receive Council breaks, they're responsible for a \$100-million chaplaincy program; taxpayers are paying for religious schools and 'Celebrate Reason' is a very appropriate message to be putting forward today.

David Rutledge: I guess atheism is popularly understood in terms of a kind of negative identification, the lack of any belief in God or a higher power. But one of the problems with organised atheism is that lack of belief in God isn't a great motivating force in getting people to come to meetings, raise money, raise support for each other. How strong a sense of community do you think there is among Australian atheists?

David Nicholls: In some quarters there's a very strong sense. But let me take you back. Atheism is not a lack of belief, atheism just doesn't see any evidence. Atheists see no evidence for any supernatural thing, and that's the only binding force they really have. They can have all sorts of views apart from that. Atheism throughout the world has grown because of the threat that religion poses for humanity.

David Rutledge: How concerned are you that in this campaign, if it goes forward, that you might be stoking the flames of some sort of conflict?

David Nicholls: I don't think that's even within the realms of possibility. Any criticism of religion, it doesn't matter how mild it is, creates controversy. Should we stop because of that? All we're asking is even for religious people to use reason and as Bertrand Russell said, if reason shows something to be true, have the courage to accept it.

David Rutledge: So what's your next move? Now that APN Outdoor have said that they can't accommodate a bus campaign, would you say it's dead in the water or do you have other options to pursue?

David Nicholls: Well there are a few options, there are

billboards but APN controls them they haven't got back to us on that. Any company really has the right to refuse a service to a customer, but in this instance, you have to wonder. Just consider the proposed wording: Celebrate Reason. I mean is it vindictive, inflammatory, offensive? No, it's not, it's none of those, and I really have to ask, why have we been refused? It's not as though they're opposed to controversy. In Adelaide I believe, in the recent past, the APN buses had all across the back of a bus or some buses, the message, 'John 3:16' which is the most famous Biblical passage 'That God so loved the world that he gave his only son ...' Now atheists find that offensive, and there's lots of atheists in Australia, but we wouldn't prohibit its display.

David Rutledge: David Nicholls, President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia.

And I should mention that we approached APN Outdoor for their response, but that response was an official No Comment.

The Religion Report then interviewed Greg Clarke, Director of the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute and the Centre for Public Christianity in Sydney.

His response to the question below caused some ire amongst the listeners who then wrote to the Religion & Ethics Guestbook. — Editor

David Rutledge: What about the slogan that the *Atheist Foundation of Australia* wants to run? The one that they've settled on was 'Atheism: Celebrate Reason', what do you think of that?

Greg Clarke: Well again, you know, I'd like to plug in there, 'Christianity: Celebrate Reason'. I just think this claim that religion is anti-reason doesn't hold up. I mean the incredibly influential Christian thinkers like Aquinas, Augustine, through Luther, they gave a very high role to reason. There are people who practice religion in a very irrational way, but the basis of religion can be approached with your mind and does make sense.

Religion & Ethics Guestbook. <http://www2b.abc.net.au/religion/guestbook/>

Ha. Using Luther as an example of a great reasoning thinker is a joke. The guy was a raving nutter, and profoundly opposed to reason. Beside that, the whole premise for Christianity is absurd, as it is for pretty much all religion. Religion doesn't celebrate reason, it celebrates apologetics.

Geoff

Responding to David Nicholls' argument that belief should be based on reason, Mr Clark assured us that religion was indeed based on reason. That's funny - I thought religion was based on faith. Surely faith is the whole point of Mr Clark's religion, or have I misread the New Testament? And who would need faith, if reason supported one's belief? Mr Clark also cites

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

Augustine, Aquinas and Luther as 'great' reasoners, but they were less competent in that field than some of the people burnt at the stake for voicing their views. In fact the logic of those three luminaries suffered dismally from the garbage in - garbage out principle, without much in between to mitigate it. Moreover, they failed to spot their cardinal error of starting with the answer and making their 'reasoning' fit. They may have been blinded by their times, but Mr Clark can't use the same excuse.

Mike

On the religion report today a Mr Clark was asked to respond to David Nicholls interview about atheism where he stated quite correctly that reason should be the only basis for belief. Mr Clark pointed out that religion is also based on reason and gave as his examples of great reasoners Aquinas, Augustine and Martin Luther. Interesting that the most recent reasoner for religion has been dead for nearly 500 years.

Duncan

I'm not in the least surprised by a refusal to allow any slogans. My experience is that Australian society is not nearly as Secular as it appears. We have prayers in parliament and organisations may openly shun affiliation due to ones lack of religious belief. Censorship of atheist slogans are just another symptom of pervasive religious influence in Australia. Come on Australian Government, lead from the top, make some laws to protect a minority group, Atheists.

Bruce

Interesting that a slogan that promotes reason is denied from appearing and perhaps more interesting that the company which controls this advertising won't comment. What a strange society we live in when ideas without substance take precedence over those that are backed by logic and reason.

John

Why can they put slogans on buses in England, such as the ones suggested, but Australians can't do so? All sort of other slogans are on buses, etc. Don't we live in a Democratic society??

Sumner

Regarding the bus advertising, it's quite outrageous to hear of this censorship. Meanwhile we have in-your-face advertising about better sex and longer erections.

Sandra

The suicide bombers that destroyed the trade towers

and George Bush who invaded Iraq were acting on the irrational belief in a supernatural being. The Atheist Foundation of Australia is trying to prevent this sort of stupidity in the future. Stopping atheists from advertising is very wrong in an allegedly free society. I can understand why the advertising company will not accept the advertisements. They are scared of the backlash in a country that kowtows to ignorant and arrogant bigots such as Mr. Clark. There are many atheists supporting *Amnesty International*, *Medicins sans Frontiers*, and giving food to the poor. The only reason religion appears to give people strength is because we allow them to indoctrinate children with fear and lies that make them weak. Any statement for which you cannot produce evidence is a lie by definition. And lying to children is a very serious form of child abuse.

Edward

The AFA should definitely, without question, be permitted to launch their campaign. In making the world a better place, reason, rationality and critical thinking must always prevail. This case should be no exception.

Mark

The denial of advertising to Atheists demonstrates the technique of the religionists: Put all your own propaganda into every forum available, threaten those who put an opposing view, block other views from public discussion and then present an image of goodness, spirituality and democratic belief for public consumption. We must do all we can to stop them from getting away with it. Everyone, whether Atheist or not should speak out against this refusal to let non religionists have a say.

Dez

OK, so we know the bus company is pro religion. I wonder if AFA offered to pay for a Bible verse on their buses, they would accept the ad. I have several suggestions, but one of my favourite ones would be Isaiah 36:12, King James version: "But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? Hath he not sent me to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?" OK, so it's a little long for a bus sign. Since it's Xmas time, why not put up some of the words of Jesus as in Luke 12:47: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." Come on bus company, this is the word of YOUR Lord here; what say ye?

Bill

Celebrate Reason!

by Peter Taylor

The AFA was invited to submit an essay to *Unleashed* on the ABC Website

The article appeared on 29 December 2008

<http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/stories/s2455954.htm>

On *The Religion Report* of 26 November, Greg Clarke, Director of the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute, was asked to comment on a proposed Atheist Foundation of Australia bus slogan that said: "Atheism. . . Celebrate Reason." He thought it was a pity it had been banned, because public debate about religion is healthy, but disagreed with what he saw as the implication that religion is irrational. He insisted that Christianity is a rational belief, being based on the reasoning of thinkers like Aquinas, Augustine and Luther.

But those men lived long before the invention of the scientific method of understanding our world. Today, their arguments would be dismissed because, instead of first observing the facts and then drawing conclusions, they began with the premise that God exists, then searched for "facts" to prove it. Sadly, the practise hasn't stopped. Religious "scholars" today are happy to ignore scientific facts if they contradict dogma: creationism and vilification of homosexuality being glaring examples.

Shonky thinking by individuals is regrettable, but usually harmless. However, when organised religions, those gigantic multi-national corporations of enormous wealth and political influence, demand we accept unquestioningly the irrational doctrines on which their claims to authority rest, then the results can be catastrophic.

The current economic model espoused by most countries is that of a "growing" economy. This requires a growing pool of consumers to buy goods obtained by depleting Earth's resources while destroying ecosystems, ignoring the fact that our planet is a finite resource, and all life depends for survival on the alarmingly thin membrane of air, soil and water that surrounds it.

"Everyone is nervous about impending catastrophe, but governments are not addressing the primary cause of the problem – overpopulation."

About 6,800 million humans currently inhabit this planet; increasing at 142 per minute. Thus, every year about 75 million new humans compete for space, food and water – mostly in unhealthy, overcrowded, polluted cities. This human increase is mirrored by a corresponding decrease in other living organisms, 65 species of which become extinct every day, seriously undermining the ability of Nature to sustain us. Water is becoming scarce and food too expensive for increasing numbers of people as demand outstrips supply. Every day 32,000 hectares of forest are cleared, 15,000 hectares of land becomes desert, and 70 million tonnes of CO₂ are released into the atmosphere to cope with the increasing affluence and effluence of burgeoning populations.

There is a positive note – the rate of population increase is slowing in countries where women are better educated, aware of their rights, and legally equal to men. Even so, the population will reach about 12,000 million before it plateaus later this century.

Everyone is nervous about impending catastrophe, but governments are not addressing the primary cause of the problem – overpopulation. Why? Because they need to curry favour with religious power-brokers in exchange for political support. Prayers are recited in parliament, religious schools are favoured, pointing out religious irrationality is frowned upon – censored in the case of the Atheist Foundation of Australia bus advertisements, and state-subsidised Christian chaplains in supposedly secular state schools preach that humans are the unique creations of an invisible, omniscient, omnipotent god who created Earth and the universe as a testing ground to weed out the "unfaithful". This earthly existence is said to be merely a temporary stopover for humans on the way to heaven (paradise) or hell. In other words, it doesn't matter what happens to the planet as long as humans continue to breed.

Organised religions not only refuse to consider overpopulation to be a problem, but also actively undermine efforts to correct it by condemning masturbation, contraception, family planning and pregnancy terminations while insisting

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

that a women's role is to be a compliant child bearer, accountable to her husband. Apparently there's no limit on the number of humans able to fit on this tiny ball of rock hurtling through space, because God will provide.

Graphic warnings of looming calamity are making people fearful, but instead of demanding their governments do something rational, too many are embracing the illusory security of an omnipotent, supernatural father figure, or joining groups based on wishful thinking – like religion. One typical group; World Citizens Action, (apparently coordinated by the U.N.) reckons there's a new enlightenment, humans are evolving into a wiser, less competitive, less materialistic race of supermen. And they assert that a revolution is taking place as we heed the deepest yearnings of our hearts and unleash the magical power therein, enabling us to dissolve seemingly insurmountable obstacles while unleashing benevolence that unlocks and nurtures our deepest yearnings. It is based on unity in diversity: everyone wins. This ignores the truth about the nature of humans, and will do nothing to avert disaster.

Sir David Attenborough wrote in *The Life of Mammals* “Instead of controlling the environment for the benefit of the population . . . we should control the population to ensure the survival of our environment.”

The choices are clear: persuade religions to jettison dogma and accept facts so we can reduce populations to a sustainable level and preserve the natural environment in which we evolved, or do nothing and accept the consequences.

Peter Taylor
Public Relations Team
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

Atheists pursue redress with anti-discrimination legislation

The *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* is to complain to the Tasmanian Anti-discrimination Commissioner following the refusal of Metro Tasmania, a State owned bus company, to display its advertisements.

President of the Foundation, David Nicholls said: “Following legal advice we have decided to lodge the complaint. It is unfortunate the AFA has to go down this path to achieve justice. However, there is no grudge involved here, just a simple matter of what is right.”

David Nicholls said atheists worldwide have an important message for humanity and one that is quite urgent. He said the denial of an opportunity to express that message on Public Transport had possibly resulted from unfounded concerns in executive decision making. Mr Nicholls said he expected a good outcome to the complaint and envisaged the slogan, “Atheism - Celebrate reason! Sleep in on Sunday mornings” to soon be on a bus near you.

Hobart lawyer James Crotty has been retained to advise on the complaint.

H
U
M
O
U
R

A young missionary on his first term in Africa is out away from camp having devotions in a quiet clearing, as was his custom. This one particular day, whilst reading his Bible, a lion comes and lays down right beside him, so close that the hot warm smell of its breath is wafting over him.

As you would suppose, this makes the missionary exceedingly uneasy.

He closes his eyes, praying ... but when he opens them he sees another lion approach from the brush, and proceeds to lie down on the other side of him.

Convinced that this is a test of his faith, the missionary determines to return to his Bible reading. But as soon as he does, the two lions rise and pounce, devouring him in one fell swoop.

And the moral of the story?

Never try and read between the lions.



Cartoon thanks to www.atheistcartoons.com



Cartoon thanks to www.atheistcartoons.com

HUMOUR

In 1940 I holidayed in my army time down at the Sea of Galilee.

"Pretty little lake" I thought, I'll hire a boat and have a paddle about.

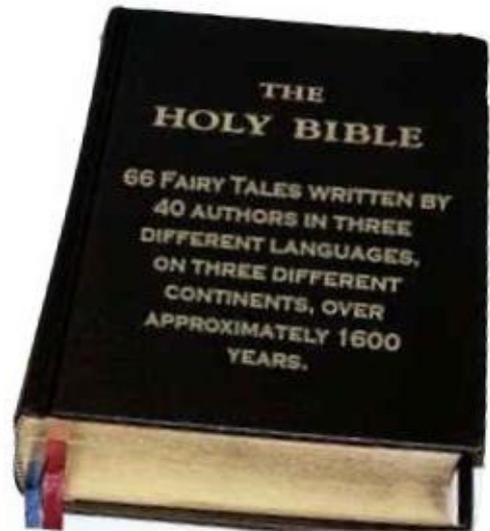
The boat owner said, "Soldier, the hire will be a pound. (£1).

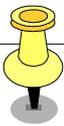
"Fair go mate, I said, "You must know I only get 35 Bob (£1.15 Shillings) a week."

"Do you know that Jesus walked on this lake!" said the boatman.

"With the rate of your hiring, I am not surprised he did" I said.

Frank D.





ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
of the
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

will be held on

Wednesday 18th March 2009
at 7.30pm

Eastwood Community Centre
95 Glen Osmond Road
EASTWOOD SA

All members are welcome to attend.

Atheist Logo Competition

Fame and fortune to the tune of \$100 and our eternal gratitude awaits a member successful in designing an *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* logo for use on the AFA web site and as a letter-head.

This is the new Banner for the Forum. Our letter-head and website will use this design so a logo must be the same or at least compliment the colour.

***Atheist Foundation
of Australia Inc*** Established
1970

Competition closes 30 June 09.

The AFA Committee of Management will consider all entries. In the event of no entry being chosen we will ask for more submissions.

Examples of logos used by other Freethought groups.



American Atheists



Richard Dawkins



Humanists



Australian Skeptics



Rationalist Society
of Australia



Dear AFA.

I was not allowed to teach in most private schools across Western Australia unless I declared faith and a devotion to the church. One advert this week for a teacher said openly: "Regular church attendance a must!"

Teaching for me is about growth and a search for knowledge; without it we are sheep going through the gate with a dog on your heels.

I am now teaching at a Montessori school that seems to offer a ray of light as it approaches religion with an open-ended question and an understanding of culture rather than as "This is it take it or leave it".

Educators are in a very difficult position with regard to the wishes of parents. However, I have found most parents haven't a clue what goes on in the school day or what education their beloved John or Jane is being subjected to, if any!

Overall I think it is down to tolerance and understanding. Most parents won't tolerate bullies in school but most will allow religious dogma (the worst bully there ever was). Through blinkered ignorance the child, like a sponge absorbs information creating a harder breed of religious fundamentalists. The silly season has been a frightening example of this.

But I must give you this terrifying true example of a parent- religion team: In Halifax, West Yorkshire (UK), as you are probably aware there is a large Pakistani community. Outside my house a very small boy was running in the road. I went out to find his parents and save him from certain death as it was a notorious car rat-run. I said to the little Pakistani boy. "Hey, kid! Don't run in the road. You could get knocked down and killed, what would your mum say if she saw you running in the road? She would be very sad if you got hurt, lets take you home."

He said this: "In Allah I have faith my mother is proud for me to die because I go to the virgins in the sky."

This child was four years old and at that moment I had a horrible vision of bombs strapped to his vest, so I took him home anyway and I went home and cried.

I will be joining the foundation, if I may, because I

think the push for change needs careful handling we can't just shout louder but rather have to be the alternative subtle constant message of reason. My experience in psychology has taught me that creating a barrier invites defence take the barrier down and you get to the truth

Peace for the New Year
T

Hi guys,

O.K., I'm convinced.

I have decided to join your association.

I have done so, for a number of reasons.

I have been a long time member of Australian Skeptics and I noticed they once had a 'hands off' approach to commenting and investigating religion. This has been addressed in recent times, but there is still scope for a more direct approach in taking religious beliefs (and their negative consequences) head on. I am pleased that your organisation does so and it is a breath of fresh air to me. I will not say a bad word about the Skeptics, so please do not take this comment as a criticism. It simply means that there is a gap that I would like to fill in my many interests concerning this world we live in.

\$25 for a year is cheap. It may buy a person one main meal in an average restaurant in Sydney, if one does not mind the lower end of the menu. For \$25, I think anyone can take a chance and it puts some credibility in my views on religion.

It feels good to read some of your articles about a whole host of subjects. For whatever reason, I have come to the same conclusions in everything I have read, so I guess by brain's logic and perception circuits are working fine and I am in touch with the real world. A little reassurance in a crazy and biased world has been quite a nice change and I am liking this feeling.

I have posted a cheque and a completed membership form today, so it should be coming your way soon. It wasn't planned, but it is ironic that today of all days, I have decided to make a stand as an atheist. Today has been the only day for a while I have had some free time to tidy up a few loose ends in my domestic life. Like throwing my bible in the bin over 20 years ago, symbolic gestures (even if they are an accident of time) can be important.

Talk to you soon. And I am patient, I know everyone is on holidays, so no rush in the processing.

With regards, CL :-)

Ah, the New Year has arrived! As I write this, less than three weeks remain of the Bush administration. After 20 January, when Barack Obama becomes President, along with a heavily Democratic Congress, no foetus will be safe! They will all be turned into stem cell burgers. Underage girls will be given birth control info or condoms and teenage pregnancy will soar. In our public schools, in science class, the age of the earth will suddenly increase from about 6,000 years to billions of years! Dinosaurs will no longer be considered contemporaries of “early” man. God will be — God? What god? Oh yes, and now he’ll be mocked! OK, so it’s not going to be *that* different. What will most likely happen is all the religious nonsense that was so prevalent in the Bush administration will suddenly go to the back of the bus, if not get totally kicked off.

According to recent polls, three in four Americans will be glad to see Bush gone. The 25 per cent that still think he was a good President are what’s left of the people that have run our country into the ground for the last eight years. They are the ones that would still vote for Sarah Palin for President in a second. I’m sure that many of you Down Under watched in absolute amazement at the number of Americans who went absolutely ga-ga over her. No matter how many times she mangled an answer, or appeared to be totally clueless, the religious right couldn’t get enough of her. Now it is thought that she might even try to get the incumbent Alaskan Republican Senator’s seat that comes up in 2010. Polls show her up 20 points in that potential match up. Religious fundamentalism is alive and well in many areas of the US!

Recently, perhaps due to the current bad economic conditions and corresponding employment woes here, there seems to be an increase in Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses running around from door to door looking to save the downtrodden. This past Sunday afternoon there was a knock on our door and there stood two members of the LDS church. OK, you know how they operate: it’s always two young men in their early twenties with white shirts, ties and ID badges. Believe it or not, I always enjoy talking with these LDS missionaries: it’s like target practice, shooting fish in a barrel! If you are going to play the Mormon “game”, you really need to know some of their doctrine, history, and definitely some of their terminology. There’s any number of ways you can go about it, but I tend to let them know right away that I’m familiar with who they are, then provide a little history about their church just to demonstrate my “credentials”. Big smiles! (Maybe this guy is one of us!) Then I abruptly tell them I’m an atheist, and as



such, I always want to know *why* I don’t believe in something; hence, my familiarity with Mormonism. After the amazed look on their faces subsides, the dialogue begins. I generally point out that there’s no real difference between Catholicism, for example, and Mormonism, except for the details, but that each one generally considers the other a cult. After all, what’s the real difference between hailing the Virgin Mary, rosary beads in hand, to get your message to Jesus and the Holy Spirit versus getting dressed up in your snazzy Temple outfit and performing the “Through the Veil” ritual in the Celestial Room? (Jesus Christ! How does this atheist know about Through the Veil? they must be thinking.)

I can generally hold an audience with them for about ten to fifteen minutes, long enough to get *our* message to them. Whether it does any good or not, I’ll probably never know, but I’d just love to hear the reaction of these missionaries as they head to the next house. What are they saying to each other? “How could that guy know so much about LDS and totally reject it? He even said he didn’t smoke, drink, use drugs, or even drink coffee! Just like *us*! And he’s an *atheist*! Hmm!”. Maybe that “hmm!” will get their brains working a little harder after they reflect on their day. Maybe what I told them about Mormons being basically decent, intelligent, industrious people, who could accomplish just as much or more without all the supernatural nonsense, could sink in and have an effect. Sadly, most religions have a sort of “feedback system” in place where if you do accidentally think of something outside the proverbial box that’s anti-doctrinaire, you are to immediately ask God for forgiveness and promise never to consider any such thing again.

The inventors of these religions were, in a sense, not fools. Yes, they cultivated millions into *being* fools, but they knew well that maintaining faith in the unseen would require a built-in reinforcement loop that would automatically deploy in certain challenging situations. In the case of Mormons and JWs, they generally travel in pairs not only to overwhelm the “mark”, but probably to provide an immediate “faith band-aid” if a heretical situation arises. A Mormon visit to our house is definitely a heretical occasion! Will the Mormons come to your house in 2009? If so, welcome the opportunity and tell them about the “A” Team! It *may* do some good, and, if nothing else, sharpen your debating skills.

Happy New Year to all!

Bill

A Religious Experience.

by Lee Holmes

In December I was needed to look after my mother who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Her situation is unusual because, although she is 85, she is very fit, and walks everywhere in any kind of weather just to escape the confines of her unit. Unfortunately because of the disease Mum has been forgetting her keys. My other siblings and I (all of them live interstate) could not convince Mum to go into temporary respite so I decided to spend a couple of weeks at her unit before her annual holiday to Canberra.

I had also tried to have her Church assist in some way but — alas! — it was not to be. In fact I didn't even receive a reply. I was very courteous as you will see in an extract from the email I sent.

Dear C... and the people of St ...,

"...S... has been involved with St ... for over 50 years and has attended services twice weekly plus functions and study groups. The amount of time, effort, money and support S... has put into the church is significant in anyone's eyes.

It would be very sad if S... felt the church was not there for her in her ultimate time of need."

In the time since the diagnosis, Mum has had no help whatsoever from the church or fellow parishioners. Her whole life is revolved around the parish, yet no-one rings or pops in for a visit or includes her in many of the activities.

I have been really astounded at the lack of compassion her Christian friends have shown. It was also a surprise to be told by an assessment nurse that it is a story she hears often. You'd think they would at least put on the pretence of caring.

Knowing I would be taking Mum to church had me a tad nervous. I grew up there, was baptised and did communion but hadn't been back, except for a couple of funerals, for years.

On the whole it went pretty well. I decided to sit most of the time, even when everyone else stood or prayed or sang.

There were two amusing situations.

Halfway through the service the priest and his helpers started walking down the aisle toward the back of the church. (I thought we were going to get out early.) Then the congregation stood up and turned toward the back and the priest read Bible passages, while walking back up the aisle. I remained seated. But the words he spoke "I am not the messiah" had me having to control myself to not burst out laughing. All I could think of was Monty Python — "He's not the Messiah — he's a very naughty boy!" It took great effort to erase this from my mind.

A little further on in the service there is a 'love in'. People mingle and shake each other's hands saying "Peace be with you." A couple of people came over to me (I was standing by this stage after a gentle nudge from Mum), shook my hand so I smiled back but said nothing. One of Mum's friends came into the pew in front, turned to me, took my hands and said, smiling, "Peace be with you ... even if you don't want it." I burst out laughing this time. So did my Mum and everyone around us.

It made my day!

Footnote: Further to Charles Cornwall's article *Our Credulous World*, this week my Mum is being placed into a Nursing Home. The room is 12A!

The philosophy of Atheism represents a concept of life without any metaphysical Beyond or Divine Regulator. It is the concept of an actual, real world with its liberating, expanding and beautifying possibilities, as against an unreal world, which, with its spirits, oracles, and mean contentment has kept humanity in helpless degradation.

— *Emma Goldman 1869 – 1940*

How God and Bambi Made Me Gay ... and Atheist!



by Alexander Wallace

Well, it took a series of contradictions that made no sense. First, I was raised from infancy, a hard-core, right-wing, anti-Semitic, anti-papist, Southern Fundamentalist Baptist — a good Christian boy who bought it all — in the Jewish Bronx, during World War II. I was also raised a Roosevelt-New-Deal-Union-hating, Liberal-loathing, McCarthy-loving crypto-fascist-conservative — in the Jewish Bronx, during World War II. And although my family was publicly pacifists and took Holocaust victims into our home, we had swastikas painted on our door, during the war, by our *Jewish* neighbors — so don't tell me religious bigotry is the province of only one cult.

And, despite the fact that my father sucked-up to a long series of good Christian bosses, he got nowhere and often was fired. We lived in a Bronx tenement-slum and received none of 'God's bounty' for all our prayers and piety. But we had The Lord Jesus, who was king; a chance at the great restricted country-club in the sky called Heaven, and we had The King James Version of the Bible — translated at the command of a Scottish ancestor who was a faggot to the core — James I of England and VI of Scotland. Of course, we didn't know of Good Queen James then — 'they' only let the sheep know so much and even the church leadership was in denial about Jimmy.

So I persisted in my beliefs and devotion. By the time I should have known better, I could recite from memory entire chapters of the Bible, which we read and discussed every night after dinner. I could solve any theological problem put to me by quoting any number of verses from any number of chapters from anywhere in the New or Old Testaments. I taught a mean Sunday school myself, and I was well on my way to the seminary and a lifetime of lying to and herding of sheep.

One little problem.

Good little Christer that I was, I was also absolutely boy-crazy! A man-loving homosexual who knew men were for me, from Day One. My parents were (secretly) appalled and often horrible about it. Still, they gave me

my first Merman, Garland, Dietrich and Noel Coward albums — looked the other way when I drew all-nude crucifixion scenes in my Sunday school books and ran off to see Broadway musicals whenever I had the chance.

Of course, I cannot give my parents all the credit or the blame. I did most of the hard, on-the-ground or in-the-bed basic training myself. And I was pretty secretive about it — fairly easy in The Big City — and I said secretive, not closeted. There is a difference.

I had my first affair — very secretly — at 14, with a famous stage and film actor who was 29 at the time and on the cover of *LIFE* magazine. Well, I was bigger than he was — and taller. Now that I think of it, though, he wasn't really the first. Actually, *Bambi* came first. Yes, Walt Disney's darling little boy-deer! Oh, those big, innocent eyes! Those big, floppy ears! (Big floppy ears on a man are so.... utilitarian!) Those long, long legs! *Bambi's* delicious little bubble-butt! Oh, yes! I really *wanted* *Bambi*!

Then, along came Bob S., my mother's best friend's son. I adored Bobby S.! I lusted after Bobby S.! He really was very *Bambi*-like — big eyes, big ears, long legs, bubble-butt. I knew I wanted to make passionate love to Bobby S. — and he, me — even if neither of us had any idea of how that was actually done, as we were only four years old at the time. But I was sure I wanted to make love to boys. It was the one thing I was sure of in life, even then.

But, can you imagine? Born Again — boy-crazy — and on my way to a Southern Baptist seminary? Have I mentioned Judeo-Christer homophobia? "God Hates Faggots!" is a pretty terrifying message, especially hurled at a questioning kid. And it's not just shouted by right-wing, nut-case fundamentalists. I heard it from everyone I knew — kids in school, teachers, principals, other kid's parents — in the Jewish Bronx, during and after The War — and most often from my own parents.

Well, when not running from cute, faggot-loathing, Yahweh and Jesus-loving street toughs I'd have loved to make love with — and when free of my good Christian Father railing against Sodom and Gomorrah — I realized that something was wrong, terribly wrong, with religion. My loins were sending one message and that other sex-organ, the brain, was beginning to send yet another signal. Very confusing.

Then, I encountered history — Accurate History. As we believed the Bible was a divinely ordained and infallible record of biblical times, people, events, prophecies, and revelations, it was inevitable for a studious type like me

(Continued on page 21)

(Continued from page 20)

to seek confirmation — proof — outside The Bible, much the way ‘Biblical Archaeologists’ and ‘Biblical Scholar-Scientists’ were doing. One had to find the stones-and-bones that were surely there and that would prove scripture to be Accurate History and thus, *The Truth*.

In such pursuit of “Truth,” one had to confront not only the historical Jews and Crypto-Christians, but the historical Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. And where, actually, were Ararat, Eden, Ur, and Ephesus? And when actually did Bethlehem and ‘Nazareth’ actually appear on a map? Why did the Romans allow the conquered Jews to build a new temple on the massive platform — the highest point in *Yeru Shalem* — that Herod Magnus had provided as a base for the camp-site for the Roman Legion stationed in Palestine?

And, being a-boy-and-man-loving boy and man, who could be surprised that I’d prefer the slim, immaculate, young Pharaoh, in his little loin-cloth, purple eye-shadow and all that gold to the insufferable Semites in their scruffy *schmattahs*? Who wouldn’t prefer beautiful, nude, Greek boys wrestling and the manly Romans in their magnificent *togae* to the martyrdom-mad Christers, wrapped in mangy rags and set afire?

Seriously, Accurate History — written by professional, ethical Historians and not “The Biblical Version” and certainly not the myth-based, Hollywood epic, post-Gibbon, Judeo-Christian propaganda accepted as “The Truth” by those too lazy to get real — appealed to the incipient rationalist in me, I had to get to the bottom of the totally irrational homophobia endemic in Judeo-Christian theology, tradition, and practice. For, if Mother Nature had created only 10% of us gay, where was the threat to the other 90% of the population? Why were Believers so desperately fearful of what may have been simply evolution’s — or deity’s — attempt to curb over-population?

Well, in my pursuit of Accurate History (and it is really easy to find) I learned that despite massive, unparalleled archaeological efforts in “The Holy Land,” the Old Testament has yet to be proven. Much of it has been *dis*-proven and the New Testament is a complete fiction and entirely a fraud. No room for details here, the facts are lock-tight. The dominant, 2000-year-old cultural and political paradigm — Established Christianity — is a fraud constructed on a lie. There was no ‘Jesus,’ who would have been *Yehu-Shuvah* if he did exist. There is absolutely no evidence — no stones or bones — *for*, and abundant, conclusive evidence *against* the New testament. Christianity, an anti-democratic construct, is simply a tyranny like any other. Brainwashing,

discovered by shamans and perfected by Christians (and other priesthoods) is so effective, it was adopted as basic indoctrination procedure by Fascists, Nazis, and Communists, alike.

Homophobia? Just one of the scare tactics — like racism, gynophobia, anti-Semitism and agoraphobia: fear of democracy. (The ‘Kingdom of God’ will not be a parliamentary monarchy but a tyrannical theocracy. Don’t ask: “How would Jesus vote?” Kings don’t vote; they command.) Monotheists must have enemies — devils — to fear and hate.

So, with the Establishment revealed as a hoax by Accurate History (and common sense), what of the theology — all that’s left? If you really want to ‘get’s believer, forget the trappings and wrappings, the myths, the miracles, the god-men: go for the jugular, the theology. Original Sin? Redemption as a prelude to Salvation? Requiring an unasked-for sacrifice of a mythical Messiah? The Immortal Soul? A presumed universal desire for Heaven and Eternal Life?

These are hypotheses, tenets, mere postulations — not statements of fact or even Revealed Truths and are unprovable by any criteria. And you cannot have the latter tenets without the first or disregard any as personally distasteful or the entire ponzi scheme collapses. Once you start to question the theology, the entire construction is revealed as faulted plaster-of-Paris and it crumbles.

So you see, ‘God,’ Walt Disney, and Bambi made me gay and Atheist. Judeo-Christian homophobia turned me to Accurate History and a rejection of the vicious nonsense called religion. My on-going readings of Accurate History, coupled with a deep interest in the art, literature, social customs, and culture of The Greco-Roman World — bolstered by new revelations in history and new discoveries by archaeology — continue to reveal all religion as bogus, the treacherous construct of power-mad men incapable of making rational decisions about their constituents or themselves. Also revealed to me is a broader, richer, more varied, more creative and more ‘spiritual’ world canvas than any narrow superstition can offer. I’ve also learned that Nature, Biology or Evolution — not some irrational deity — have created me who I am, and Nature is perfectly happy with how I turned out. Although life’s been no bed of roses, I am perfectly happy the way I turned out.

I am not religious because I am not desperate — or greedy. I can not believe because I prefer to know; and there is a difference. What I do *not* know is simply to be

(Continued on page 22)

(Continued from page 21)

learned. If I die before I learn all there is to know, I have not failed to succeed. Someone is bound to pick up where I leave off.

And in the meantime, I have my Sundays off — and my mind is free.

Alexander Wallace is a lay expert on Hadrian and the early Christian period. His articles and reviews on archaeology, contemporary life-style issues, theatre and restaurant reviews have appeared in many gay and straight venues. He currently resides in Los Angeles where he is completing a book-length treatment of this article.

*Reprinted with permission.
From AMERICAN ATHEIST October 2008.
www.americanatheist.org*

Pope Prattle

Pope Benedict was reported as saying that saving the world from homosexual behaviour was as important as saving the world's rainforests. He condemned gay acts as against God's will.

Catholic clergy in Tasmania could breach state hate-speech laws if they repeat comments allegedly made by the Pope. Tasmania's Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Sarah Bolt, yesterday warned that any statement that incited hatred or ridicule of a particular group of people could breach the state's laws.

Churchgoers who are gay or support gay rights have been urged to stage a silent protest by wearing pink triangles when they attend Christmas services. Wearing pink triangles was a reminder that the Nazis had forced homosexuals to wear them in extermination camps.

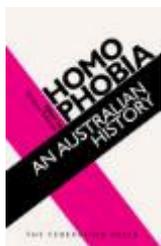
Australian Greens Senator Bob Brown said the Pope's tirade against homosexuals was outrageous. "Homosexuality is a necessary niche of nature's grand diversity, and the Pope should honour it rather than imply disdain for the Creator. The Pope should have used his Christmas message to speak out against the Catholic Church's insistence on celibacy before marriage and its ban on birth control measures, including condoms." Enforced celibacy was cooked up against the order of nature, causes much unnecessary heartache, and is something the Pope can fix. Why not celebrate Christmas with a papal decree ending enforced celibacy instead of playing Scrooge to millions of happy homosexuals? Senator Brown said.

The Vatican refuses to join a United Nations appeal for the universal decriminalisation of homosexuality launched on 18 December by 66 countries. More than 80 countries have laws against homosexuality, including nine in which it is punishable by death.

Letters to the Editor Sydney Morning Herald 27 December 08

I wonder if the Government, the Opposition and community leaders will publicly condemn the Pope's Christmas comments that homosexuality is a threat to the survival of human race as they did Sheik Hilaly's comparison of unveiled women to uncovered meat?

**Paul Sadler
Newtown**



Homophobia: An Australian History

Edited by Shirleene Robinson

Publisher : Federation Press RRP \$39.95

Homophobia is a prejudice with effects that extend far beyond the gay and lesbian community. While its physical, emotional and social effects have been charted to some extent, the development of homophobia in Australia has yet to be fully explored.

Homophobia: An Australian History is the first book to consider homophobia in a distinctively Australian context. In this collection, thirteen well-known scholars examine the embedded homophobic attitudes that Australian gay and lesbian activists have fought to change. The book traces the evolution of homophobia, from its expression in Australia's past as a colonial settler society, through to manifestations in present day society.

The compilation of this text is timely, given the 2007 release of the Same Sex: Same Entitlements report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. The release of this report, which focused on institutionalised and legal homophobia, has raised public awareness of these issues and sparked broader debates about homosexual rights.

IN THE PAPERS

Herald Sun (Melbourne), Thursday 25 December 2008

Nativity scenes help communities

Congratulations to all councils that have approved and installed nativity scenes in their communities.

In the holiday season, the real meaning of Christmas is often lost. The message that is often put out is a materialistic point of view.

I believe Christmas is a representation of the love we feel for mankind. The birth of Christ and the renewal of our belief in Christianity is felt by all at this time of year.

Nativity scenes send out the right message to the community of what Christmas truly means.

Senator Helen Polley
Launceston Tasmania.

Dear Senator Polley,

Yesterday I saw in the *Herald Sun* (Melbourne) your letter about nativity scenes and “what Christmas truly means”. The letter may, of course, have been published elsewhere as well.

I have not read glib, pompous, triumphalist tosh like this for quite a while, perhaps not since the 1950s!

Now I have heard a few well-worn jokes from time to time about Tasmanians being isolated and out of touch with the big modern world outside the Apple Isle, but you are a Federal Senator, so you have been to Canberra at least and know that this is 2008, not 1958 — or even 1908!

For example, “The birth of Christ and the renewal of our belief in Christianity is felt by all at this time of year.” *All!* I find it hard to believe that even you are unaware that there are people on this planet who are not Christians. If you *are* aware of non-Christians, then the sentence is windy bluster or crass wishful thinking, depending on how it is interpreted.

And who decides what precisely is the *real* “real meaning” of Christmas? God, you, the Pope, the Imam of Jerusalem, or the Flying Spaghetti Monster?

After all, during the 1650s, when the Puritans briefly ruled the roost in England, most celebrations of Christmas were banned by law and parliament deliberately met on Christmas Day. Was this the “real meaning” of Christmas? Well, many Puritans regarded the festival as “Popish”, pagan, idolatrous and liable to encourage boozing and philandering. They had a point: Christmas is, after all, a Christian rebadging and modification of much older European festivals such as Saturnalia and Yule.

And, come to think of it, the Coptic and Orthodox churches do not even celebrate Christmas on 25 December, as they still use the Julian Calendar.

So are there different “real” meanings of Christmas in a number of parallel universes?

If churches, chapels and cathedrals want to put up nativity scenes on their properties with their money, it is clearly their right to do. It is quite another matter when governments or local authorities use rates and taxes (from all members of the community) to put up Christian nativity scenes (or other displays of religious propaganda). This amounts to the none-too-subtle advertising of Christianity to, or imposing it on, non-Christians. In my ethical scheme

(Continued on page 24)

(Continued from page 23)

of things, Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems, Jews and the non-religious have rights too, and these should include not having to be humiliated by Christian imposition. If freedom of conscience is not just empty rhetoric, it implies freedom to do various things *and* freedom *from* religious tests and compulsion.

If you reckon that non-Christians should be second-class or third-class citizens in Australia, then say so frankly.

I mention this as mainstream Christianity has a long and very grubby history of publicly marginalising and humiliating “heretics” and unbelievers, such as Quakers, Unitarians and, particularly, Jews.

You also mentioned that the modern Christmas message is often “a materialistic point of view”. If you are referring to Christmas as a festival of spending with a message of “Shop, shop, till you drop”, then I am inclined to agree with you. I dislike the commercial “message” of Christmas most of all, but I am also aware that, over the centuries, many Christian churches have shown almost miraculous ability to combine the service of Jehovah with the worship of Mammon and the acquisition of vast corporate wealth and privilege.

I have an atheist friend who, as an adolescent, was interned in two Nazi concentration camps. (Her father died in Auschwitz and her mother in Stutthof.) She remembers December 1944 and the S.S. guards of an evening lustily singing carols. Was this the true “Aryan” spirit of Christmas?

No, Senator, council-funded nativity scenes are not the “right message”: they hark back to the old, nasty, mediaeval message of religious triumphalism and intimidation.

Yours sincerely,
Nigel Sinnott

Vatican newspaper slams ‘the pill’

The contraceptive pill is polluting the environment and is in part responsible for male infertility, a report in the Vatican newspaper L’Osservatore Romano said on Saturday.

The pill “has for some years had devastating effects on the environment by releasing tonnes of hormones into nature” through female urine, said Pedro Jose Maria Simon Castellvi, president of the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, in the report.

“We have sufficient evidence to state that a non-negligible cause of male infertility in the West is the environmental pollution caused by the pill,” he said, without elaborating further. “We are faced with a clear anti-environmental effect which demands more explanation on the part of the manufacturers,” added Castellvi.

The article was promptly dismissed by several organisations.

“Once metabolised, the hormones contained in oral contraceptives no longer have any of the characteristic effects of feminine hormones,” said Gianbenedetto Melis, vice-president of a contraceptive research association, quoted by the ANSA news agency.

The hormones contained in the pill such as oestrogen “are present everywhere... in plastic, in disinfectants, in meat that we eat,” added Flavia Franconi, of the Society of Italian Pharmacology.

Pope Benedict XVI in October reaffirmed the Roman Catholic Church’s condemnation of artificial birth control. Contraception “means negating the intimate truth of conjugal love, with which the divine gift (of life) is communicated,” wrote on the 40th anniversary of a papal encyclical on the topic.

An encyclical is a letter usually treating some aspect of Catholic doctrine and issued occasionally by the pope. The landmark document, whose title in English is “On the Regulation of Birth”, was published at a time when the development of the pill was giving new sexual freedom to women across the world.

Millions of Catholics distanced themselves from Rome as a result.

That Debate: a retrospective on the reverend contestant.

by John Dillon (AFA Member)

I read with interest the article in November-December issue of THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST about a debate at the University of Technology to do with Christianity versus atheism. All credit to our advocate, Alan Conradi.

Alan's opponent, the speaker in support of Christianity, was one Michael Paget, an Anglican minister.

Back in 2006 I (an avowed atheist) accepted a letter-box-drop invitation to attend a "Why God?" discussion cum social gathering organised by local Anglican churches. The meeting was held in the home of a parishioner — and I was the only non-parishioner present!

The key speaker was none other than Michael Paget, who was then still a student at Moore Theological College.

My body language disagreement with what Michael was going on with was so obvious that he approached me at tea and cakes time to ask what the problem was.

The gathering was made up predominantly of elderly parishioners, some of whom had already made impassioned, and equally fanciful, declarations as to how God had showered his blessings on them.

In those circumstances I didn't want to cause an embarrassing ding-dong row, so I confined my guarded response to (1) my contention that Jesus was arguably never an historical figure and (2) mention of my having had numerous religion-questioning letters published in the local paper.

Michael expressed great interest in both matters and invited me to go into more detail by way of correspondence. I duly obliged.

Firstly, I challenged Michael's inordinate emphasis on the need for *faith*, a definition of which, I asserted, was: Faith is that which is necessary to sustain belief in the absence of evidence.

I reminded him that neither by science nor by reason could the existence of God be proved. Therefore, it followed that the Bible couldn't be guaranteed to be "the word of God" and, in any case, it was significantly anonymous and often incomprehensible and contradictory.

Other factors I referred to were doubts raised about the Old Testament by virtue of the first 1,500 years or so of Jewish records being largely fiction; the untold number of scribes, theologians and translators etc who had had a hand in compiling biblical manuscripts; the Christian themes and beliefs pre-dated by Ancient Egyptian mythology; the incorrect apparent face value interpretation of critical parts of the New Testament, and its unacceptable inconsistencies. And so on.

I listed half a dozen reference books, and included copies of several illuminating and challenging essays by non-religious authors. Last but, I trust, not least I sent copies of some ten of my own pagan contributions to the local paper.

Michael's response to all this? Nil.

With the reserve forces available to him at Moore College I'd have thought there might have been some attempt to refute my observations and otherwise to put me in my place!

So, it would seem from Michael's participation in the debate that those questions I raised are of no account. Faith is certainly a remarkable resource. But what of intellectual integrity?

Character is much easier kept than recovered. — *Thomas Paine*

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Tuesday January 20th 2009, 6pm
Conference Room
Old Canberra House, Lennox Crossing ANU

THE NEW CRUSADE? MILITANT SECULARISM, STRIDENT ATHEISM AND SOCIAL HARMONY IN AUSTRALIA

Enquiries: Email Freilich.Foundation@anu.edu.au
Phone: (02) 6125 5527

THE FREILICH FOUNDATION PRESENTS:



ANU PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES 2009

THE NEW CRUSADE? MILITANT SECULARISM, STRIDENT ATHEISM & SOCIAL HARMONY IN AUSTRALIA

Tom Frame

Director of St Mark's National Theological Centre,
Professor of Theology, Charles Sturt University



Tuesday 20 January 2009, 6pm
Conference Room, Old Canberra House, Lennox Crossing ANU

This lecture is free and open to the public.
Enquiries E: Freilich.Foundation@anu.edu.au T: 02 6125 5527

In this lecture Professor Tom Frame will examine militant secularism and strident atheism as emerging features of post-9/11 Western popular culture. He asks whether these forces are a response to religiously-inspired terrorism, the last gasp of modernist philosophy or a renewed attempt to drive religion from the public square. He will argue that the 'New Atheism' championed by Professor Richard Dawkins will revive the worst elements of 'Social Darwinism', perpetuate economic, educational, social and spiritual inequalities, and foster intolerance and close-mindedness. Professor Frame will contend that the relegation of religious considerations to the fringes of social policy and political discourse will damage Australia's democratic institutions and impoverish community life.

The Right Reverend Professor Tom Frame was ordained in 1993, he has held parish appointments in Australia and England. He has been Bishop to the Australian Defence Force (2001–2007), Patron of the Armed Forces Federation of Australia (2002–2006), a member of the Council of the Australian War Memorial (2004–2007) and judged the inaugural Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History (2006–2007). Professor Frame is the author or editor of 24 books including *Church and State; Australia's Imaginary Wall* (2006), and *Anglicans in Australia* (2007). In 2009 he will release a new book entitled *Losing My Religion: Unbelief in Australia* (November).

This public lecture will be held as part of the Freilich Foundation Summer School in Bigotry and Tolerance being held in January 2009 on the theme of Religion and Bigotry. For more information visit www.anu.edu.au/hrc/freilich

To join the ANU Public Lectures mailing list and to listen to selected podcasts, visit www.anu.edu.au/publiclectures
The views expressed in this lecture are those of the presenter and do not necessarily represent the views of The Australian National University. CRICOS# 00120C

ANU COLLEGE OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

MAC0809016

New AFA Forums Active

We are proud to announce the new *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc Forum* will be ready for action on 8 January 2009.

The Forum will be accessible to the public but registration will be required to post and use calendar and search functions or view members. In an effort to reduce spam, abuse and trolling there are three verification methods. Human verification (words from a random picture), email verification (you must click a link in an email) and first post moderation.

While this may sound intimidating it will help keep the spammers and loonies out.

Of special interest to AFA members is the Private Members Forum visible only to authorised members. Access to this forum will be by PM (Private Message) to AFA Admin once registration is complete.

We hope you enjoy the new format and look forward to seeing some old faces there.

We remind AFA members that when posting in the public forums they will be representing Atheism in Australia. There is no censorship and we trust all representative members follow basic polite rules of engagement.

Come to the private forum to vent and relax.

Please visit www.atheistfoundation.org.au/forums

Reason's Greetings

AFA Admin

ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC FORUM

www.atheistfoundation.org.au/forums

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANK YOU

to
*Protium and partner
Fiery
Sean the Blogonaut*

**for your commitment, enthusiasm and
damned hard work with the new and old Forums.**

ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

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

SURNAME _____ (BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE)

GIVEN NAMES (or initials) _____ (Ms/Mrs/Mr/Dr/Prof) _____

ADDRESS _____

State _____ **Postcode** _____

Email _____ **Phone** _____

Occupation (optional) _____

FULL MEMBERSHIP (per annum)

Single \$25-00

Double \$30-00

Student \$15-00

\$ _____

5 YEARS FULL MEMBERSHIP

Single \$105-00

Double \$135-00

\$ _____

Would you prefer to receive your Magazine by email (PDF file)

YES _____ **NO** _____

LAMINATED MEMBERSHIP CERTIFICATE

\$5-00

\$ _____

DONATION \$ _____ **TOTAL PAYMENT** \$ _____

SIGNATURE _____

NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO PURCHASE THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST MAGAZINE

6 issues\$30-00pa ...\$ _____

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

ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC or by
Ms Lee Holmes (Treasurer)
Private Mail Bag 6
MAITLAND S.A. 5573

DIRECT DEBIT
Commonwealth Bank
BSB 06 5503
Acc Number 10120389

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