

# The Australian Atheist

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## ATHEISM:

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



**Atheist Foundation  
of Australia Inc** Established  
1970

Private Mail Bag 6  
Maitland SA 5573 Australia

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

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## EDITORS

The Australian Atheist - Lee Holmes

Website - Lee Holmes

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## PROOF READER

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## CHIEF TECHNICAL SUPERVISOR

Grant Ettrick

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Digital Print Centre  
18 Graves St  
KADINA SA 5554  
Ph: 08 8821 1781  
Fax: 08 8821 1166  
copyk@bigpond.net.au

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# ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

EST. 1970

## PHILOSOPHY

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

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

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

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

## AIMS

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

To safeguard the rights of all non-religious people.

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

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

To promote atheism.

# AndrewsJakeman

CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS  
BUSINESS ADVISORS & MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

Level 5/111 Crown Street  
Wollongong NSW 2500

Telephone: 61 2 4226 1000  
Facsimile: 61 2 4228 0907

ATHEISTS PROVIDING  
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management needs.

# OPINION

Creationists love bananas. In fact they absolutely adore bananas. Bananas are probably their best proof for the existence of God. God created the universe and everything in it for the convenience of humans and the banana proves it. Consider the following. Bananas are slightly curved to fit the hand perfectly. They have 3 grooves on the outer surface, to match the 3 fingers on one side and 2 grooves on the inner side to match a finger and thumb when you grasp it. The colour tells you when it is ready. Green – too soon, black – too late, yellow – just right. There is a tab at the top so that it's easy to open. It has biodegradable, non-slip packaging, is shaped to fit the mouth and has a pointy top to guide it in, and so on. There is a video on You-Tube (<http://www.boreme.com/boreme/funny-2006/banana-god-p1.php>) that has two genuinely sincere gentlemen extolling the virtues of the banana as proof of God's existence. Richard Dawkins showed this video at one of his lectures, and comments that at the end of it you almost expect John Cleese to appear and say "And now for something completely different". I would be tempted to say "Well, OK, then what about the pineapple?", but there is a better answer, and Dawkins presents it in his lecture. He puts up a picture of a wild banana. If God created the banana and intended it for the enjoyment and convenience of humans then he did a lousy job. The wild banana is small, flat, and full of seeds, is best eaten black and has none of the beneficial features of the modern banana discussed above. Google wild banana and see for yourself. So who created the modern banana? We did, by selective breeding from the wild banana over many generations.

To discredit stories like that of the banana you need a Baloney Detection Kit (BDK). Of course the banana tale is just too easy, but sometimes you come across something that may seem at first sight a bit more plausible, and the BDK comes in handy. The BDK comes from Carl Sagan's book *The Demon Haunted World – Science as a Candle in the Dark*, and Public Relations Team member Dr. Richard Doyle has put it into the form of a PowerPoint presentation as a training aid for young scientists. He would probably not mind sending it to any AFA members who would like it. Here are some of the tools:

- Wherever possible there must be independent confirmation of the 'facts'.
- Arguments from authority carry little weight – 'authorities' have made mistakes in the past. They will do so again the future.
- Spin more than one hypothesis. If there's something to be explained, think of all the different ways in which it *could* be explained.
- *Non sequitur* – Latin for 'it doesn't follow' e.g., *Our nation will prevail because God is great.*
- *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc* – Latin for 'it happened after, so it was caused by' e.g., *Before women got the vote, there were no nuclear weapons.*
- Slippery slope e.g., *If we allow abortion in the first weeks of pregnancy, it will be impossible to prevent the killing of a full-term infant.*
- Confusion of correlation and causation e.g., *A survey shows that more college graduates are homosexual than those with lesser education; therefore education makes people gay.*
- Always ask whether the hypothesis can be, at least in principle, falsified. Propositions that are not testable, or not falsifiable, are not worth much.
- *Ad hominem* – Latin for 'to the man', attacking the arguer and not the argument e.g., *The Reverend Dr Smith is a known Biblical fundamentalist, so her objections to evolution need not be taken seriously.*
- Appeal to ignorance – the claim that whatever has not been proved false must be true, and vice versa e.g., *There is no compelling evidence that UFOs are not visiting the earth; therefore UFOs exist.*
- Special pleading, often to rescue a proposition in deep rhetorical trouble e.g., *How can a merciful God condemn future generations to unending torment because, against orders, one woman induced one man to eat an apple? Special plead: you don't understand the subtle Doctrine of Free Will.*
- Or: *How can there be an equally godlike father, Son and Holy Ghost in the same Person? Special plead: you don't understand the Divine Mystery of Trinity.*
- Straw man – caricaturing a position to make it easier to attack e.g., *Scientists suppose that living things simply fell together by chance* – a formulation that wilfully ignores the central Darwinian insight, that nature

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ratchets up by saving what works and discarding what doesn't.

- Argument from adverse consequences e.g., *A God meting out of punishment and reward must exist, because if he didn't, society would be much more lawless and dangerous – perhaps even ungovernable.*

If you go to the website of the Skeptics Society of the USA ([www.skeptic.com](http://www.skeptic.com)) you will also find a ten point list of BDK tools put together as a video by Michael Shermer. It's similar to the above but based around how to best deal with a new theory or outrageous claim.

So next time you are having a debate and are confronted with what appears to be rubbish, make use of the Baloney Detection Kit, and watch your opponents go bananas.

*Dennis*

## Letters to the Editor

Fellow atheists,

Some of the mail we receive is truly out of this world. In this case it is out of the USA! (No offence intended to our USA friends.) Sadly the letter was unsigned and there was no return address on the envelope. It was hand written with hand-drawn flowers at the beginning.

I certainly hope you get as much from the contents as I did !

Lee

**D**ear Ms Lee Holmes and The Atheist Foundation;

I found out that at the end of our lives God holds us up to an Ankh-Mirror, to see what we will do.

I met the illumined "Sons Made One", who travel with utilizing a different wave length of light than we ordinarily perceive.

Also, I knew they also have fully human bodies as John 4:1-4 tells us. Their "lite-bodies" were gorgeous. This seems to have to do with a math-algorithm program built into the universe, where-in following our (math) algorithm-branch path of Highest, Most Noble Self leads to "less breakdown on vibration" and this is the true meaning of "Soul redemption".

The Highest Path Self.

(Choices)

Praise be Unto God,

Who Loves,

and is telepathic

PS. There is radio-crystal in our pineal glands. Many people's may be atrophied or clogged with decrepit interference.

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I am a new member of the Atheist Foundation. I wish I had joined years ago. My main interest in atheism is the maintenance of a secular State.

I was fortunate to be brought up by disaffected Catholic parents who had been subjected to a fairly horrific primary school education during the depression years at the hands of nuns. My mother because she was left handed; my father because he was poorer than your average church mouse. There is no doubt their initial disaffection was based on bitterness at their treatment before their intellect took over.

My parents did insist that I go to Sunday school, and religious instruction of various denominations, but I was also encouraged and allowed to question what I was taught there. I have long been aware of how privileged I was.

The first point I would like to make is my great respect for those people who have been indoctrinated with religion from early childhood and yet have had the intellect and courage to throw off its shackles. It cannot be easy. I often wonder whether in different circumstances I would have been able to.

One of these people is Charles Cornwall. I would be interested to know more of his intellectual Journey from Baptist Minister to Atheist.

This brings me to my second point, prayer. I agreed with all of his [Charles Cornwall's] comments on prayer as presented, but he did deal with only one type of prayer and that is non-selfish prayer, that is prayer for others in suffering, prayers for world peace and similar; although admirably compassionate I agree it is obvious it does not work. Thankfully prayer for world domination by Muslim radicals is also useless.

However I believe selfish, self-oriented prayer needs to be considered separately.

I would like to diverge for a minute.

For some years I practised medical hypnotherapy. The basis of hypnosis is to achieve an "altered state of consciousness". Although this term as far as I know still defies exact definition in terms of brain function, it is still quite real to those who have witnessed, experienced it or used it. In a state of altered consciousness subjects are hyper-suggestible and open to post-hypnotic suggestion.

Religions have used induction of altered states of consciousness, some for millennia. The chanting of hymns, monotonous liturgy, swinging of smoking brass incense dispensers and the particular intonation of many priests can all be seen as induction devices. If you accept this it helps explain why otherwise intelligent people get hooked on what otherwise defies logic.

Back to self-oriented prayer: some of this will also be useless, for example praying for a growth spurt after your epiphyses have fused just isn't going to happen. But then there is aspirational prayer. "Dear god help me become a success in my business." "Dear god help me improve my golf handicap".

Or "Dear god make me a better Christian / Moslem /whatever." In this latter case it may even mean defending the faith by extreme means.

My point is that, in the same way as hypnotic therapy can help achieve a desired end by starting to deal with an aspiration and visualising the desired end point while in an altered state of consciousness, religious acolytes, probably without ever realising the process are using prayer successfully to achieve their aspirations.

### **Ronald Turpin**

I have just received and read the latest issue of *The Australian Atheist* with great joy. Please keep up the good work.

Being Danish — and proud of it — I especially wanted to put straight a few facts re about Niels Bohr on page 7.

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These rants, allegedly written by a “happy idiot” named Irving, calls him Neils in stead of Niels (his full name was Niels Henrik David Bohr) and proclaims him to be Lutheran *and* a believer.

Neither accusation is true. In Denmark you become a member of the national church “Folkekirken” at birth by default, and you stay a member (and pay church taxes) unless you actively resign from the church. This is why Bohr is listed in the church register where you can also witness his resignation:

“Udmeldt af Folkekirken den 16 April 1912” = Resigned from Folkekirken 16 April 1912.

I have read a biography about Bohr, where it is described how his father takes him to their local church, in order for him to see what it is about for himself, and he immediately concludes that “this doesn’t make sense to me” or words of a similar effect. (Can’t remember the exact source but will keep looking.)

The original church register document can be found here...

[http://www.steenwinther.com/data\\_kirkeboeger\\_019\\_2\\_027\\_K04-10-A.Tif](http://www.steenwinther.com/data_kirkeboeger_019_2_027_K04-10-A.Tif)

Best regards,  
**Steen Winther**

**H**i there,

I am an AFA member and lifelong atheist. I am a former public school teacher, now working full time as an organiser with the Australian Education Union, an organisation committed to free, universal and secular education.

I congratulate you on the latest THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST (Issue No. 16) — it is a ripper. As a Dawkins admirer, I’m thrilled about next year’s convention in Melbourne, hoping that I’m on any list that I need to be on, because if I can’t get in I will probably try to break in.

There is a great deal of convergence between my atheism and my passionate advocacy of public schools and a fair funding model that supports them (currently not in existence).

Recently I was struck by a profound incongruence surrounding choice. “Choice” has been the mantra of successive market-driven Western governments when determining education policy. “Choice” in education is a furphy: the well off are the only ones with a genuine choice of schools. The promotion of choice for the wealthy has led to the opening of thousands of faith-based schools and the closure of public schools. This leads to less “choice”, if anything, for parents who don’t want religious instruction for their children. More and more parents have lost the “choice” of sending their kids to the local public school, to which they could walk, and are forced to drive past the local private (often Catholic) school to the nearest public school some suburbs away. The nightmare wrought on the system by the promotion of private schooling is becoming more pronounced in the UK also, but Australia is unmatched in terms of government funding for the private education system. I am reminded of a bumper sticker: “At least the war on public education is going well.”

The irony is that it is the same “choice” advocates who tend to promote private and faith-based schooling, which seems to be the very antithesis of choice. To instruct your young child in religion affords them no choice whatsoever as to what they believe. It is this hypocrisy that I have tried to encapsulate in a short prose piece that came to me one morning. The pseudonym “Pa Kinnit” is a play on “Packin’it” as I believe that is what many parents are doing when they reject the public education system to cocoon their little darlings in the illusory warmth of a private school. Here and abroad, they are calling this phenomenon the “white flight” and policies that encourage this amount to state-sponsored social segregation.

**Glenn**

# Choice

by Pa Kinnit

**T**hank you to successive Australian governments for giving us so much choice.

Choice, choice, choice, choice, choice, choice, choice.

Choice.

No other country does it quite like we do.

Thank you for giving us the choice to drive our kids across town in a Lexus/Hummer/ TANK. (Please circle one.) Why would we send our kids to the local school when we can drive them in safety in our new tank? (It's got tinted windows so no one can see in.)

Choice.

Thanks for letting us choose to drive our tank to and from our secure house (with Gothic columns) behind a secure gate, behind a secure perimeter fence which protects all of the lovely residents of Heavenly Elms Estate from the outside world. The security cameras, round-the-clock-back-to-base-monitoring, guard patrols and dogs help too. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance, or so it says under the body corporate's logo. We've seen *A Current Affair*, you know. There are some nasty types out there.

Choice.

Thanks for allowing us to choose a school for our kids. How could that be fairer? All parents in Australia are in a position to make the same choice. Aren't they?

Thank you for allowing us to choose the children with whom our children mix. If our kids are going to spend forty hours a week with someone, to grow with someone, to learn from someone, to appreciate and understand someone, we want that someone to be as close to being our kids as possible.

Thanks for giving us the choice to eschew Darwin's evolutionary claptrap. We humans didn't come from monkeys. And we certainly didn't come from dinosaurs. How ridiculous! Science has caused a lot of unnecessary doubt. Apart from my new tank, my new phone, my new computer, my blackberry, my ipod, my sat nav, aeroplanes, immunisation, keyhole surgery, X-rays, radar and cyclone warnings, what has science ever done for me? (Actually, I wonder how scientists managed to get so many things right and yet get that 'evolution' stuff so incredibly wrong!)

And, lastly, thank you for giving us the choice to give our children the choice at age two to (a) believe in God or (b) believe in God. I'm sure they appreciate having that choice.

**D**ear Minister,

In the context particularly of your education responsibilities I refer you to a book, *The Purple Economy - Supernatural Charities, Tax and the State*, by Dr Max Wallace.

I hope, in fact, that you are already very familiar with this book, and are actively implementing measures to redress the unconscionable public funding of the religious interests cogently discussed by Dr Wallace.

The specious apologetics of the advocates of this largesse have held sway far too long, with — nationally tragic

consequences — notably for public education.

The democratic concept of separation of church and state has been, and is being, shamefully perverted by vested religious interests — in predominantly and increasingly secular Australia.

Yours sincerely,  
**John Dillon**  
NSW

*John is a member of the AFA. He has not received a reply from Julia Gillard the Minister for Education.*

# From the Inbox

I have a great deal of difficulty with associates in elucidating that I am not an atheist because to not believe in a God I would have to first believe that one exists to not believe in ... How do you guys handle this?

Ian

Greetings, Ian,

Thanks for your email.

This argument “to not believe in a God I would have to first believe that one exists to not believe in” is popular with religious folk because saying Atheists believe in something, makes us the same as them, and therefore we have no right to criticise.

The statement is correct. The fallacy for atheists lies in the use of the word, ‘believe’.

There are two usual uses of the word,

1. We say we ‘believe’ when there’s a probability of and some evidence for something. I can say, for example – ‘I believe Helen and Richard are going to Noumea,’ because I’ve heard a rumour and know they’ve been talking about it, but nothing’s been decided.

2. The way ‘belief’ is used in your statement gives it an entirely different meaning. We use it when we have zero evidence for something, and there is zero probability of it occurring in the natural world we inhabit, but we wish it were true. Children believe in fairies, Father Christmas, Superman and other impossible entities. While most of those beliefs are dropped along with childhood, an alarming number of adults continue to believe implicitly in the existence of gods, devils, life after death, ghosts and magic. Many people feel a need for a personal god or gods to give ‘meaning’ to their life. But as there has never been the slightest reasonable evidence to support the existence of any of the thousands of gods humans have worshipped, they have to have faith, and ‘believe’ in their god or gods.

For this reason the Atheist Foundation of Australia has deliberately avoided the use of the words ‘believe’ and ‘belief’ in their definition of atheism. We do not believe there are no gods. We simply state that we accept there is no reasonable scientific

evidence for the existence of such things. Our stance has the added advantage of putting the onus of proof on those who declare their belief in gods.

It follows, therefore, that even if adequate proof of gods were to arrive, we would still not believe in them, because we would then know they exist. A very important distinction.

I hope this helps. If I’ve missed the point, please email us again.

Best wishes,

Peter  
Public Relations Team

I understand how you feel about God and religion.

First of all, God is not religious. His desire is to have a relationship with everyone through His Son, Jesus.

I say I understand because at one time I was a rock musician, alcoholic (that would have killed me years ago if not for God’s intervention), and also into drugs.

Jesus has delivered me from all of those problems and has given me a much better life.

The most wonderful thing to me is to know Jesus and to get to know him more and more as time goes on.

I challenge you to challenge God about His existence. Ask Him to do something for you and see if He answers.

The God I serve is the Creator of all things and is Love.

Benn, Evangelist, Bible Teacher, Counselor

Hello Benn,

My name is Nigel and I will reply to your comments about God, Jesus and love.

Because you have raised several points, and for reasons of time and space, my answers will need to be fairly brief. In theory, at any rate, a reply to everything you have written could be very lengthy indeed.

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“*God is not religious*”. I think I can understand this by analogy with the idea that a King or Queen is not a subject in his or her own domain. On the other hand, God presumably believes in God, but so of course does the Devil (if the Devil exists). And, in a related area, plenty of people have pointed out that Jesus was not a Christian.

*God’s desire is to have a relationship with everyone through his son, Jesus.* — H’mmm! How can a non-corporeal entity have a son (or a daughter) except in a metaphorical sense? Offspring are a feature of living organisms in the physical realm.

By God you are referring to the Abrahamic Yahweh or Jehovah, also called God (with a capital G) and Allah. To Jews, the idea that God has a son borders on blasphemy (“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our god is One”); and Muslims, who regard Jesus as a major prophet, specifically deny that Jesus was divine. Some writers and researchers regard Jesus of the New Testament as mythical, or a composite character.

There is something strange about the notion that an (allegedly) omnipotent being like Yahweh “*desires to have a relationship*”. An omnipotent being is almost by definition complete and self-sustained: any benevolent “desires” or feelings of anger or jealousy amount to a denial of omnipotence! Desires for relationships are essentially a feature or function of living, corporeal beings, especially social ones that look for “connectedness” to feel secure.

I do not think I should comment on your being a rock musician because I dislike rock music on aesthetic, not ethical grounds. I am, however, sorry that you once had alcohol and drug problems but am pleased that they have ended. You are not the first person to claim that Christianity has delivered you from alcohol and drugs, but may I point out that Buddhism discourages alcohol and often tries to help people get off drugs, and Islam specifically bans alcohol. Mormonism would ask you to give up drugs, alcohol, tea and coffee; and Jainism would strongly encourage you to become a strict vegetarian. Several religions disapprove of gambling (and so do I). However, you do not need to be religious to be a teetotaler, a vegetarian, or to avoid addictive drugs. Buddhism requires high ethical standards and encourages devotees to question what they are told, but it does not require belief in a deity.

If God or Jesus or both have freed you from substance addictions, why have they not delivered other people from cot deaths, early-onset cancer, lethal infections,

horrible degenerative diseases, congenital abnormalities and debilitating forms of mental illness? The existence of widespread and apparently needless suffering is something that makes a merciful, all-kind deity seem ludicrous, and sophistry about “free will” is invariably a flimsy “fudge”.

Why should I “challenge” Yahweh about his existence and not Ahura-Mazda, Brahma, Shiva, Thor, Mars or Ceres? If an omnipotent deity really existed, religious apologists would not need to trot out the shabby two-card trick of insisting on the need for “faith”.

Also, I do not like the sound of Yahweh as expounded by the Abrahamic religions: this god sounds too much like a Middle Eastern Bronze Age absolute monarch in the sky, cobbled up to add weight to the earthly authority of Bronze Age warlords and kings who could claim to be his appointed representatives on earth. A lot of Christianity seems to be a device by the elect few to control women, children and the have-nots.

You are entitled to believe that your God *is the creator of all things and is Love*. But I see no reason to believe in an (apparently) uncreated creator — or, for that matter, in creation; and love, as far as I can see, is an emotion that is generated by living, mortal bodies and minds. Furthermore, the religious notion of hell does not really square with idealised abstractions about love. I have certainly met some fine religious people over the years, but I have also come across people, just as devout in their way, who were either control freaks running on a large charge of hate, or else struck me as ethically and emotionally stunted. By the same token, I have also met atheists I liked and disliked, with many gradations in between.

I think I have written enough, and hope I have covered most of the points you mentioned.

With good wishes,

Nigel  
Public Relations Team

This is my last email to you.

As an evangelist it is my wonderful job to preach the Gospel. Jesus died for all, including you. You have the opportunity to have the most wonderful relationship with the Creator of all things.

You can certainly reject Jesus and that is your choice. It is also my duty to warn you if you do that you will spend an eternity in a horrible place called

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hell. So unnecessary since Jesus gives you the opportunity to spend eternity in heaven with Him.

I have done what God expects me to do and I am innocent of your blood.

God will have a record of our communication when you die and you will not be able to tell Him, "I didn't know". I have told you the truth.

Love in Christ,

Benn, Evangelist, Bible Teacher, Counselor

Dear Benn,

Well, you have now shown your true colours.

It is clear that, when you use the word *love*, it is almost the opposite from what other human beings mean by it.

And your comments on hell underline a long-standing

criticism of religions like Christianity, that their message often boils down to the bullying dictum: *Believe or else!*

No thank you. Give me liberty any day.

Yours sincerely,  
Nigel

ONLY JESUS CAN GIVE YOU TRUE LIBERTY.

H'MM! "What is truth?" said Pilate.

"True liberty" is a weasel term, because what some people need to feel (and *be*) free can be precisely the same as what other people need to avoid or be rid of (like excessive noise).

"Do not do unto others as you would have them do unto you: their tastes may be different."

Nigel

## Call for Atheist stories by atheist writers.

**A**s mentioned in THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST, Issue 14 (March-April 09), AFA member Linda asked for contributions for a book for atheists she hopes to edit.

The initial response was encouraging but there is not enough material.

So writers, this is your last chance. If this call to pens or keyboards goes unheeded the book is dead. It is now up to you.

Lee

**I** thought I'd just say here that the stories for the book, if it ever gets off the ground, don't just have to be atheist coming out stories; they can be anything at all atheist-based, or sceptically based.

Articles, opinions, short stories such as science fiction or speculative with a non-believer theme, poems, even song lyrics, anything goes, as long as it's about atheism or a non-supernatural world view.

If there's anyone out there, I would really like to include stories of "double" coming out, ...that is, those who are homosexual and atheist, as I hear so many harrowing stories from gay atheists and their conflicts with Christianity and being gay. I would like to support their stories in this book, again, if it ever gets going.

I am a writer myself and write under my pen name of L. A. Wilson.

Thank you!

Yours sincerely,

Linda — known as "Kid" on the AFA forum.

# HERETICAL HAPPENINGS

## KEEPING YOU IN THE KNOW

Greetings,

Preparations for the Melbourne Global Atheist Convention in March next year are in full swing. The list of intellectual and academic speakers is astounding and well beyond original expectations. There is more reading about them on the official web site but here are the names to whet your mental appetites: Richard Dawkins, Catherine Deveny, Phillip Adams, Taslima Nasrin, Peter Singer, PZ Meyers, Dan Barker, A.C. Grayling, Sue-Ann Post, Stuart Bechman, Kylie Sturgess, John Perkins, Tamas Pataki, Max Wallace, Robyn Williams, Russell Blackford and Ian Robinson.

We have notable people in the pipeline who may attend depending on whether they can successfully juggle other commitments to accommodate us. At head office, we have all our fingers and toes crossed for that to happen. But, even so, the line up of confirmed presenters has no precedent in Australia's history. The message is clear: if you wish to be a part of an historical occurrence, I implore that you do not miss this opportunity.

The benefits involved to be in the presence of and hear the renowned international voices of Atheism on offer are at least twofold. It will be spell binding for us mere mortals to sit in awe amidst the condensed thoughts of remarkable minds. And such an occasion carries with it a definitive message to political and religious leaders and followers that Atheism has come of age and will not sit quietly by and have religious precepts rule our lives, our communities, our country and the wider planet. This organised demonstration of reasonableness by reasonable people, whether that be the listening audience or the presenters speaking about the here and now, and not some culturally instilled fantasy, is the stuff only in the dreams of our forebears. We are indeed privileged.

The final paragraph on the Convention website succinctly condenses AFA sentiment.

"The bigger we can make this convention, the stronger the signal it will send to Australia's religious and political institutions that atheism and secularism are forces to be reckoned with. So start saving now, message all your friends with a link to this page, blog about it, twitter it – please, do whatever you can to help us spread the word and gather together the biggest contingent of atheists this country has ever seen!"

There has never been a better opportunity for making a difference to the political and social landscape than hoisting the name Atheism up where it belongs, by attending this Australian and globally important event

Making the Atheist Convention happen has taken the efforts of a small number of exceptional, enthusiastic and committed AFA people on the Convention Committee who really do deserve our thanks. They are, in alphabetical order: Jason Ball, Grant Ettrick, Dave Fregon, John Ganas, Mark Gilroy, Joel Kilgour, Lee Holmes, John Perkins, Andrew Rawlings, and Tanya Smith. We meet via the Skype audio computer program weekly, which is not without its own technical difficulties, sometimes more frequently and the e-mail traffic is continuous.

Of course, there are AFA members not mentioned who are also helping with Convention matters and whose assistance is invaluable. We thank them all, especially Chrys Stevenson, our expert in writing tantalising Media Releases as well as being a thinker and organiser in her own right and Richard Gill, owner of APM Graphics. Richard designed the logo for the AFA web site, winning the prize money for that competition. Simon Pierce who works for Richard is designing advertising material for the Convention as well as for the bus slogan campaign. Finally, thank you to Jake Stollery for designing The Rise of Atheism logo.

### **Stop Press:**

The Global Atheist Convention Tickets are now on sale at [www.atheistconvention.org.au](http://www.atheistconvention.org.au) There are a limited number of tickets and it would pay not to tarry. A new era for Atheism in Australia has begun.

Until we meet again,



# It Ain't Necessarily So

By Charles Cornwall

You've probably recognised the title of this article. I borrowed it from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Here's my favorite verse and the chorus:

*Now Jonah he lived in a whale,  
Now Jonah he lived in a whale,  
For he made his home in  
That fish's abdomen,  
Now Jonah he lived in a whale.*

*It ain't necessarily so,  
It ain't necessarily so,  
The things you're liable  
To read in the Bible,  
It ain't necessarily so.*

Too right it ain't. The Old Testament is simply packed full of truly mind-boggling stories, many even more fanciful than the one of Jonah's adventure in the belly of a whale. In any other context but the Bible no one today with a smidgeon of intelligence would believe these stories. Yet thousands of intelligent people do, and that's even more mind boggling than the stories themselves

The New Testament, too, has its share of highly implausible stories. There's the incredible one of a *virgin* who gave birth to a baby boy! When the boy grew up he did amazing things like walking on water and turning water into wine. Most amazing of all, he died and after three days came back to life and, even though he can't be seen, is still alive today – 2000 years later!

Years ago I had the misfortune to mix with people who actually believed these stories. They were very keen on evangelizing the heathen – those poor benighted souls who believed in false gods and outlandish myths. They would smile indulgently and patronisingly at the incredible beliefs of these poor misguided souls and claim they had a God-given responsibility to convert them to the one true God and his inspired word, the Bible. It never occurred to them that, for example, the story in the Bible of the Devil disguised as a serpent in the Garden of Eden was just as fanciful as that of the giant snake of Aboriginal Dreamtime stories. Yet the one they accepted by faith while dismissing the other as unbelievable.

When it comes to belief in the Bible as the word of God there are basically two types of Christians. There are those, such as I have just described, who take it literally (the fundamentalists). Then there are others

who, under the sheer weight of scientific evidence, accept evolution as a fact and agree that Adam and Eve never existed. But they continue to believe that in some way the Bible is still divinely inspired. They claim that the Garden of Eden story, the story of Jonah and the whale and the myriad of other fanciful tales are not meant to be taken literally but allegorically of some deeper spiritual truth.

If that is the case, we are confronted with an insurmountable problem. Which bits of the Bible are to be taken literally and which bits symbolically? The fact is there is no way of telling. There are no footnotes indicating which is which. Perhaps, when God was dictating his word and it came to the point where footnotes were necessary, it was the Sabbath and he simply overlooked telling his amanuenses to include them. After all, it is well known that the omnipotent God needs to rest on the Sabbath – the Bible tells us so!

Here is a question I would like to ask those Christians who take this second approach to the Bible: If Adam and Eve, Jonah and the whale, Jesus walking on water and Jesus turning water into wine are not meant to be taken literally, what about other similarly incredible stories like the virgin birth and the resurrection? Eliminate those on the grounds of consistency and the whole edifice of Christian dogma collapses in a heap of rubble – just like the walls of Jericho when, at God's command, the ram's horn trumpets were sounded!

Consider this: If an educated, intelligent person with no knowledge of Biblical content and Christian dogma read the Bible for the very first time, what would his or her reaction be? Well, I can't prove it but I have no doubt that he or she would assess it as being just as fantastical and absurd as all the other religions of the world with their particular incredible stories and unbelievable myths. How could the reader conclude otherwise?

But let us suppose this hypothetical person was fair minded and decided to give the Bible another chance, as it were. He or she would probably endeavour to find out some background to the Bible like who wrote it and when, how the various books were chosen and compiled, how it came to us in its present form and so forth. Providing he or she used scholarly sources of information on these subjects the facts discovered would include:

Many of the stories of the Bible were originally passed on verbally. In some cases it was hearsay upon hearsay

*(Continued on page 14)*

(Continued from page 13)

upon hearsay.

There are no *original* Scripture writings in existence today.

What we have are copies – none less than 100 years older than the originals.

These copies (of copies, of copies) were done laboriously by hand resulting in many scribal errors, omissions, additions and “improvements” (i.e. deliberate interpolations by copyists). Of the thousands of manuscripts in existence, no two agree in their entirety.

There are many other contemporary writings in the Hebraic and Christian traditions besides those eventually chosen to make up the O.T. and N.T. canons (lists of “authentic” books) as we have them today.

The selection of books from the numerous manuscripts (and even bits of manuscript!) to be included in the Hebrew (O.T.) canon was a process over many years. There is no scholarly consensus today as to when the O.T. canon was finally agreed to. Dates vary between 200 BCE and 200 CE.

The numerous N.T. manuscript errors and differences sometimes resulted in scholars having to “reconstruct” the original. Some manuscripts were in Hebrew, some Aramaic and some Greek. Translation led to more errors. [*Aramaic and Hebrew are supposition. The earliest known versions of N.T. texts are in Greek!*]

The N.T. canon was not agreed on until the Council of Carthage in 397CE. During the Reformation Luther was not happy with some of the selections. He downgraded Jude, James, Hebrews and Revelation to a place of secondary importance. The Roman Catholic Church did not confirm the N.T. canon until the Council of Trent in 1546.

The following two quotes (from opposite sides of the equation) will confirm what the above selection of facts demonstrates, namely, that the Bible, as a divinely inspired book in unified form (which many Christians believe) is patently false. The first quote is from Dr.

Leslie Weatherhead, an eminent biblical scholar (albeit of the liberal variety) and a prolific author:

We must always remember that the Bible is not one book, but a library of books written by a hundred fallible men over a period of a thousand years...The Bible is made up of myth, poetry, history, prophecy, biography, mystical writing, allegory, parable, drama – indeed, almost every kind of writing that exists except that of scientific textbook...the Bible is a library of almost every kind of literally form, written or edited by fallible men whose inspiration did not exclude their looking through coloured spectacles, or the limitations of the knowledge and outlook of the day in which they lived, or the party to which they belonged.

(*The Christian Agnostic* (1965) pp151ff.)

The second quote is from eminent biologist, atheist and prolific author, Dr. Richard Dawkins:

[T]he Bible is ... a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents, composed, revised, translated, distorted and “improved” by hundreds of anonymous authors, editors and copyists, unknown to us and mostly unknown to each other, spanning nine centuries.

(*The God Delusion* (2006) p 237.)

Let’s return to our hypothetical person who, having read the Bible for the first time, came to the inevitable conclusion that its stories were no more believable than the fantastical myths of other religions. Giving the Bible a second chance, as it were, he has now gone on to learn a bit about how it came into being. He has learnt about the long tortuous process covering many centuries, involving hundreds of people with their individual preconceptions and prejudices, working from thousands of manuscripts and scraps of manuscript, none of which agree and which have been copied and recopied over and over. Will this additional knowledge cause him to reconsider his original conclusion about the Bible’s lack of credibility? I think not. Rather, I think it will provide him with conclusive confirmation. I don’t think he would say, in the words of our title, “It ain’t necessarily so” It’s more likely he’d say, with utter conviction, “It definitely and emphatically ain’t so!”

**T**he song [It Ain’t Necessarily So] was banned by all radio stations across the US and UK shortly after its release. It did not actually question the existence of a god but queried the appropriateness of taking a literal interpretation of the bible, effectively an attack on Creation ‘Scientists’.

From **Atheism and Music**

by Anthony Pickham

<http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au/articles/atheism-and-music>

# THE RISE OF ATHEISM

Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre  
12-14 March, 2010.

Register now and be a part of the largest gathering of non-theists in Australia's history.



DAWKINS

TASLIMA

ADAMS

DEVENY

SINGER

BARKER

MYERS

Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Global Atheist Convention

Atheist Alliance International

## THE RISE OF ATHEISM

Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre  
12-14 March, 2010.



"This event heralds a new era of atheism in Australia. It is more than a convention – it is an historical event. It is a statement to the nation that non-theists are uniting and demanding the return of Australian secularism – in our government, our educational institutions and in our welfare systems. This is our line in the sand. Be there and make history!"

David Nicholls  
President

Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.

Be there – make history!

"Anyone who can make it to the Melbourne Global Atheist Convention but does not is missing the opportunity of a lifetime."  
Ed Buckner  
President  
American Atheists

"Make no mistake, atheists are in the vanguard of a world-changing movement and this Convention will give it a welcome helping hand."  
Terry Sanderson  
President  
National Secular Society UK

"I wish your convention every success - an important step towards the creation of a more rational and humane Australia."  
Roy W Brown  
IHEU Main Representative, UN Geneva  
Immediate Past-President  
International Humanists & Ethical Union

"Congratulations AFA and AAI. The Global Atheist Convention promises to be an outstanding event."  
Marshall Perron, former Chief Minister of the Northern Territory; architect of the NT Rights of the Terminally Ill Act

[www.atheistconvention.org.au](http://www.atheistconvention.org.au)

Global Atheist Convention

[www.atheistfoundation.org.au](http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au)



## Global Atheist Convention Information

### IMPORTANT

Members who wish to attend the Convention but are unable to book tickets via the Internet, please ring Head Office as soon as possible to arrange ticket bookings and payment.  
(08) 8835 2269

#### Gold Weekend Pass \$310.00 + \$9.00

Gold Weekend Pass provides access to the Friday night convention launch event (drinks and canapés provided) plus all presentation sessions on Saturday and Sunday, and lunch and refreshments (as per the Full Weekend Pass) plus reserved seating in the front rows of the Plenary sessions and a preferential convention registration line. The Gold Weekend Pass does not provide access to the Saturday Night Dinner.

#### Full Weekend Pass \$260.00 (full price) / \$210.00 (concession)

Full Weekend Pass provides access to the Friday night convention launch event (drinks and canapés provided) plus all presentation sessions on Saturday and Sunday, and lunch and refreshments. Preferential seating allocations will be made for Full Weekend Pass holders relative to Sunday-Only Pass holders. The Full Weekend Pass does not provide access to the Saturday Night Dinner.

Only people with a valid full-time student identification or concession card are entitled to purchase the Full Weekend Pass at the concession rate. Identification and entitlement to concession pricing must be demonstrated when you register at the convention, otherwise the difference between the concession rate and the full rate will be charged at that time.

#### Sunday-Only Pass \$150.00 (full price) / \$110.00 (concession)

Sunday-Only Pass provides access to all presentation sessions on Sunday, including the Richard Dawkins presentation, and lunch and refreshments. Preferential seating allocations will be made for Full Weekend Pass holders relative to Sunday-Only Pass holders.

#### Saturday Night Dinner Pass \$100.00

Saturday Night Dinner Pass provides an opportunity for you to meet other convention attendees in a casual setting. All convention speakers will be invited to attend the Saturday night dinner and we are planning a range of entertainment acts.

**Booking fees \$1.25 + 2.5% per ticket (maximum \$9.00 for Gold Weekend Pass)**

### Program

At this stage, we anticipate that the Global Atheist Convention will conclude at approximately 4pm Sunday 14 March 2010, however, the program will be finalised closer to the time of convention.

#### Friday Night

Catherine Deveny, Sue-Ann Post

#### Saturday

Phillip Adams, Taslima Nasrin, PZ Myers

#### Sunday

Peter Singer, Dan Barker, Richard Dawkins

#### Saturday Night Dinner Entertainment

Simon Taylor (Illusionist), Jamie Kilstein (Comedian)

# Media Release

## ***The Rise of Atheism* – Global Atheist Convention Melbourne – 12-14 March 2010**

**S**ending a strong message that atheism is gaining momentum as a political issue in Australia, thousands of non-believers will gather in Melbourne next March for a major international convention: *The Rise of Atheism*. The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre has been booked for the event which is set to become the largest gathering of non-theists in Australia's history.

President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia (AFA), David Nicholls, says that inquiries about the convention have exceeded all expectations and interest continues to grow as organisers confirm some of the leading names of the 'New Atheism' movement as speakers.

Leading the lineup is author of *The God Delusion*, British evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, along with American biologist, Professor PZ Myers, host of the world's top-ranked science blog, Pharyngula. Also confirmed is Dan Barker, a former evangelical pastor. Barker, author of *Losing Faith in Faith*, now heads America's Freedom from Religion Foundation and hosts America's first atheist radio program, Freethought Radio on Air America.

Australian speakers include; philosopher and professor of bioethics, Peter Singer, broadcaster Phillip Adams, and *Age* columnist, Catherine Deveny. More information on the convention is available at: <http://www.atheistconvention.org.au>

The enormous contemporary interest in atheism as a social and political movement has been fueled by global religious conflicts and the increasing politicisation and influence of the 'religious right'. A number of best-selling books on the subject, including Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, Sam Harris' *The End of Faith*, and Christopher Hitchens' *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, have inspired thousands to join non-theist organisations and online atheist communities.

AFA president, David Nicholls says, "Non-religious Australians are fed-up with an unrepresentative Christian minority influencing important civil rights issues like abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research and gay marriage – all issues which the majority of Australians support. They're also concerned about the amount of tax-payers' money being pumped into religious schools at the expense of the public education system."

"People contact us at the Atheist Foundation every day, saying, "What can we do to stop this?" says Nicholls.

Surveys show that only 7.5% of Australians attend church regularly. While the official Census figures show Australia's 'non-religious' make up 20% of the population, several major international studies reveal that this figure is vastly underestimated. Nicholls estimates that non-believers in Australia are probably closer to 50%.

*The Rise of Atheism* Convention will bring together atheists from around the country, and across the world. "Make no mistake," says Nicholls, "this is not just going to be a talk-fest. The incredible level of interest should be a huge wake-up call to politicians and Christian lobbyists, alike, that non-religious Australians are preparing to stand-up and be counted. Atheism is on the rise, and the non-religious will no longer sit quietly on the sidelines while good policies are derailed by religious dogma and prejudice."

### **Relevant Statistics**

Nationally, only 7.5% of Australians attend a place of worship weekly. *Source: Zuckerman, Phil (2005), Atheism: Contemporary Rates and Patterns, Cambridge University Press*

A survey by Germany's Religion Monitor (2008) found that 31% of Australians do not believe in God, a divine power or life after death, while a further 26% were uncertain to varying degrees. *Source: Religion Monitor (2008), 'Australia: High level of religious identity paired with low level of Belief', Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation, Sydney/Gütersloh (Germany)*

# VIEW FROM AMERICA



I wonder how many of you have been following the fiasco here in the United States regarding yet another attempt to reform the dysfunctional health care system in this country? It must seem amazing to you and residents of other industrialized countries as you watch the debate play out. You might ask how is it that there are so many Americans who are up in arms (literally in some cases!) about attempting to reform a system that costs too much and generally doesn't provide as good an outcome as in over thirty countries who have that dreaded "SOCIALIST" health care system? What kind of people would lead the charge against reforming this system that has been called unsustainable by nearly all parties involved?

OK, you guessed correctly: it's basically the Republican Party and its hoards of religionists who have been duped, once again, by their puppeteers, the US Congress, and its patrons Big Pharma, the insurance companies, and various other health care associated lobbies.

Now, you might think, gee, weren't the Republicans badly defeated in the November elections? Well, yes and no. Obama won by something between 53 and 47 per cent, which still leaves a lot of sore losers. Couple that with our system of government where each state, regardless of size, gets two senators (100 total), and generally under Senate rules it takes 60 votes to pass most legislation, so almost any bill can be stopped before it reaches the President's desk. The Democrats, with the recent death of Senator Kennedy, now have 59 votes, and being Democrats, it's hard to get everyone in the party on board on any particular issue in any event. Even if the House of Representatives, which has a large Demo majority, passes the bill (simple majority vote), it will do no good because all three branches of government must approve it.

Briefly, the way the game is played in the Senate is that the big companies usually make huge donations to various senators from the small right-wing states. The senators, usually Republican, but in some cases conservative Democrats, take care of their religious constituents by voting against abortion and anything favoring gays, against any form of gun control, stem cell research, and against any other issue that those "Hollywood liberal types" might support. These senators are great at distortion, or even outright lying, about non-existent provisions in the targeted pending

legislation that stokes the fears of the religious zealots who have been fed total lies from the beginning by their church leaders, and/or the omnipresent right-wing talk radio hosts who are pros at stirring the pot.

So far in the health care debate, they have been painting President Obama as a Communist, new-age Hitler, promoter of government "death squads" for the elderly, and a President who will ultimately destroy life in the USA as we know it! Actually, that last point could make the country a lot better, depending on what reforms were adopted! In fact, I wrote my congressional representative saying the so-called "death squads" would be great idea if they were to allow any citizen to ask to be euthanised when the end was near. Currently, only the state of Oregon has a Death with Dignity law where a patient diagnosed with less than six months to live can obtain a prescription of a lethal dose of medication which will end the patient's life. Fortunately, the Federal government apparently is allowing Oregon continue this policy. It's amazing that this law, which was enacted in 1994, survived the Bush administration, a friend of the religionists' "suffer for Jesus" insanity, and also the health insurance and drug providers. Remember, if you can keep a terminally ill patient alive for a few more days, weeks or months, the doctors get to run more expensive tests, along with the hospitals that also run up the bill.

What's really amazing about it all is that in most cases, the people who would actually benefit by the proposed new system are the ones that are against it! Many of these people are the ones who are losing their jobs and their health care benefits that came with it. Others may currently have a policy, but in many cases these policies are so filled with co-pays and deductibles, that in the event of a hospital stay, they would be wiped out financially, insurance or not!

Here's a personal example of how insane our system is. Four years ago my wife went to the hospital here in Florida, a medium cost state, to have a breast biopsy. She did it as an outpatient and was out in five hours. The cost was about \$11,000. Since her policy has a \$5,000 deductible to keep the cost down (She was still paying about \$225 a month for it) we had to write out a check (*American spelling*) for \$5,000 up

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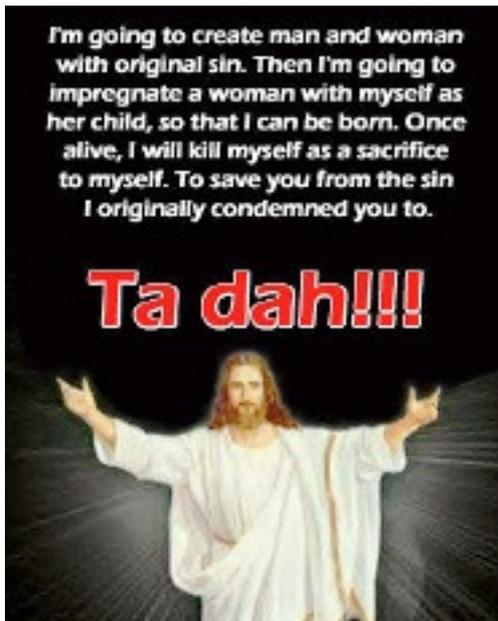
front. Fortunately the results were negative. Her policy now costs about \$300 per month and will increase every year!

So what's my point of all this? Once again we can see how much damage to our country religious ideas can do, even indirectly. "True believers" are easily swayed by lies generated by the industries involved, and spoon fed to them by the very politicians who are supposed to be looking after the interests of the people first and foremost. The politicians know well that if you have an electorate which believes that a god living in a place

called "Heaven", who once rose from the dead to "save" those not even born yet, it's a piece of cake to get them to believe that the BLACK man in the White House is secretly forming "death panels" to play god and decide when old people will be sent to the death camps! If we ever do wind up with health care "reform" in the US, it will probably be heavily watered down, and still providing outrageous profits to the insurance industry, etc. Stay tuned: the circus will probably continue for a couple more months!

*Bill*

## Humour



A paratrooper was scared to jump.

His instructor told him, "If anything goes wrong, say, 'Buddha oh Buddha' and you will be saved."

The paratrooper got so scared that he forgot to pull his rip cord. So he said, "Buddha oh Buddha," and a hand came out of the sky and saved him.

He said, "Thank God," and he was dropped.



**I**t's God who keeps them in pain,  
Who tortures and drives them insane.  
While Atheist heathen,  
With sci-ence and reason,  
Finds meaning by using her brain!

— Ford Ray

**C**hristians, it is needless to say, utterly detest each other. They slander each other constantly with the vilest forms of abuse and cannot come to any sort of agreement in their teaching. Each sect brands its own, fills the head of its own with deceitful nonsense, and makes perfect little pigs of those it wins over to its side.

— Aurelius Celsus, fl. ca. 180 C.E.

# Scientology: the Early Years

By **Dennis Morris.**

**A**cademic, financial genius, explorer, writer, mystic or charlatan?

Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, founder of the cult of Scientology and the centre of world controversy, has been reported in all of these roles.

Scientology and its attendant “science” of Dianetics had all the qualities of an inspired money-spinner. It was simple enough to appeal to the millions of “self-help” advocates while requiring the regular and expensive ministrations of officers of the movement to help the acolyte “clear” himself of psychological blocks.

According to their evidence, put before a commission of inquiry, he was born on 11 March 1922, at Tilden, Nebraska, in the United States, the only child of Commander H. R. Hubbard, U.S. Navy, and Dora May Hubbard.

He was raised on his grandfather’s Montana cattle ranch and “could ride before he could walk”. At 14, together with his parents, he travelled extensively throughout the Far East and India. At 19 he entered the University of Washington D.C. where he graduated in mathematics and engineering from Columbia College, say the bulletins. Scientologists are also told that he attended Princeton University and obtained the degree of Ph.D. from Sequoia University.

An information letter dated November 1963, and headed “Essential Information every Scientologist should know”, states that “you often hear slurs on LRH’s lack of degrees”. After listing his academic qualifications the letter adds: “But there are no degrees or courses given in universities for the subjects he researches. He does not practise in any field requiring a degree. He does not need or want degrees, but even so he has them”.

In 1950 he published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. This led to the establishment of the Hubbard Dianetics Research Foundation of Elizabeth, New Jersey, of which he became director.

The commission’s report points out that there are “two

such official organisations today and these are the Hubbard Association of Scientologists International of the United States and Great Britain, and the original Hubbard Dianetics Research Foundation”.

In Scientology literature he is hailed as “a driving genius” and “one of the ablest men alive today” with his work compared to that of “Lister when he introduced antiseptics and Harvey, anesthetics”. His achievements in creating a world-wide organisation with a claim to millions of followers are regarded as “a record which few men have equalled in history”.

Hubbard describes himself as a student, explorer, pioneer in horticulture and many other fields, nuclear physicist, civil engineer, glider pilot, master boatsman, philosopher and “one of the prime movers in the effort of getting man into space”.

## Other claims

The findings on some of his other claims are:

- B.Sc. in civil engineering, George Washington University, 1934. The university says he was there from autumn 1930 to spring 1932. No degree in any subject.
- Ph.D. Sequoia University, 1950. No Sequoia University is listed in the United States.
- Student, Princeton School of Government, 1945. Hubbard has never been enrolled at Princeton University.
- Commander of the Caribbean Motion Picture Exhibition and W.I. Minerals Exhibition, 1935. The Motion Picture Association Inc., can find no reference to this exhibition.
- Alaskan Radio Experimental Expedition, 1940. The State of Alaska’s Department of Public Works, the Federal Communications Commission and the University of Alaska can find no record of this expedition.
- Squadron Commander U.S.N., 1943. Hubbard served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Naval Reserve.
- Fellow, Oceanographic Foundation. The Oceanographic Society Inc., of New York, knows of no such foundation.

Hubbard’s claim to be one of the prime movers to put man into space was put to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in Washington. It denied a connection with NASA “in any capacity”.

Scientologists regarded L. Ron Hubbard as a prophet or God figure, according to evidence given at a commission of inquiry into Scientology. A British judge described him as a “charlatan and worse”.

*(Continued on page 21)*

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Even in death, the founder of the Church of Scientology was at the centre of controversy and mystery. He disappeared from public view in March 1980 and his estranged son tried unsuccessfully to have him declared dead two years later. An announcement by the Scientology organization said: "L. Ron Hubbard, after completing his life's work to his full satisfaction, departed his body on Friday, January 24 1986".

According to officials of the church, Hubbard willed himself to death at this ranch near San Luis Obispo in southern California. His death was kept secret.

The announcement sparked off more mystery. According to his death certificate, he died of a stroke on a Californian ranch. The county coroner said that he was prevented from ordering an autopsy because of a certificate, purportedly signed by Mr. Hubbard, declaring his objection to an autopsy.

Mr. Hubbard's personal estate was estimated some time ago in 1984 at well over \$100 million.

He and the Scientology organisation have come under repeated attack in many countries and Scientologists have responded with equally vigorous denials. There have been many inquiries into Scientology, court actions, fiery accusations and counter accusations.

One of the strongest attacks came from Mr. Justice Latey in the English High Court in 1984 when he said the practices of Ron Hubbard and of his helpers were "grimly reminiscent of the ranting and bullying of Hitler and his henchmen".

He ordered a Scientology father to hand over his 10-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter to their mother, who had fought for almost six years to be reunited with them after herself breaking away from the organisation. The judge said the real objective of Scientology was money and power for Mr. Hubbard, his wife, and those close to him at the top. People were brainwashed into unquestioning obedience, and the cult's methods could be very dangerous to the mental health of the trainee. Scientology sought to indoctrinate and brainwash people, especially children and impressionable young people, so that they became the unquestioning captives and tools of the cult, withdrawn from ordinary thought, living and relationships with others.

At the time, the organization had an annual turnover of US\$4 million in Britain alone, the money being raised

mainly from expensive counselling courses which members were required to attend.

A Scientology information brochure available in Durban, South Africa, says that Scientology is a religion in the truest sense of the word.

"In Scientology, salvation is through the work of the individual himself. The abilities and potentials of the individual as a spiritual being are stressed".

In 1968 the Church of Scientology issued a statement saying that South African, British, Australian and New Zealand institutions were daily killing thousands of psychiatric patients with surgery and brutality. The countries were accused of running a "new king of Belsen or Auschwitz" and so "solving the problem by killing the insane".

In 1973 the South African Government appointed a commission of inquiry into Scientology. The commission refrained from an outright ban on the organisation but recommended legislative curbs on many of its practices in South Africa. Some of these were described as harmful or potentially dangerous, particularly where children were concerned.

*People were brainwashed into unquestioning obedience, and the cult's methods could be very dangerous to the mental health of the trainee.*

Among the commission's anti-Scientology recommendations was a ban on the practice of psychotherapy and psychology by unlicensed and untrained people. The commission reported on Scientology's aims of curing disease and described Scientology's allegations against psychiatry as "irresponsible, inaccurate and untruthful".

The commission refused to recognise Scientology as a church or religion.

How did it all start?

One story is that in the late 1940s a group of science fiction writers met in New York and fell to discussing the weaknesses of modern orthodox religions.

One writer suggested that a new religion was needed to replace the existing hotchpotch of outdated beliefs and to capture the imagination of a jaded public.

They decided that this new religion would need to draw vigorously from two major spheres: science fiction, which was then going into a boom, and psychoanalysis, which was in its post-war heyday. The philosophy should be based on the former, the techniques on the latter.

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One of the science writers present was L. Ron Hubbard.

The Church of Scientology was born in 1954.

In 1969 Ron Hubbard and 200 of his disciples, including a number of South Africans, were branded by the Greek Government as “undesirables” and ordered to leave Greece. The group had made its home aboard a Panamanian ship docked in the harbour of Corfu, an island in north-western Greece, several months earlier.

The expulsion order followed months of diplomatic pressure in Athens by American, British and Australian envoys to examine the activities of the group. Mr. Hubbard had been trying to obtain the Greek regime’s permission to set up his headquarters ashore and the group were injecting about \$50,000 a month into the market of Corfu but they were summarily told they must go. They sailed away and there were many stormy seas ahead.

The movement has had a rough ride almost everywhere it has surfaced.

In Britain, its leaders were banned for a while after Scotland Yard produced a report on the sect. In America, several leaders, including Hubbard’s third wife Mary Sue, were prosecuted for conspiracy to gain illegal entry to the offices and files of government agencies.

In February 1978 Hubbard was sentenced in absentia to four years in prison and fined \$6350 for fraudulent business practices. Three other church officials — two of them in absentia — received lesser sentences. The French criminal court issued a warrant for the arrest of Hubbard and the two absent officials. Mr. Georges Andreu, president of the church’s French branch, was present to receive his sentence of two years in prison and a fine of some \$1740.

In 1983, the wife of L. Ron Hubbard, founder of the Church of Scientology, who had not seen him in two years, was seeking to prevent his son having him declared dead or mentally incompetent.

A former aide, Mr. Gerald Armstrong, has told

reporters that Mr. Hubbard behaved increasingly like Howard Hughes in withdrawing from society. “It became more intense as the years went on. I saw his health and emotional and mental state deteriorate. He would go nuts if there was dust in the air. He was a hypochondriac, always complaining.”

Judge David Hennigan in Riverside, California, was asked to dismiss the petition as an invasion of privacy by a lawyer for Mr. Hubbard’s third wife, Mary Sue. But the judge snapped: “If all he is concerned about is privacy all he has to do is walk in here and say, ‘Here I am and I’m alive’.” The lawyer said he would not appear.

Evidence from letters written by him to the FBI and others have suggested that Hubbard had considerable mental problems at an early stage, including paranoid delusions that he was being threatened by Russian spies anxious to obtain his insights into the human mind. Those insights were pedestrian enough, but when Hubbard later introduced the theory of reincarnation, Dianetics was transformed into Scientology, a new “religion”.

His vast fortune, too, remains a mystery.

In Britain, spokesmen for the movement say his will makes provision for his wife and “certain” children, but that the bulk will go to the Church of Scientology to help to continue marketing “the word”.

It is ironic that Ron Hubbard, who advocated self help, fought so fervently against modern psychology and psychiatry, and although selling his own doubtful methods for millions of dollars, was himself suffering from severe mental illness. “Physician heal thyself!

The Church of Scientology does not tolerate criticism. Paulette Cooper, who wrote *The Scandal of Scientology*, was put on the hit list to “get her incarcerated in a mental institution or jail or at least to hit her so hard that she drops her attacks”. She received death threats, 14 libel suits against her publisher and obscene phone calls. And on 26 October 1981 nine church officials were convicted for plotting to steal United States government records about the church.

*Evidence from letters written by him to the FBI and others have suggested that Hubbard had considerable mental problems...*

If you want to make a little money, write a book. If you want to make a lot of money, create a religion.

There is a condition worse than blindness, and that is, seeing something that isn’t there.

**L. Ron Hubbard**

# A French Revelation, or The Burning Bush



By James A. Haught

**I**ncredibly, President George W. Bush told French President Jacques Chirac in early 2003 that Iraq must be invaded to thwart Gog and Magog, the Bible's satanic agents of the Apocalypse.

Honest. This isn't a joke. The president of the United States, in a top-secret phone call to a major European ally, asked for French troops to join American soldiers in attacking Iraq as a mission from God.

Now out of office, Chirac recounts that the American leader appealed to their "common faith" (Christianity) and told him: "Gog and Magog are at work in the Middle East.... The biblical prophecies are being fulfilled.... This confrontation is willed by God, who wants to use this conflict to erase his people's enemies before a New Age begins."

This bizarre episode occurred while the White House was assembling its "coalition of the willing" to unleash the Iraq invasion. Chirac says he was boggled by Bush's call and "wondered how someone could be so superficial and fanatical in their beliefs."

After the 2003 call, the puzzled French leader didn't comply with Bush's request. Instead, his staff asked Thomas Romer, a theologian at the University of Lausanne, to analyze the weird appeal. Dr. Romer explained that the Old Testament book of Ezekiel contains two chapters (38 and 39) in which God rages against Gog and Magog, sinister and mysterious forces menacing Israel. Jehovah vows to smite them savagely, to "turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws," and slaughter them ruthlessly. In the New Testament, the mystical book of Revelation envisions Gog and Magog gathering nations for battle, "and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them."

In 2007, Dr. Romer recounted Bush's strange behavior in Lausanne University's review, *Allez Savoir*. A French-language Swiss newspaper, *Le Matin Dimanche*, printed a sarcastic account titled: "When President George W. Bush Saw the Prophecies of the Bible Coming to Pass." France's *La Liberte* likewise spoofed it under the headline "A Small Scoop on Bush, Chirac, God, Gog and Magog." But other news media missed the amazing report.

Subsequently, ex-President Chirac confirmed the nutty

event in a long interview with French journalist Jean-Claude Maurice, who tells the tale in his new book, *Si Vous le Répétez, Je Démentirai (If You Repeat it, I Will Deny)*, released in March by the publisher Plon.

Oddly, mainstream media are ignoring this alarming revelation that Bush may have been half-cracked when he started his Iraq war. My own paper, *The Charleston Gazette* in West Virginia, is the only U.S. newspaper to report it so far. Canada's *Toronto Star* recounted the story, calling it a "stranger-than-fiction disclosure ... which suggests that apocalyptic fervor may have held sway within the walls of the White House." Fortunately, online commentary sites are spreading the news, filling the press void.

The French revelation jibes with other known aspects of Bush's renowned evangelical certitude. For example, a few months after his phone call to Chirac, Bush attended a 2003 summit in Egypt. The Palestinian foreign minister later said the American president told him he was "on a mission from God" to defeat Iraq. At that time, the White House called this claim "absurd." Recently, *GQ* magazine revealed that former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld attached warlike Bible verses and Iraq battle photos to war reports he hand-delivered to Bush. One declared: "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground."

It's awkward to say openly, but now-departed President Bush is a religious crackpot, an ex-drunk of small intellect who "got saved." He never should have been entrusted with the power to start wars.

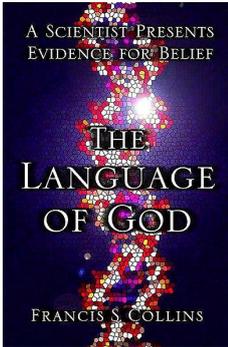
For six years, Americans really haven't known why he launched the unnecessary Iraq attack. Official pretexts turned out to be baseless. Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction after all, and wasn't in league with terrorists, as the White House alleged. Collapse of his asserted reasons led to speculation about hidden motives: Was the invasion loosed to gain control of Iraq's oil — or to protect Israel — or to complete Bush's father's vendetta against the late dictator Saddam Hussein? Nobody ever found an answer.

Now, added to the other suspicions, comes the goofy possibility that abstruse, supernatural, idiotic, laughable Bible prophecies were a factor. This casts an ominous pall over the needless war that has killed more than four thousand young Americans and cost U.S. taxpayers perhaps \$1 trillion.

*James A. Haught is the editor of the Charleston Gazette (West Virginia) and a FREE INQUIRY senior editor.*

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# BOOK REVIEW



## The Language of God:

A Scientist Presents Evidence For Belief

By Francis S. Collins

Publisher; Simon & Schuster

ISBN; 9781416542742

Reviewed by Mark Sorrell

**B**y way of introduction, Francis Collins was the head of the Human Genome project. In his book, *The Language of God*, I found very little in the way of “evidence”, unless you consider misquoting Dawkins, or the personal need to believe compelling.

Mr. Collins did spend a lot of time explaining how science was unlocking the mysteries of nature, the workings of the genome and our relationship to the animal kingdom, which I quite enjoyed. He also summed up the religious conundrum neatly with:

“... godless materialist might be cheering. If humans evolved strictly by mutation and natural selection, who needs God to explain us? To this, I reply: I do.”

Firstly, I cannot let the “godless materialist” label pass with out comment. If Mr. Collins would like to see materialism in all its glory, he should try a visit to the Vatican.

Early in his book Mr. Collins poses another question which I think holds an important answer to his need; “Why do we have a ‘God shaped vacuum’ in our hearts and minds unless it was meant to be filled?”

I would argue that we don’t have a “God shaped vacuum” in our minds. We may have ignorance, fear and insecurity, but those things can be “filled” in many ways. Some people choose, or are indoctrinated, to fill that vacuum with God. Some are overwhelmed and turn to drugs for sweet oblivion or develop a hunger for power to satisfy their delusions of self- importance.

Others choose to fill this vacuum with a thirst for knowledge. For some, unfortunately, knowledge does not seem to be enough. Mr. Collins seems to have shown that intelligence and/or a good education are not a sure cure for wishful thinking caused by a fear of one’s own mortality and insignificant place in the universe. The issue that Mr. Collins really seems be struggling with is: Why am I not the centre of the universe?

The supposedly profound questions, unanswerable without God, are questions only if you insist on believing:

- What is the meaning of human existence?
- Why did the universe come into being?
- What happens after we die?
- Why do we know right from wrong?

If God can exist outside of nature and time, with no need to be created himself, why can’t the universe?

The universe existed before humans, and large complex species tend eventually to become extinct. In fact with our shallow gene pool we may not be long for this world. How then can we be the reason for the earth, if not the whole universe? And why does there need to be any meaning to our existence, other than what we make for ourselves?

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As an Atheist, I have no need for any of these questions. I've dealt with the fact that I'm not the centre of some grand plan, and I will die a permanent death. I know right from wrong because the morals of our time ease my path through the society in which I live. Like most people I even stick to them most of the time.

Belief or otherwise in a God would appear to be an internal decision. No amount of debate between the two sides will ever be likely to satisfactorily bridge the gap. Either you are capable of accepting the absence of God or you are not. Arguments that begin with "If you are willing to accept the existence of God, then" will only ever appeal to those who already believe. Likewise, science and reason will never persuade a believer, because "God exists outside of nature/time/the Universe", or some such response.

On the positive side, Mr. Collins did present arguments against Creationism, Intelligent Design, and any other "God of the Gaps" theories, pointing out that religion cannot, and should not, take the place of scientific education and endeavour. If only the religious would take note of this and stop trying to interfere with every aspect of our lives.

But there's little chance of that.

## Belief

By John Warren

*"With respect to what belongs to God in himself, let us first lay the necessary foundation for the whole enterprise by considering how God can be shown to exist, for unless this is established, there is nothing else to consider."* — St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 1, Chapter 9.

### Introduction

And Thomas Aquinas, having satisfied himself, by a manipulation of words in his brain, that God could be shown to exist, went on to most extensive considerations. But none of those manipulations proved that God existed outside Aquinas' own brain – the existence depended only on self-generated belief.

Belief in anything is an acceptance that the object of that belief is external to one's body and can be used (manipulated) by one's body. It is a function of the brain. No brain, no belief. The things which one believes, objects of belief, are generated in the brain by inputs from the external world through one's sensory organs of sight, sound and touch.

The objects of belief may be separated into several different classes:

First, those objects which arise from direct physical input to the body's sensory system from outside the brain: the rays of light, the waves of sound and the sensations of touch and smell.

Second, objects which are conveyed to the brain by physical inputs but which are misinterpreted in the brain, such as mirages and optical illusions, so as to give a false and unusable image of reality outside the brain.

Third, those objects which are conveyed to the brain from other people by means of oral or written stories.

Fourth, those objects which are generated in and by the brain itself as it attempts to rationalise all the objects existing in the brain; i.e. to understand the relations between those objects so as to turn them into a useful picture of the external world.

### The Reality of Beliefs

That the first class of beliefs is a true picture of the external world can be verified by using that belief in practical activity. If one sees an apple pie before one on the table there is no more convincing test of the truth of the mental picture than to pick up the pie and take a bite. Karl Marx recognised in 1845, in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, that acting on the mental image, or objects of belief, was the test of whether the image was a true representation of the reality of the external world or not.

The physical actions of an individual establish its relation to the world in which it lives.

When one applies the practical test to an image such as a pond of water on a desert track by trying to scoop up the water, only to see it disappear, it is confirmation that the image was not a true reflection of reality but only a misunderstanding in the brain – the well-known mirage.

The third class of beliefs which enter the brain as stories from other people are only regurgitations of the content of those other brains. They gain no authenticity by being repeated but have to be taken on trust that someone, somewhere, experienced the original physical connection to the real world. While not having any physical connection to the external world they do gain

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in emotional conviction by endless and widespread repetition and acceptance by members of the community.

The fourth class of beliefs is generated by that remarkable computer in our head, the brain, but it suffers from the same problem as our desk-tops and lap-tops: garbage in, garbage out. Unfortunately one generation loads the next one with the intellectual baggage, both good and bad, which it accumulates during its time in control. Young people are suffused with the mores of their elders and accept them almost without question as Aquinas recognised:

*“Custom, especially that which dates from childhood, takes on the force of nature and as a result the things with which the mind has been imbued from childhood take such firm root that it is as if they were naturally known of themselves.”*  
Contra Gentiles, Book 1, Ch. 11

Consequently all the stories of supernatural realms, angels, gods and ghosts with which we allow (even encourage) our children to absorb without critical guidance become embedded as impediments to understanding the real world in the light of ongoing advances in science and technology.

### **The Supernatural Realm**

That there exists an unseen, untouchable realm, separate from the one we live in and use every day, is a belief which is held by billions of people throughout the world in one form or another. That belief has a very long history. The key features of that history were elucidated by J. G. Frazer in his monumental study: *The Golden Bough*. He concluded that at the earliest stage of social development humans related to their environment through the belief that everything around them contained forces or spirits. That that belief or attitude exists, even to-day, was amusingly exemplified in the BBC comedy sketch, *Fawlty Towers*, when Basil Fawlty thrashed a car which had frustrated him by failing to start. We can recognise the response in ourselves now when kicking a flat tyre in anger at its, presumed, deliberate intention to annoy us. Trivial examples perhaps, but when it was felt that the great events like storms, floods and earthquakes or the growth of crops were the result of those forces it led to the attempt to influence those forces by magic: by incantations and ceremonies. Those incantations and ceremonies continue to-day in the form of prayers, rituals and the magical eating of body and drinking of blood in the form of crisps and wine.

### **Conclusion**

By definition there is no physical connection between the natural brain and the supernatural realm. No physically detectable ray of light or wave of sound

emanates from that realm and we certainly can't put our hands out and touch any of its supernatural inhabitants. Consequently belief in the supernatural could not have entered the brain in the first or second ways outlined in the Introduction. It must have come by the third and fourth paths and, once there, it becomes the immaterial thing we call thought. Although immaterial itself, thought has a material basis in the activity of the neurones and chemicals of the brain and that has given rise to the fundamental problem of philosophy: understanding the distinction between thought in the brain and reality outside it.

It is very difficult for people to introspect and appreciate that the beliefs which they hold are just the results of the activity taking place in the brain and that those beliefs remain there until tested in practice. And when tested, many of the beliefs are found to be groundless. In particular the age-old belief that a god exists who is benevolent and who will respond to the plea to “deliver us from evil” is shown to be nothing more than an idea in the supplicant's head when monstrous evil in the world continues unabated; witness the ongoing abysmal poverty and illness in so many parts of the world, the butchery in Rwanda, the earthquakes in L'Aquila and China.

Imagine what multitudes pray regularly for help from the all-powerful, all-benevolent God. Nothing comes, yet theologians are unable to face that fact directly as proof that there is nothing “out there” to render help.

Despite such obvious set-backs, believers have persisted in their beliefs throughout the ages. To have persisted so long belief in such an unreal and unprovable thing as the supernatural must play some useful part in life.

One obvious value in generally held belief in the early tribes is that it supported social cohesion. It is, even now, much easier to be friends with people who share one's opinions on all sorts of things than it is to feel empathy with those who oppose one's opinion. In the days when witch doctors and shamans held sway it was of value to them, in particular, if the majority of people shared belief in their supernatural powers. And later, when those medicine-men became the chiefs, kings and queens of nation-states, as noted by Frazer in his *Golden Bough*, unity of belief gave those leaders a great lever to rally their believers into armies to fight under the banner of differences of spiritual belief as a smokescreen to obscure their real secular economic and power aims.

When the obscuring cloud of belief in the supernatural lifts we may reveal a clearer picture of the reality which we have to manage every day, a clearer understanding of our relations with our fellow human beings and the environment in which we live.

# Our Father, to thine own pathological self be true



**By Catherine Deveny**  
**The Age, 2 September 09**

**H**ere's my theory. God has narcissistic personality disorder. Stay with me as I indulge in two of my favourite pastimes: illuminating monotheistic religion's exploitation of the human desire to feel safe, loved and special; and my constant need to question and expose maladaptive behaviour. Let's pathologise!

Here's the deal: tick five in the diagnostic criteria and we have an NPD winner!

- Feelings of grandiosity and self-importance (I am God); exaggerating accomplishments (I made you and the world) to the point of lying (I exist and there is a heaven); demands to be recognised as superior without commensurate achievements (Worship me and only me because I am great and almighty and I know everything).
- Obsession with fantasies of success, power, brilliance, beauty or perfect love (I will love you, you will love me and we will live happily in eternity).
- Conviction you are unique and special (I am almighty. I am the one and only God).
- Requires excessive adulation, attention and affirmation — or, failing that, wishes to be feared (Worship me. And me only. Or you will feel my wrath. Worse still, you will not come to my party in heaven).
- Feels entitled. Demands automatic compliance with unreasonable expectations for special and favourable priority treatment (Follow my rules and rituals no matter how barmy, or you'll go to hell. And don't question me. Because I am God).
- Is "interpersonally exploitative": uses others to achieve his or her own ends (Kill in the name of God. Wage war in the name of God. Cut off family members in the name of God. Punish children in the name of God. Discriminate against homosexuals, non-believers and women in the name of God.

Spread the word and convert others so I have more power in the name of God).

- Devoid of empathy (Kill in the name of God, etc).
  - Behaves arrogantly (I am great and you are sinners); feels "above the law" (Kill in the name of God, etc).
- Atheist pin-up boy Richard Dawkins describes God as "the most unpleasant character in all fiction. Jealous and proud of it. Petty, vindictive, unforgiving and racist. An ethnic cleanser urging his people on to acts of genocide." Mm, smell that NPD!

It has been suggested that Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Kim Jong-il, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama suffer NPD.

NPDs are often extremely successful in business, politics, entertainment, sport and the clergy. It's believed a highly emotional, chaotic childhood results in a sense of inferiority, which hobbles NPDs ability to be true to themselves; instead creating a false reality. Which becomes their reality.

They are charismatic, persuasive and intelligent and become skilled actors who can fake any emotion and have the ability to make you glow with their favour. But they are deceitful, ruthless, manipulative users who are unpredictable and emotionally erratic. The emotional transaction is wildly out of whack. They expect the best but give very little. They cannot love and have no empathy. But they are emotionally needy and crave attention so hone their skills to attract love, admiration and attention to fill a hole inside them that will never be filled.

NPDs don't feel they exist without an adoring fan club, so they create their own fantasy world in which they are king. With their manufactured charisma and genuine hauteur, they make others feel special by granting small mercies and bestowing their favour.

Which is how people get sucked into the transaction of worshipping a God despite no rational evidence. Babies die in ditches every day, yet God helps Hollywood stars win trophies. "Ah yes, the Lord works in mysterious ways. He helps me find my car keys occasionally. And because he's so famous, and he noticed me, that makes me special. So I keep believing. Because if I don't, I won't be special."

My 11-year-old atheist gave me the revelation that God had NPD when he said, "I think we invented God and then God invented us."

It was Galileo who said, "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended us to forgo their use."

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