

# The Australian Atheist

Issue Number 38

March - April 2013

**2012 Global Atheist Convention  
shortlisted for  
The Ockhams 2013 Award**



*Pluralitas non est ponenda sine neccesitate*  
*Plurality should not be posited without necessity.*



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**The subject matter herein need not be taken as the official view of the Atheist Foundation of Australia.**

# From the Editor

The 2012 Global Atheist Convention has been shortlisted for an "Ockham's Award" by *The Skeptic Magazine*.  
[www.skeptic.org.uk](http://www.skeptic.org.uk)

Even if we don't win, it is a huge compliment to the organisers. More details in the next issue.

Speaking of the Convention, Lawrence Krauss' tribute speech to Christopher Hitchens has been transcribed and is published on page 20. I'm sure it will bring back many fond memories and a possible tear to the eye. Huge thanks to Leanne Carroll – transcriber extraordinaire.

The Public Relations Team has once again excelled itself. Newish PR person Cat, took up the challenge to the question — "is there heaven and hell to go to for my soul when I die?" Cat's response was detailed, informative and has a lovely twist at the end. Not surprisingly the correspondent hasn't replied.

I must apologise to Nigel Sinnott for publishing the wrong article in the November – December issue. I'm not really sorry as it was an interesting article and well worth publishing. The intended article is on page 16.

There has been much "making fun of" the Catholic Church so I thought I may as well add to the mocking. When "El Papa" resigned Twitter was all abuzz. Some of the more amusing comments are below. Thanks to Tom Melchiorre (Co-Editor) for pointing out the error in one joke doing the rounds. The image is of a waving Pope Benedict with the caption "Pulls out early... Like a good Catholic." Wrong!

Thanks to everyone for sending in articles, I can't possibly use them all but don't let that stop you.  
Happy reading.



BREAKING NEWS: Pope announces resignation "to spend more time with his family".

JOB VACANCY. Wanted one Pope. Must be male and Catholic. Good references not necessary.

The Pope says he is "fully aware of the gravity" of his decision to resign, but "not convinced of its evolution".

Nope Benedict.

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My best advice to anyone who wants to raise a  
happy, mentally healthy child is:

Keep him or her as far away from a church as you can.

**Frank Zappa**

# Letters to the Editor

## Why am I atheistically inclined?

During World War II, my father was serving in the army and I was enrolled, at the age of five, at the only pre-school available, run by a sect of the Roman Catholic Church.

Family legend told me I had been christened in the Presbyterian faith. What faith a pre-6 year old has is beyond me.

At this pre-school my fate was sealed by a simple error by my mother in sending me to "kindy", as we called it, with a meat-filled sandwich for morning play lunch, on — shock, horror! — a Friday. In those days it was considered wicked or something to eat meat on a Friday. Years later this prohibition was repealed and meat on Friday became religiously acceptable (except during Lent). Go figure?

I was dragged out in front of the class, my pants were pulled down — this was in the days before boys owned underpants — and I was beaten on my bare backside in front of a mixed class with a wooden ruler by a floor-length, black-robed Irish nun. This raised bruises I have been told. I was then deported to the adjacent church to repent my sins, buggered if I knew how, and to wait till the school session was over. If I recall correctly, I was also supposed to "confess", again I did not know how.

Needless to say I did not return to pre-school but hung out till the next year when I was old enough to go to the local State School.

At this school we had scripture every week, which was conducted by religious people of the local Protestant faiths. As I remember, nearly all of the children had to attend these sessions with the notable exception of a couple of Jewish and Indian or something children of wartime refugees. We did so envy them.

Now my uncle was a pastoralist and a former headmaster. He mentioned in-breeding on occasion and the perils it caused the stock.

At scripture one day the local Presbyterian pastor was carrying on about Adam and Eve and also Noah and Cain and Abel, and to this day I have not seen any reason to back away from my beliefs and adopt those stupidities.

I give you my full name and address but would prefer that, if you decide to publish this, you do not to use my details as I live in an aged-folk cluster and the hassle of going through all this is beyond my inclinations these days.

As always I do enjoy the logic of the magazine.

Best regards,

Jim.

*Editors note:*

*During the Famine in Ireland, (1740-1741) because of the scarcity of grain due to the drought, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church allowed Irish Catholics — and only Irish Catholics — to eat meat, a rarity itself for the poor, any day, including Friday, during Lent.*

Dear Editor,

That was a great read! (Issue 37 January – February 2013). I especially enjoyed the story about the Gippsland pizza shop owners, (Mandy and Fred) who put on a free dinner for disadvantaged people in their town. If you're in touch with them, please let them know it was a moving story and set a great example!

Regards,

Kris



# From the Inbox

Good morning,

I read your article by David Nicholls, "Overcoming Religious Indoctrination: 6 Steps Towards Sanity." I relate to it so much. Thank you!

I was raised in a conservative, Christian home. I believed I chose my faith. I sincerely believed in Jesus Christ and that the Christian life was the best life as well as the only way to "Heaven." But I never worked through the logic of Christianity or why I believed.

I went away to university and law school. I studied abroad. I studied other worldviews and philosophies.

Eventually I found myself in a depressed state. I took the path of least resistance and turned to my childhood religion — praying, going to church more, reading the Bible, and hanging out with churchgoers. Slowly and subtly I was convinced that God loved me so much that I should sacrifice my career and future. I quit my job and planned to become a lifelong missionary to Africa. Fellow churchgoers praised my sacrifice. But I only had enough money to go for a month. No worries. I had "faith" that God would provide.

I came back broke and unemployed. I stayed positive for a while, but eventually I was very angry with "God" because I had stepped out in faith, but I didn't hear anything back from "Him." Ultimately, I would realise I was talking to myself and torturing myself.

I started going through the logic of Christianity. In short, I realised Christianity is a sacrificial religion. It teaches its adherents to sacrifice their energy, time, talents, and money to "God" rather than production or scientific inquiry. (The Dark Ages is the result of such large-scale thinking — rich Church, poor everyone else.)

I also realised, as your article discusses, that Christianity's fear of death and eternal damnation as well as the unworthiness of humans lead to subservient confusion. Christianity praises confusion rather than clear thinking because confusion forces reliance on "God." And Christianity teaches that people are not "worthy" of "God." Why can't I just believe that most people are pretty much good?

A lot of Christians also paint a false dichotomy of morality. It's either Christian morality or drunken orgies. Can't I be moral without "God"?

I realised that a huge reason why I bought Christianity is because I had a deep fear of the unknown and lacked self-confidence. Christianity plays in to fears of the unknown because it answers what the universe is ultimately going to look like and how I

is great for those lacking in self-confidence because a good Christian is supposed to deny himself anyway.

Looking back on my childhood I see that my parents passed on a deep fear of the unknown and lack of self-confidence to me cloaked in Christianity. I was always a deep thinker though. So I suppose I can especially relate to Abraham Lincoln's quip that a divided mind cannot stand. It seems my mind is coming together.

I am not so much angry at my parents because I choose not to be and do not want to be a victim. But I am angry with myself. I consider myself intelligent. How was I duped into believing this stuff? Christianity worked for me when I didn't take it seriously — when I just went to church and then forgot about it. But when I took it seriously it led me to its logical conclusion, self-sacrifice.

How do I deal with this anger that I have wasted time fearing the unknown and living by "faith" rather than reason? Where do I go from here?

With much appreciation,  
Patrick

Hello Patrick,

Thanks for your email. I wrote that article many years ago after contemplating about what would best benefit others such as myself who have been through the forced treadmill of religious indoctrination. The article could be better with additional information if written now but it does contain the essential material to at least start those so affected on a path of escape.

Believe it or not, your situation is one that has been repeatedly experienced by thousands, maybe millions of others. None are exactly the same but the similarities of trust betrayed, feelings of the time wasted, and despondency at not being aware of the confidence trick are very common. Self-rebuke for uncritically accepting what are now seen as incredulous stories and concepts can be an overriding thought if not put into proper perspective.

The past president of the AFA, Keith Cornish, was a lay preacher well into his forties and he also was annoyed with himself that it took him so long to escape. As an aside, Keith belonged to the Salem church in Gumeracha, South Australia. I'm sure the flock of that church would have liked to emulate the famous incident of the "witch" hangings in the town of Salem in the USA when he left their fold.

I tend to think like Sam Harris about life in that we are alive right now at this moment and memories are only antecedents leading up to this point in time. Sam



suggests that none of us chose those antecedents as each one was an antecedent from previous occurrences. Whether that is true or not, and I tend to think it is a reasonably convincing story, as is known the past cannot be changed. It may take extreme effort in putting negative thoughts about the paths we think we chose out of mind but it can be done. One might never rid entirely self-blame for aspects of our lives that we would rather never happened, however, that is making judgment on the knowledge in the present which makes it an unfair blame.

Think of an extreme example where child-soldiers are totally indoctrinated to kill and torture without mercy. They do this not realising the huge blunder they are making in causing immense suffering and death to others. Then they get older, escape that terrible situation and have to reflect on their actions. As can be imagined, that must be a devastating thing to face up to. Are they to be blamed or helped? Then come back to your own case, a lesser one if a scale could be made for past activities, and see you are not at fault. That is the start to coming to grips with decisions made long ago.

You are an intelligent person but that is not automatically going to prevent ideological indoctrination. The Pope is an intelligent person as are many religious people. Religion is more complex than evaluation by only rationally thinking about it and saying it makes no sense. As Richard Dawkins points out, religion is just an unhappy using of evolutionary propensities developed over eons of time to help survival. It is better to imagine there is a lion in the tall grass than not do so, as at some stage there might be one. Those without that imagination were removed from the gene pool by being breakfast for a lion.

If we add how tribal expectations keep common thoughts alive by each culture, it is quite easy to see how the combination of genetics and psychological social pressures can make even the smartest amongst us religious. Of course, if we understand this is how humans tick before we are manipulated by it, then the chances of such a system working become very limited. The good thing is that in retrospect it is possible to see how we have been affected. We can then develop strategies, although they might be hard to implement and not necessarily easily so, to overcome and beat the system.

I understand how one can be "angry" at having been deceived by parents, priests, schools, government — but, naturally enough, it is a fact that none of those people or structures are any more responsible than you. They are victims as were you. They failed to recognise that escape was even an option let alone a possibility. You have escaped — you might not have — as they haven't. That is one of the things you have to be absolutely thankful about. It is only a waste of life if the totality of it is lived in a

delusion.

You ask, 'Where do I go from here?' The answer is upon each individual. Some find that following the never ending story of scientific investigation and discovery more than adequately makes our short time on Earth an experience not to be missed. Others devote themselves to various worthwhile causes and still others just enjoy the freedom of thought that has been wrenched back from the abyss of make-believe. I find that helping to build a system where children are not subjected to the fearful inanity of any religion something hard to better.

But, whatever you do, just knowing you are mentally free will help you overcome the dark induced or internally produced thoughts that are a part of being human. Good luck.

Best wishes,  
David

David Nicholls  
President  
Atheist Foundation of Australia

Hi there. I found your organisation on the internet. I was born a Catholic. My question is: Is there heaven and hell to go to for my soul when I die?  
Thanks Brandon

Hi Brandon.

Thank you for your query. We welcome such questions and I would like to commend you in approaching us — rather than simply trusting in the faith that was foisted upon you as a child. We were born with querying minds, and what is more human than to exercise our brains and ask the hard question of "Why?"

I was brought up in the Catholic faith and subjected to at least 6 years of Catholic education from age 6 to 12. I was subjected to First Confession, First Communion but did not complete the process of Confirmation. By that time I knew what an atheist was, and that I was one.

However, I was always interested in the subject of religion and read various books about Catholicism.

To answer your question, we must first look at the concept of the "soul". A large majority of people, religious or not, seem to take the existence of a soul as an absolute given. People often exclaim "Well of course we all possess a soul!"

Why this "of course"? What evidence do we have for the existence of a soul? Has a soul ever been seen? What gives people the idea that there is a little something extra that lives within us, unseen, unfelt, undetected and unmeasurable, which carries on living when our bodies have died?



I believe it is because of the fear of death — a fear that is particular to human beings.

Humans are “blessed” and “cursed” with consciousness, with a sense of self, and the concepts of how we fit into the world around us. Hence we are aware that our life will unavoidably come to an end, and this frightens us. And so throughout our entire history we have invented ideas to help us cope with the inevitability of death — hence the creation of Heaven, Hell, reincarnation, Judgement Day, Nirvana, St Peter at the Holy Gates ... and many more.

Although humans are intelligent and adaptable beings, we are also simply another species of life — albeit a remarkable and singularly complex species. Modern human beings have been in existence for only around 200,000 years. Compare this to the existing age of the Coelacanth fish (100 million years) or the alligator (more than 150 million years) or of sharks (420 million years). Do these creatures also possess a soul? What about other life forms, like amoebas and germs — do they also have souls? If these other creatures do have souls (and this concept is believed by other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and The Dreaming), then do these non-human souls also go to either heaven or hell after they die? Is there a separate heaven and a separate hell for sharks, for kangaroos or cattle, or germs and other bacteria, or is there an afterlife amongst the clouds for groupings of life forms, i.e. a mammalian heaven, a reptilian heaven, an aquatic heaven and so on? It may sound silly to consider such ideas, but is it any less silly to believe that human beings each contain within their bodies an invisible passenger that continues living indefinitely after the body has died? And if this is the case (the existence of souls), then why the need for a body at all? If the most “true” aspect of ourselves is our soul, why do souls choose to inhabit bodies if they can already exist independently? Isn’t the body superfluous?

To come back to your question about heaven and hell: the concepts of heaven and hell have been a way by which to control both adult humans and to frighten small children into obedience. “Heaven” and “Hell” are cultural and religious constructs, they are not empirical facts — and these very concepts change from place to place — and some cultures don’t have the constructs at all. The same heaven and hell concepts have also changed over time — for example, in the Middle Ages the Catholic Church believed it was a mortal sin to even possess a Bible!

If you examine what we know about the universe, and consider its size and all its mysteries, the question of heaven and hell falls into insignificance. Once we place Earth in context with the entire universe (the magnitude of which stuns many of us into a kind paralysed awe!), you may begin to understand why people like myself and many other atheists find contemplating religion, god and an afterlife as a limiting waste of time. The immensity of the actual universe, both great and tiny, is more mysterious and glorious than the “miracles” and “visions” that are described in the Bible. Consider the size of our solar system, and then consider the galaxy within which our solar system exists, and finally consider our next nearest galaxy and add to this the number of stars in a universe, the size of which we are still unsure of. Add to this equation the unexplored regions at the very bottom of the ocean, and finally consider the “inner-space” of atoms, and quarks, and the components that make up a quark... having considered all of these things, ask yourself again: “Is there heaven and hell to go to for my soul when I die?” Well, what do you think?

Cat  
Public Relations Team  
Atheist Foundation of Australia



## You’d think they would keep it themselves!

### hand made cross blessed by the pope

this item is hand made from red cedar wood and has 4 red garnets and 1 citrine inbeded into it, my father went to visit his home town in italy and while he was in italy he was fortunate enough to have it blessed by pope Benedict XVI so this is a great item to have in your antiques collection that could be worth thousands one day. another good reason to buy from me is i donate one quarter of all my sold items from various sites including gumtree to charities around the world

\$299.00

Negotiable

# Meeting One's Maker: Or Why God Needs More New Saints

By Eve Jones

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"Going to meet your maker" is a common phrase used by the death deniers of this world. Unlike "kicking the bucket" or "popping your clogs", it lacks finality and promises new adventure.

If my Sunday school lessons from yesteryear still serve me correctly, one's body remains on Earth to be recycled by worms or the fires of the crematorium while one's soul goes marching on, the exception being the chosen few who go up in "The Raptures". (More on Rapturees later.)

According to Wikipedia, there is a world population of over 7 billion with an annual death rate of 8.37 per thousand. There are other sites that concern themselves with death rates such as the CIA, World Bank, indexmundi and Hebrew4christians. The figures vary slightly, but in round terms they work out to one person dying approximately every half a second.

By the time God spends time answering prayers, sitting on the Judgment Day Bench and listening to pleas from the saints, especially newly-appointed and popular saints who get many requests for help, there is little time left for any one-on-one meeting with God. Even after sending some new souls off to Hell-Fire and Brimstone HQ, the one-on-one meeting is unlikely to last longer than half a second — not much reward for a lifetime of devotion.

Before the one-on-one meeting, the soul must first encounter Judgment Day. I'm not sure if each soul gets its own day shortly after becoming a soul or if all souls are stored up until The Final Day and all processed at once. I favour the first option

as the backlog of souls would be very great and no one would have arrived in Heaven yet.

Sitting on the Judgment Day Bench would at first appear to be a good job for God to delegate to the saints, except for the fact that saints have been appointed over centuries and their ideas of what constitutes a sin may vary; for example, hundreds of years ago it was believed that people who suffered epileptic fits were possessed by the Devil and condemned to Hell.

A more modern saint may think of epilepsy as bestowed by God and the soul worthy of a place in Heaven.

People using mechanical means of birth control have also been condemned to Hell but may yet be seen as heroes in an over-populated world. Besides, they would be condemned only by Catholic saints, the rest of the married world being free of sin when they copulate using condoms.

In times of very high death rates, such as World Wars and earthly disasters, the death rate and therefore the "new soul" rate would climb steeply and, I fear, cause a serious backlog at the Pearly Gates. I imagine during the horrendous battles on the Western Front in the First World War souls may have been required to queue along the Pearly Fence waiting for admission.

In order to process so many newly-arrived souls through Judgment Day and the Pearly Gates the obvious thing is for God to delegate some tasks and to whom else but the saints? Who else it up there to do the job?

This may not be as easy as it seems. Would new souls feel

cheated if they got their one-on-one meeting with a saint rather than The One they have devoted their life to?

After admission the Big Question arises. What do these millions of disembodied souls do to fill in their time for all eternity?

New souls' problems may be different from those who "Go up in the Raptures". It seems the people most likely to rave about The Raptures are USA evangelists. They tell how Rapturees will bodily ascend into Heaven leaving behind puddles of clothes and cars run off the road. It's a great yarn but funnily enough I have never yet heard them tell of what happens to the nude Rapturees when they arrive in Heaven. Do they stay nude? What sustains them? Is there a Heavenly Food and Drink Supply and Sewerage System?

We know there has always been a clothing source for the white robes of angels and probably a musical instrument maintenance shop for their harps and trumpets.

Do Rapturees need shelter or is there no weather in Heaven? Perhaps some theologian can enlighten me.

All this leads to God's Big Purpose: Why does God bother to create souls just to end up storing them ad infinitum in Heaven?

Moreover, why does any thinking person want his or her soul to finish up spending a purposeless eternity corralled in The Great Soul Storage Shed In The Sky?

Is there a learned theologian out there who can truthfully answer these questions? If so, please bring your evidence to the table.



# Media Releases

## The Decline and Fall of the 'Roman Empire'

There is every possibility this generation is witnessing the beginnings of the decline and fall of the Roman Catholic Church. After a mere 8 years in the position of Pope, Joseph Ratzinger is only the second Pope to resign. An interesting parallel is that the other was Gregory XII, who resigned in 1415 in the midst of an intense political schism in the church. Rumours abound that it is inter-political machinations that have brought about Joseph Ratzinger's demise.

David Nicholls, president of the AFA, said, "No matter what the reason is for the resignation, the trail of death and suffering left by Joseph Ratzinger's adherence to and reinvigorating of antiquated Catholic traditions has brought the Church's reputation amongst its own adherents and the wider community to a low and possibly irrecoverable position."

The raft of socially naive and dangerous edicts emanating from the Pope include reinforcing the second-rate status of women, acute hostility to homosexuality, continuation of the hard line on abortion, opposition to voluntary euthanasia, obstruction to the use of condoms in HIV/AIDS-ravaged countries and fortifying that artificial birth control is wrong.

Nicholls said, "Under this Pope, socially-progressive programs have been vehemently opposed against the wishes of the people, at least in developed nations. By various surveys it is known that the majority of RC adherents in these countries do not support such antiquated dictates."

The Roman Catholic Church is losing its members in the West at a rapid rate not only because of lack of progressive thought but mainly because of its sullied reputation. The gains in developing nations outstrip this loss and it would be no surprise if the Vatican chooses to cut its Western losses and choose a Pope from Africa, South America or the Philippines. The numerical advantage is obvious.

Nicholls added, "The Catholic Church has crossed swords with modernity and has lost that battle. Its power base may linger, supported by developing nations for some time to come, but the writing is on the wall that the ensuing schisms will eventually mean the total downfall of this anachronistic institution.

<http://atheistfoundation.org.au/media-release/the-decline-and-fall-of-the-roman-empire/>

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## Governed by the Religious Gene

A letter was published in *The Age* 26 February 2013 regarding Heinz Karl Klinkermann being convicted of the attempted murder of his long suffering wife.

The letter read in part: "WHEN next we vote as Victorians perhaps we should consider the religious association of those putting themselves forward for election."

The Atheist Foundation of Australia (AFA) applauds those sentiments and goes further with the suggestion that this similarly applies to every voter in every state and territory.

David Nicholls, president of the AFA said, "This is not a single issue problem. Parliamentarians are making decisions guided by their religious leanings and disregarding the electorate's informed wishes on many social issues. If a politician can't get simple ethics correct, how can we expect them to draw the right conclusions on other serious matters?"

Issues that are ignored include the case in point, legal voluntary euthanasia, as well as same-sex marriage, stem cell research, religious chaplains in state schools, financially pandering to religion in the many billions of dollars, allowing bigoted religious discrimination, disregarding people of other faiths and no faith with Christian prayers before parliamentary sessions, etc.

Nicholls added, "Women are regarded by some of our leaders as second-class citizens on the abortion issue and most of those leaders because of religion. If politicians can't keep their faith-based concepts out of the halls of power, people should really consider whether they are worth voting for. Religion in politics is no longer just a preference as many people in society are suffering and are disadvantaged by a particular brand of magical thinking."

The Atheist Foundation of Australia calls on the media to better expose how religion is deleteriously affecting democracy.

<http://atheistfoundation.org.au/media-release/governed-by-the-religious-gene/>



# Submission

## Education and Employment Committee's Inquiry into the Australia Education Bill 2012

14 January, 2013

Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

The Atheist Foundation of Australia is pleased to make a submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee's/House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee's Inquiry into the Australia Education Bill 2012. The 2011 Census found that 22.3 per cent of Australians had no religion, an increase of 7 per cent since 2001. Additionally, since the Census question is phrased to assume religious belief, the actual number of Australians who are non-religious may be higher. The Atheist Foundation is Australia's premier organisation of atheists, humanists and freethinkers, and supports ethics and evidence-based public policy.

### **Brief statement on school education**

Education, particularly in primary and secondary school, must combine developing a base of knowledge, skills and character. The first two of these cover what and how to think, with the latter being more important, as skills support intellectual discovery, technological development and entrepreneurial ingenuity. The last of these matters concerns developing young people into responsible members of the Australian and world communities. While the Atheist Foundation broadly supports the idea put forward in the Melbourne Declaration — adults who are honest, resilient, optimistic, tolerant, enterprising and ethical, and who have a commitment to democracy and fairness — the AFA stresses that education must prepare young people for successful lives and careers, and support a thirst for lifelong learning.

Education also has a strong role in strengthening economic mobility, as it can help enable people to overcome disadvantage. Lower levels of education are strongly associated with longterm unemployment, as jobseekers in this category are less likely to have the necessary skills either to find work or, once in employment, to perform adequately to retain the position.

### **Australian Education Bill 2012**

The Atheist Foundation applauds the Government's commitment to ensuring an excellent education for all Australian children, recognising that education is vital to a growing economy and cohesive society, and for each individual to realise her or his potential. The Atheist Foundation also supports the goals of achieving top five OECD rankings in reading, mathematics and science, as these are expected to give young Australians a strong base of knowledge and critical-thinking skills in pursuing their careers and higher education. The emphasis on science education is particularly welcome, as future innovation depends on not only an understanding of the natural world but also on skills such as thinking critically and gathering evidence.

It should be noted that, in supporting science education, the Atheist Foundation strongly opposes any recognition in the classroom of intelligent design and other forms of pseudoscience, other than to encourage students to use critical analysis to expose such concepts as fraudulent.

### **Transparency and accountability**

The focus on transparency and accountability is significant. In advocating evidence-based public policy, the Atheist Foundation supports greater data collection and analysis to promote better educational outcomes.

In this context, the AFA looks forward to assessments on the tangible benefits and effectiveness of the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program. The Foundation recognises that young people can require social and emotional assistance, and supports students' access to trained mental health professionals in school. However, the Atheist Foundation rejects the notion that such support should be provided by religious personnel whose chief *raison d'être*, as has been revealed in a number of cases, is likely to wish to convert



new followers rather than to assist students. Although the Program has been amended to require religious personnel to complete training in mental health, this does not address the inherent inappropriateness of their performing this role at all. Mr Gonski recognises this inappropriateness in Review of the Funding of Schools in Australia Final Report, noting that since Federation governments have been responsible for providing “secular” education (p5). It follows that funding or providing staff whose normal function is religious is inconsistent with this responsibility.

Therefore, the Atheist Foundation submits that the Program should be renamed the National Students’ Welfare Program and provide funding for secular mental health professionals only. In contrast to religious staff, secular mental health professionals are less likely to alienate students of different faiths (or no faith), will not risk using taxpayer funds for proselytising, and do not have any conflict of interest in providing advice that contradicts their own personal religion.

The very presence of Christian, and in the main, fundamentalist religious persons on state school grounds authorised by the school principal and the government sends a distinct message to students that the religion they represent is valid in its supernatural claims. Apart from this being an evidentially unsupported assertion, as stated, it is divisive in the present and does not bode well for the future when the students are adults.

### **School funding**

The Atheist Foundation appreciates the desirability of providing a legal basis for an agreement between the Commonwealth, States and Territories, and independent schools sector to implement the National Plan for School Improvement. This should help ensure that the Plan’s goals are met and value for money achieved. However, the AFA is concerned that taxpayer funds will still be provided to religious institutions. As well as representing an obvious breach of the separation of church and state, these subsidies distort the market and it means that private enterprises do not compete fairly with government schools.

Additionally, exemptions proposed in the Anti-discrimination and Human Rights Bill 2012 Exposure Draft would give religious businesses the right to discriminate in their hiring practices according to sexuality, marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, and religious beliefs. That these exemptions were sought by religious institutions is clear evidence that their schools are not interested in hiring the best teachers and other staff, but rather in adhering to and imparting dogma, including the notion of discrimination.

This reveals that any religious school making use of such exemptions does not share the highest priority of Australian schooling (as declared in the Bill’s Explanatory Memorandum) of “identifying and addressing the needs of school students and providing additional support to school students who require it.” It is inappropriate for the Government to fund an organisation under the National Plan for School Improvement when that organisation does not share the program’s goals.

### **Conclusion**

The Atheist Foundation supports the goal of ensuring all Australian children receive an excellent education and the target of achieving top five rankings in reading, mathematics and science by 2025. Because of the Atheist Foundation’s strong support for education, it remains deeply concerned that religious schools do not share this priority despite receiving taxpayer funds. Therefore, the Atheist Foundation welcomes the Bill’s improvements in transparency and accountability for schools that should lead to funding arrangements being rectified.

The Atheist Foundation thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission on this Bill and other matters related to education in Australia.

Yours sincerely,  
David Nicholls  
President  
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

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Only the educated are free.

**Epictetus** (*Greek philosopher associated with the Stoics, AD 55-c.135*)



# Overcoming Religious Indoctrination: 6 Steps Towards Sanity

By David Nicholls

Religious indoctrination is real. It is a traditionally-based process of all cultures. Its power is such that peoples so affected have a "belief" they have chosen their particular "faith" above the many on offer throughout the planet.

All religions work on the principle of exposing each new generation to a single worldview, to the exclusion of all others, in a repetitious and authoritative manner. Doubts as to the veracity of such "teachings" are not encouraged, indeed, are not tolerated.

Once learned, the information so gained is retained for life, allowing it to take on an instinctive mantle in later years. As with all acquired knowledge, such as learning to ride a bicycle or rote remembrance of mathematical time's tables, once taught, unlearning is not an easy option.

This is not to say that the results of such methodology are not practically overcome-able.

Youthful brains soak up information with little effort, establishing permanent neuronc pathways. Older brains require considerably more effort to alter this situation. There are many atheists to attest to this. In fact, it is the rule rather than the rarity that most atheists were raised from infancy under some religious regime or other. Even the most intense religious indoctrination can be overcome.

Here is how it is achieved:

First, one must become acquainted with and become used to the correct terminology pertaining to religious indoctrination. Even though the religious are quick to point out that others have been brainwashed (such as



communists, other religious adherents and even atheists), it is they who have succumbed to this process.

Brainwashing/inculcation/indoctrination is one in the same word in meaning. These words are used in reference to promoting a one-sided opinion as being truthful, without allowing access to other ideas and with no reservation in calling it unjustifiably, the "truth". Considering the adverse ramifications of such methods and results of brainwashing, this is nothing less than mental child abuse of the worst kind and one day it will be viewed that way.

Just seriously think about this for a moment. If you are religious or harbour religious thoughts, it is more than most likely the result of being abused and mentally used as a child. There is no escaping this fact. That the abused can then go on to abuse others in a likewise fashion is near enough to proof positive of the reality of the situation.

Under the guise of a good for humanity, the fear of death and/or eternal damnation is instilled into the pliable and susceptible minds of children and continues into adulthood. Sprinkled with tales of eternal life, temporal wishes supernaturally achievable, the unworthiness of humans and the existence of a "good" and an "evil", sets the mental scene for subservient confusion.

Second, after recognising one has been abused and brainwashed against their will and without their knowledge, if escape is required, then effort to combat this negative outlook must be more intense and prolonged than the unwanted religious input.

A good start is to fully appreciate that all religious people of the thousands of religions that have and do exist, have been similarly abused, with them considering that they have the correct religion and all others are wrong.

Even religions under the same name can state unequivocally that their counterparts have it incorrect. As an example, fundamentalist Christianity classes the Pope as the Anti-Christ and Catholicism a heresy.

Third, take a proper look at Earth. Fifty thousand Iranians have been recently killed by earthquake, three thousand many-denominational people died in the Twin Towers, six million Jewish people died in the Holocaust etc, etc. Where were their respective gods? They were remarkably silent as they have been throughout history in humanity's darkest hours.

Look at the system that sustains life on our planet: Every life form preys on another life form to exist. Some of this in such brutal and horrible fashion as to totally exclude the idea of a "loving" god as the creator.

Look how the dice of life favours some and is more than wretched to others.

Look how natural disasters and pathogens kill and maim indiscriminately.

Fourth, it must be consciously recognised that books and ideas of old came from ignorant times, and were written and passed on by ignorant men living by the malleable rules of all-encompassing superstition.

Fifth, and most importantly, it must be remembered that religions have held sway since consciousness arrived many tens of thousands of years ago. It is only in the last few hundred years that science has leapt onto the scene, and in doing so, has begun to devour the very pillars holding superstition aloft.

Although it is not fully accepted yet, the one part of science that will eventually be seen as the most profound is the principle of evolution. Not only has science found no evidence for a supernatural realm, it has shown that evolution requires no such thing to sustain it.

Sixth and lastly, it therefore has to be asked as to why a super-being or thing would initiate a universe with us as only an infinitesimal dot within it. The Universe works on definite laws in a rational manner. Even if quantum structure appears not to be so!

Such a rational creative force would hardly expect us to accept the irrationality that is religion, especially as it is introduced in the heinous form of child abuse.

An all-loving god with control over every particle in existence, that chooses to allow immense suffering, cannot exist.

An all-powerful god incapable of creating perfect happiness for its creation is an oxy-moronic concept.

An all-knowing god that cannot see the inherent goodness of humanity and does not nurture and aid its creation in a fair and equitable manner is a god of immeasurably immoral proportion.

These thoughts and similar must be the constant companion of the adult psyche wishing to escape the foolishness of religious mind control.

Victims of child abuse can overcome the strong hold it has on them and in doing so can benefit greatly from the conflict. The brainwashing will always remain but in its subjugation it will eventually be replaced with feelings of pride of accomplishment.

This I guarantee.

The most painful moral struggles are not those between good and evil, but between the good and the lesser good.

**Barbara Grizzuti Harrison**

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

**Emma Goldman**

The conscience of children is formed by the influences that surround them; their notions of good and evil are the result of the moral atmosphere they breathe.

**Jean Paul**

Our awesome responsibility to ourselves, to our children, and to the future is to create ourselves in the image of goodness, because the future depends on the nobility of our imaginings.

**Barbara Grizzuti Harrison**





# Ex-Benedict



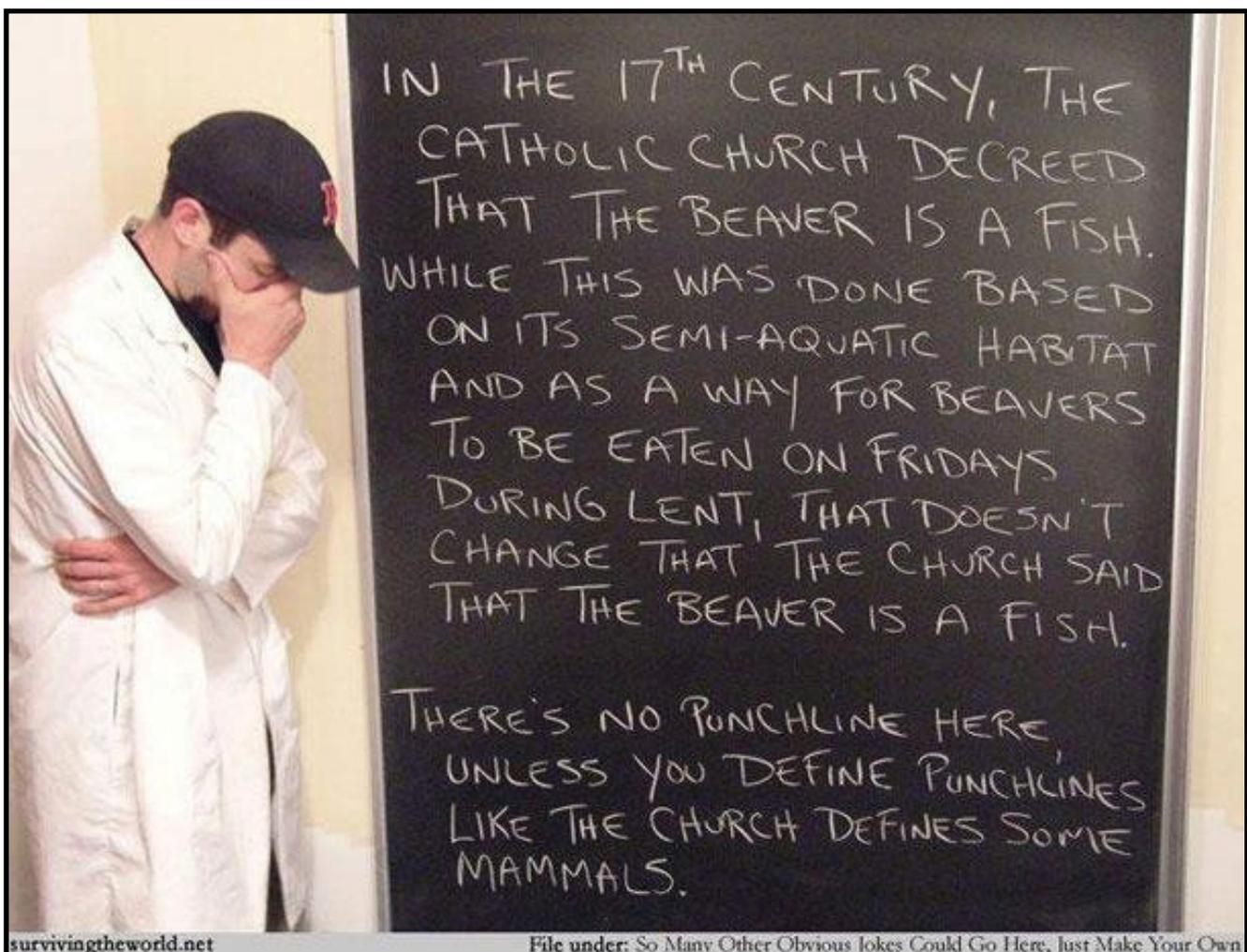
**Good Catholics  
Don't Pull Out.**



# TIME TO LEAVE, BENEDICT

THIS IS YOUR LAST WARNING--ZEUS

ReligiFake



survivingtheworld.net

File under: So Many Other Obvious Jokes Could Go Here, Just Make Your Own

# Why I am an Atheist

By Nigel Sinnott

In order to answer this question fully, it needs to be divided into two parts: why I am an atheist rather than a theist; and why I am an active atheist (one who joins atheist and related organisations) instead of keeping my atheism to myself.

## Atheism rather than theism

The reason I am an atheist rather than a theist is simply that I think atheism is true. In other words, I consider atheism a more reasonable and accurate interpretation of the world around me.

If the universe has not been created by a god, goddess or pantheon of deities, atheists are left with the unsolved question of why does anything (including me) exist, rather than not exist.

To this the theist can reply, "You, I and the world exist because God created it and us, because God loves us, and because he has a purpose for us."

I am unimpressed with this argument for theism because, instead of really solving one ultimate question, it creates more questions. If God made us, my response is:

1. How did God do the creating?
2. Why should God and God's creations exist rather than not exist?
3. How was God created?

Atheism leaves me with one unsolved riddle; theism offers an answer of sorts to this riddle, but creates two or three more. Applying the principle of Ockham's Razor, I prefer an explanation with one loose end to one with two or three unsolved problems.

In other words, my atheism is evidential and probabilistic: it is not a matter of dogma or faith in the religious sense. I do not "believe in" things the way religious people do: in fact I do not approve of "believing

in"! And I see no need for the supernatural or for magic to explain the workings of the world around me. I suspect people created the notion of gods, souls, divine intercession and religious ritual because such people did not like the idea that, at death, their personalities would be extinguished, and for ever.

The argument is sometimes raised that faith in God is a good thing because it is sustaining and comforting. Belief may be comforting for some people, but belief in, say, devils, evil spirits and hell may not be. In any case, arguments of convenience should not override considerations of truthfulness.

The beginnings of doubt and dissent were sown in my case when, as a boy in England, I was told at about the age of eight that animals did not have immortal souls. If I could not be joined in heaven by my old tabby tomcat, then heaven seemed a distinctly poor proposition.

Soon afterwards, no doubt as a reaction to being at an Anglican boarding school, I toyed with the idea of converting to Catholicism. This romantic reactionary phase was brief, because I soon found I could not swallow the notion of the Trinity. For a few months I dropped belief in the Holy Ghost and retained belief in God the Father and God the Son, but of course I started questioning whether it was reasonable to believe even in this dual godhead, and I soon concluded that it was not. I was about ten at the time.

## Active and passive atheism

Having decided that they do not believe in gods and organised religion, some people are content to give such matters no further thought and to get on with other aspects of their lives. Others, however, decide to "go public" and join atheist and freethought organisations.

My reason for being "on the active list", to borrow an expression used by the National Secular Society in the nineteenth-century Britain, is that I spent ten years in religious

boarding schools — Anglican ones to be precise — and my experiences during that time (1952-62) left me determined, long before I left school, to oppose the social and political influence of organised religion, and to support secular, state education. Despite all the waffle and humbug I heard about love and forgiveness at one of the schools I attended, the institution was in reality brutal and punitive, with scant regard for concepts like justice and the right of dissent.

Few things engender a passionate love of freedom more than the experience of being deprived of it, and Anglicans deprived me of freedom for far too long. Having become a non-Christian, I soon became an anti-Christian, partly because of the behaviour of Christians around me, and also because I learnt about Christian persecution of Jews and heretics.

I do not, of course, maintain that all religious people are intolerant control freaks: many are clearly not. And although atheists as a rule are libertarians, there have been exceptions. For example, the pro-fascist Australia First movement was run by a couple of renegade rationalists. Both theism and atheism have included tyrannical monsters in their ranks, but on the whole unbelievers tend to care more about civil liberties — for everyone — rather more than believers do. Opposition to the legalising of homosexuality and to the right of women to control their fertility has characteristically come from conservative religious lobbies, and only very rarely from unbelievers.

Private atheism is justifiable on grounds of truth. What about public atheism? Well, because of tax concessions and centuries of privilege, organised religions often have the resources to act as powerful lobby groups. So I think atheist and freethought organisations serve a useful role in putting an alternative point of view and in trying to counter undesirable aspects of the influence of organised religion.



# Son Of OMG

## By Nathan Eden

Nathan Eden is a young writer from Tasmania. He entered *The Cowley Literary Award* [www.australianartsales.com.au/cowley-award](http://www.australianartsales.com.au/cowley-award) and has been chosen as a finalist. His piece below was printed in *The Dubbo Weekender* <http://www.dubbophotonews.com.au> and attracted a typical response from a Christian.

**D**o you remember that Joan Osborne song "One Of Us"?  
It was 1995, simpler times. Some were blown away at the insight.  
Man, it was deep!...

It wasn't bloody deep, it completely missed the point. If I was the bloke who penned the tune for her I'd have addressed the whole "second coming" issue. If Jesus does come back for an encore performance he sure as shit won't have the luxury of being "a stranger on the bus".

No, Jesus will be way too busy having his lawyers go over the clause in his life insurance policy concerning what happens in case of resurrection, and dancing with Ellen Degeneres.

Not to worry though Big J; you may not have to school yourself in modern carpentry if you sing the odd Auto-tuned hook on a Kanye West track.

It's worth considering that a tad over 2000 years ago there was of course no such thing as Christianity. With this in mind, I wonder would Jesus still be representin' Nazareth as King of the Jews? Like most Old Testament lovers he was obviously on board with his father being a cruel and vengeful old dude but would he appreciate the forgiving, all-seeing, ever-loving being his old man became in the sequel? They do say that having a child changes a bloke, so God can be forgiven for becoming a little soft. Forgiveness ... it's the Christian thing to do. The only thing that's truly important is that his lessons are updated to become relevant in modern times. The parable of The Good Palestinian is sure to have a major impact.

The son of God will bring his circus Down Under just as his popularity is on the decline. Followed by twelve other blokes, he'll climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge, turn water in to wine while visiting a dry community in Alice Springs, and then visit the Great Barrier Reef by foot while everyone else takes pictures from the boat. He'll then board a plane and disappear from our consciousness and in to the internet. Children will still worship sportsmen and Justin Bieber because in this day and age, it's not cool to hang with whores unless you can rap about bitches.

Oh yeah, and having a beard is like, so 0 BC.

**Response.** *I can't believe this article has been nominated for a literary award. It is offensive to me and many other Christians I am sure. If it had been written about another "religion" for example Islam, there would be such an outcry & cry of discrimination & who knows what other backlash. There would be little forgiveness for Nathan Eden there (which by the way is a very Biblical name). Forgiveness is a critical part of civilised society being able to function & move forward as a whole & as individuals. Those people who don't forgive end up bitter & twisted individuals having a pity party that no one else wants to attend.*

*It is sad to see his attitude & ignorance of the true message of the gospel of Jesus Christ & that Jesus WILLINGLY went to the cross for all to receive the Gifts of forgiveness & eternal life through His death & resurrection. His love for us was so great & is for you Nathan too because He is a personal God. Nathan, I wish you well in your writing career but next time choose a subject you know something about. What you have written is crass & total nonsense & just makes you look really foolish. Read the Bible & get the "big picture". I see you think it is funny to be derogatory about others & what they believe but that kind of "humour" will not get you very far in life. I hope & pray you will have a change of heart towards Jesus Christ Our Lord. Don't laugh, you wouldn't believe the number of Christians who started out atheists & to prove that Jesus was an imposter & a liar!*

*Proverbs 9:10 says "The awe of The Lord is the beginning of wisdom, & knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."  
Leonie.*

**Nathan's response.** May I ask you to read it again and hopefully you will see that it is neither putting forward an opinion, nor mocking Jesus or religion. Rather it is making fun of modern society and its attitudes, particularly towards Jesus and Christianity.

Its disappointing you managed to miss the point but thank you for sharing your opinion.  
Nathan Eden



# A Rock And Bull Story

## How the succession of popes got to sit on the throne of St Peter.

By Bob Irwin

### Swallow this!

Christianity's adoption of "rock" symbology had a precedent in the Ten Commandments. The ancient tale from the Old Testament goes something like this: God wrote on two slabs of stone, with His own finger, ten laws for people to obey. On Mount Sinai He dictated these instructions to Moses who then chiselled the words into the hard stone. God's rules were never to be altered: never, ever.

Moses carried the heavy tablets down from the mountain so the people could see the one-and-only true God's new laws for conducting their lives. More than just His strict orders to the people, the Ten Commandments were treated as a moral code for living and an antidote to sinfulness. Jewish and Christian historians place this event sometime around 1500 – 1400 BC, yet its details were not compiled into the book of Exodus for another six or seven centuries, around the time the notion of monotheism was adopted by the Jewish people.

Across the centuries, countless millions have swallowed the stone-tablet story.

In keeping with their adoption of selective religious traditions of the Jewish faith, the early Christians considered the Commandments to be of material and moral permanence. There was no thought given to amending or modifying the rules of an ancient mythical God, even if they became out-of-date or were shown to be of less relevance for changing times and new understandings. Their attitude to God's infallibility and to the solidity and certainty of the Ten

Commandments made it easy for Christians to take "rock" as the character of their religion.

### Simon Says

"Build on the rock and not upon the sand" is a popular Sunday-school jingle derived from Christianity's metaphorical rock foundations. The idea was credited to Matthew who reputedly claimed that Jesus had mentioned this rock imagery when in conversation with Simon, and Simon repeated it to anyone who'd listen. Simon as "the rock" became one of Christianity's primary claims for its status, strength and validity. (Simon was referred to as Peter because the Greek word *petra* means rock.)

Here's the relevant statement found in Matthew, 16:18, Jesus to Simon:

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it."

It seems odd that Jesus would say to Simon that he was the rock upon which the Christian Church would be built before the events of the passion and alleged resurrection when no one knew or even suspected that there would eventually be a formal religious institution. And no one was advocating it. The overwhelming issue amongst Jesus' followers before and upon his death was their hopeful expectation of an imminent second coming of Jesus, when God would obliterate all non-believers and the kingdom of God on Earth would begin. Simon is more likely to have been introduced as "Peter the rock" during the writing of Matthew to help support the

narrative in favour of Jesus — whenever this gospel may have been written, or re-written — for the impact such a solid and unshakeable image would deliver.

Who really knows? No one. And does it matter? Only if you take seriously Matthew's flaky rock story and what Jesus and Simon might have said.

### Between a rock and a hard sell

The Christian Church's choice of rock symbolism says a lot about its underlying structure, self-promotion and ongoing culture.

There seems to have been no attempt by the various strands of the Church to abandon or even question Matthew's "Peter the rock" story. In any event, claiming that Christianity is built on rock is an unfortunate choice of representation because it invokes a rock's attributes: solid and steady yes, but also hard, inflexible, inanimate, unmoving, unyielding, stuck in the ground, capable of growing nothing, ancientness, and wearing out over time. As well, a rock will hurt if you fall on one. Or if one falls on you.

Rock fits with the old-fashioned attitudes so reminiscent of religious thinking and behaviour across the ages: failure to compromise, unbending, hard and written in stone. (Anyone come to mind?) And with a touch of irony, rocks are categorised under geology, one of the branches of science which helped bury the implausible notions of God in relation to the natural world as imagined by early Christians and held dear by Church authorities.

Depicting the Christian Church as being built on rock is a superficial promotion in keeping with ancient



times. As an ambiguous saying which is inappropriate to modern and informed times, the Church being built "on the rock" has to take the cake: a rock cake of course.

### Make no bones about it

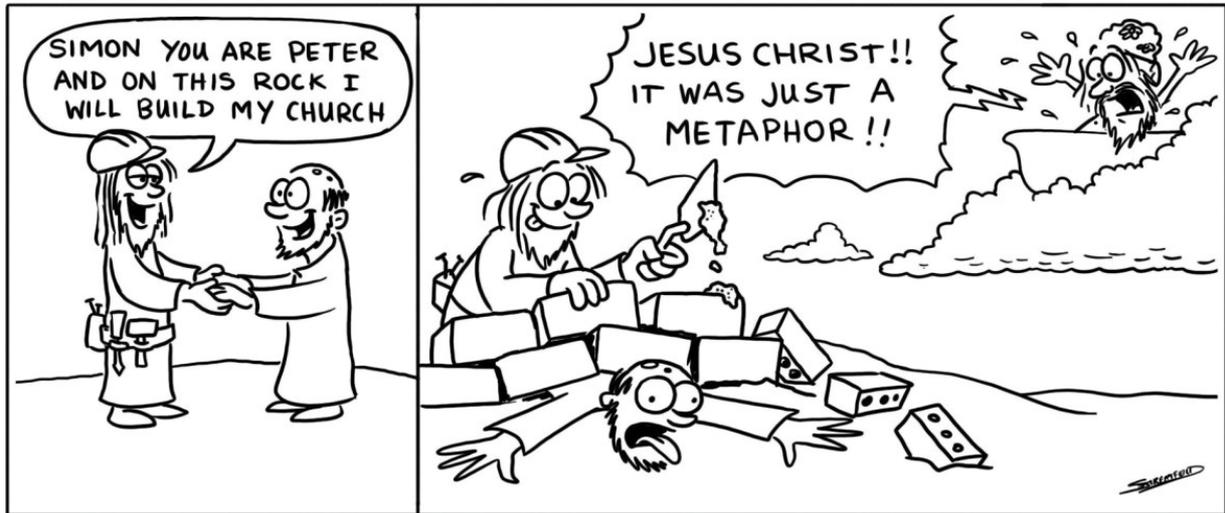
While we can never be really certain about Matthew's "Peter the rock" story, the Christian Church, in particular Catholicism will not

"the Holy Spirit moving within their meetings" which will ensure "God's will is done" in electing the replacement for Benedict XVI.

That this selection process, in effect an administrative function by the élite of the Catholic Church, can claim to perpetuate such a flight of fancy over a spiritual link to Simon-Peter is an extraordinary delusion of their collective mindset, a group

being built in stages and subjected to modifications demanded by successive popes.

Here's what Benedict said on the matter two years into his term: "Looking at it purely historically, there is scope for discussion. In my opinion, the convergence of possibilities, with the whole context of the cemetery that was moved to build the basilica and all the



tolerate views to the contrary. The early popes really thought they were onto something with the Peter link. Once they'd dug this one up they were like a hungry dog with a bone: there was no letting go. The bone has been gnawed down through the first and second millennia, but the Catholic hierarchy hangs on doggedly. After all, in declaring a sort of semi-divine historical line to this early biblical identity, each Catholic holy father regards himself as the spiritual successor to St Peter, God's representative on Earth, and the vicar of Christ who sits on the throne of St Peter.

There is no genetic or blood lineage, just a mysterious or metaphysical link, internally invented, and progressively extended through the lobbying and voting by the prospective popes' underlings, the College of Cardinals, to determine who will be next in the line. The Vatican has announced that the 117 or so cardinals will meet in March 2013 to do their "sacred duty" with

fantasy that becomes ever more deeply entrenched with the passing (or resignation) of each pope and election of his successor.

The Vatican has even convinced itself, on flimsy evidence it seems, that the bones of their St Peter are buried in Rome, under the basilica named after him. But the Catholic leadership has to make this claim, as they've expended far too much theological capital and wishful thinking to believe otherwise. Christian history says Simon was cruelly executed by crucifixion, head down, in Rome around the year 67, over 250 years before Christianity became a state-approved religious institution — thanks to Roman Emperor Constantine for his own political expediency, and about the same span of time before building of the first St Peter's Basilica started. In the hostile, anti-Christian territory of Rome it would have been a lonely grave for those two-and-a-half centuries. Demolition of the old basilica began in 1506 and the new St Peter's was not fully completed for another 154 years, due to it

details that we have been able to see, is so great that I would say that it's a normal historical certainty, or at least a high historical probability that justifies our saying that St Peter is buried there."

Well, if you can believe in a conception via God's spirit, a subsequent virgin birth which produced a man who came back to life three days after being killed then ascended to be with his heavenly father who sired him from above the sky, God's creation of the universe, male-only angels who travelled in God's earthquakes, purgatory, limbo, sainthood, celibacy, indulgences and papal infallibility, and that you're the semi-divine successor to a first century person called Peter (whose real name was Simon), you can convince yourself to believe anything you want or need to.

The Vatican promotes the Peter link for all it is worth, because without it the main foundation for papal legitimacy crumbles, and the Catholic Church would simply — peter out.

# Lawrence Krauss

## Tribute to Christopher Hitchens

### 2012 Global Atheist Convention

I'm going to depart from my normal procedure, which is to not prepare remarks, 'cos I like not to know what I'm going to say, but Hitch was too important to give out random words, so I've actually prepared some remarks.

Christopher Hitchens was my friend. And even as I say those words I'm amazed. Every time I used to leave his apartment, usually pretty drunk, I'd walk out the door in amazement. I'd think, Christopher Hitchens is my friend! What'd I do to deserve this? Why on earth would he want to spend time with me?

Shortly after his death I was interviewed on CNN by a cloying and annoying interviewer who tried to suggest that she was intimately familiar with him by calling him Chris on every occasion, and if you knew anything about Christopher you knew that he'd immediately tell you his name was not Chris.

Anyway, I'd just forced myself to watch it to see how she introduced him, and she said "On the one hand he inspired the ideals of scepticism, free inquiry, and rational thought in many but at the same time he has been called a bullying, lying, opportunistic, cynical contrarian". And she said that as if it was a bad thing! [laughter]

Christopher was a beacon of knowledge and light in a world that constantly threatens to extinguish both. He had the courage to accept the world for just what it is, not what he wanted it to be. That's the highest praise I believe one can give any intellect. He understood that the universe doesn't care about our existence or our welfare, and he epitomised the realisation that our lives have meaning only to the extent

that we give them meaning. For Christopher, this came through the credo that guided his life, the courageous defence of the simple proposition that scepticism rather than credulity is the highest principle that the human intellect can use to enoble our insistence [applause]. You can applaud that, that's his.

On a personal level, whenever I spent an evening with Hitch I came away saying when I grow up I want to be an intellectual. The moment you entered his house you were overwhelmed by a single obsession — books. Books were everywhere, on every surface. On the wall, on the floors, on couches, on tables, and in bathrooms, but unlike for many of us, myself included, the books on Christopher's wall were far more than window dressing. They were arranged according to subjects and ideas in a way that made it clear that the books were regularly read. All of them. And consulted. That the knowledge contained within them was used in the sense that few of us really adequately exploit. It was humbling to witness close-up an intellect that was so capable of surrounding any subject, relishing it, exploring it for its own sake, critically soaking up everything that's worth knowing. He was ever ready to incorporate this wisdom, to shed light upon old ideas or critically examine new ones, with the full weight of a lifetime of intellectual exploration combined with the playful and curious excitement of a child in a candy store. He embodied the delicious possibilities of existence and the profound sense of satisfaction that intellectual exploration,



integrity and bravery can bring, especially when confronting power with knowledge. Even as he openly recognised that the possibility of a successful outcome in any such battle is always slim.

Those are the two features that were most crucial to what I admired about the man. It takes courage to speak out against injustice and ignorance wherever you see it, no matter whose sensibilities you ruffle. But it takes far more courage to do that when you realise that the odds are overwhelming that you will lose; that stupidity, prejudice, superstition, hatred, power, and money generally win. But it doesn't matter. You can't give up. But it's that second feature, that unadulterated joy of ideas of the human experience, the need



for irony and humour, and the recourse to the full banquet of human knowledge and culture that set Hitch apart from so many of the rest of us. Charm and wit when combined with actual knowledge is not to be underrated. Since his death I've been told by many people that that's the greatest loss to the cause of reason that brings all of us here today. I have to state personally that's what guides me. I remember on the day he died I told myself that to whatever small extent I could emulate any of those qualities in my own work, to keep the candle of joy and wonder and irony that he kept burning, I dedicate my life to that task. And many's the day when I think how would I want to present something? And I'm guided by that simple question that so many religious people ask in their lives, but I changed the wording, and I asked "what would Christopher do?" [applause].

The last time I saw him our discussions ranged from subjects relating to the nature of nothingness, quantum mechanics, and the obscenity that is capital punishment. The madness that governs the religious fanaticism infecting both sides of the Middle East conflict, the embarrassment that is Catholicism, and a related subject — the intellectual laziness and pretentious nonsense that encompasses so much of religious faith and theological noise in our popular culture.

Christopher was not a scientist but he was fascinated by the power of science. Not merely its possible impact on human affairs, but more importantly for him and for me, the remarkable ideas that it generates. He was wise enough to recognise that the universe is far more imaginative than we are. As one who craved experience of all aspects of intellectual life, he was as eager to learn from the universe as he was from the world's greatest writers, philosophers, and

historians. On the last day I was with him, someone came to the door and I answered it for Christopher, and the person delivered a manuscript and asked if I was his manager or his agent. I said no, I'm his personal physicist [laughter, applause]. I can think of very few greater honours that I would bestow upon myself than that, in fact.

Through his questions and reflections he extended my own understanding and implications of my own work. Just yesterday I described how when musing on the material I talked about, he described nothingness as heading straight towards us as fast as it can. That idea didn't terrify him. He realised that knowledge is not to be gained from comforting our souls but for enhancing the awareness of being alive.

There are two personal aspects of Christopher that may not be apparent to a broader audience, and I want to spend a minute on each. First, what I found so refreshing about talking to the man is that one could never be quite sure about what he'd say about any given subject. For many of us when we meet like-minded friends, we can remain complacent in the knowledge that we are pretty sure they'll agree with us or at least we know what they're going to say. But Christopher approached each subject in its own context, not in the context of liberalism or atheism or any ism. We debated the Iraq war late into the night and we never agreed. But that leads to the other quality I admired so much in him. His incredible tolerance. Now tolerance might not be the word that the public associated with him, listening to him and his public appearances. He had no tolerance for nonsense, for lying, posturing, and he was brave enough to attack even the self-serving pious evildoers like Mother Teresa, or popular liberal presidents like Bill Clinton. Even when it set him

apart from popular myths. But on a personal level he separated ideas from individuals. He had close friends with whom he was diametrically opposed. Francis Collins, a friend of both of ours, is Head of the National Institute of Health. His religious ideas border on the nutty if you ever listen to them, but not only was he a close friend of Christopher's, in fact he helped him tremendously in the last months of his life, and he served in fact as his medical adviser and friend. Justice Antonin Scalia, who is one of the bastions of evil on the Supreme Court of the United States right now, was nevertheless a regular guest at the Hitchens home, and I know his personal company was enjoyed by both Hitch and Carol on a regular basis.

Being able to befriend and charm even your intellectual enemies is something we can all learn from, that we can all emulate as we try to bring the light of reason into a world which so often shuts out. It requires courage and self-confidence combined with the ability to simply enjoy people as people.

I want to come close to the end with a bit of advice which he gave, and I think it is particularly pertinent to this meeting. In his book, *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, he said "We are an adaptable species and this adaptability has enabled us to survive, however adaptability can also constitute a threat. We may become habituated to certain dangers and fail to recognise them until it is too late. You exist at the whim of people whose power does not derive from your consent and who regard you as expendable and disposable. You merely failed to notice the moment at which you were conscripted. The normal life consists of living as if this most salient of facts was not a fact at all. Try your hardest to combat atrophy and routine, to question the obvious and the given is an essential element of the maxim



'de omnibus dubitandum' — doubt everything".

In that regard, just before leaving his company on that last day we were together, in one of those poetic accidents that makes life so unexpectedly enjoyable, I was reading a newspaper at his kitchen table and I was reading about an emerging effort to ensure that young people at elite institutions preserve their Catholic upbringing both during and after college.

In the last sentence, when describing the temptations to

depart from piety, the author wrote "exposed to Nietzsche, Hitchens, co-ed dorms and beer pong, such students are expected to stray" [laughter]. I reflected on what a remarkable tribute to the man that simple sentence represented [applause].

To be so overpowering in one's cultural impact that one can be mentioned without explanation is one thing. But to be sandwiched between Nietzsche and beer pong [laughter], that's an honour that very few of us can hope to achieve. And it is perhaps

the greatest way that Christopher would want to be remembered, so I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

Transcribed by Leanne Carroll

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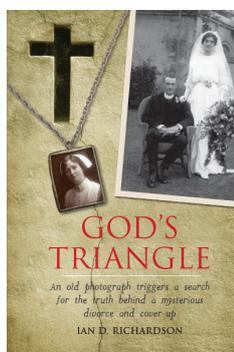
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## Book Review



### God's Triangle

By Ian D Richardson

Publisher: Richardson Media Limited, London.

ISBN: 13 9780957140103

Price: Approx. AU \$20.00

Reviewed by Tracy Burgess

**G**od's Triangle is a tale of tragedy and circumstance in a personal family history. The title character of "God" is not an explicit living character, rather, an influence on human interaction and a reason for ignorance and denial. That role being highly appropriate for a non-fiction book. Written in diary format, this book follows the trail of a man to understand a family mystery.

The story follows the life of the author's great aunt, her marriage, divorce (annulment) and eventual scheduling under the Mental Health Act. The story of Florence (Florrie) Cox. Her marriage and later annulment to Rev Frank Paice is a family mystery that many worked to keep secret. The detective work by Ian Richardson to uncover the stories of Florrie, Frank and Frank's second wife Olga leads him to an understanding of how detrimental it can be to live in ignorance and denial in a strict Christian society.

Florrie and Frank were Australian Christian missionaries in India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time when sexuality and basic biology were not discussed. It is important that the reader understand the implications of that society. In Australia in 2013 it is inconceivable that a young woman could reach a marriageable age with so little understanding of her own body. It could, however, still happens in various places around the

world today. It is a human tragedy that this is allowed to happen.

Had Florrie been better educated, not stilted and constrained by her religious upbringing, she may have been better able to cope. Frank could also have been better educated, but for his religious bindings. Both Florrie and Frank are victims of circumstance and victims of a society that refused to appropriately address gynaecological, physiological or sexual issues.

The reader is also provided with a glimpse of prevailing approaches to mental health in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia. Had Florrie instead been in 2013 she would not have spent the remainder of her life in severe mental health facilities. The "shame" attached to the situation was based upon ignorance in a very conservative society. I can only imagine the fear, confusion and frustration for both Florrie and Frank and I can only wish that things had been different for them.

I found the book to be heartfelt and considered in investigating two real people in tragic circumstances at a time of lack of knowledge, lack of openness and lack of intimate awareness. I would recommend it as an interesting insight into religious conservatives in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia.

<http://www.godstriangle.com>



# Beware the ignorant anger of the anti-scientist especially those with Facebook

By Tory Shepherd

First there was pre-scientific thinking. In medieval times people believed a balance of humors — blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile — were essential to health. In the ancient East it was hit-and-miss yin and yang or acupuncture.

Wars were fought, lives were lost, futures decided on the whims of Gods. People saw magic everywhere: in storms, in the stars.

For some people, things haven't changed all that much. They still think magically, still obey the Gods they invented.

But for most of us, science revolutionised the world. Science brought us medicine, technology, our understanding of our own biology, our origins. It helped us predict our future with far more accuracy than the stars, the tea leaves, the Delphi oracle.

Science is about shining a light in dark places.

Along with science came pseudoscience, claptrap dressed up in the garments of science, imitating it but casting no light; or projecting a false image.

Some pseudoscientists are very good actors with very good costumes. They use big words and wear white lab coats. They put "Dr" before their names and flourish meaningless bits of paper from online institutions. Pseudoscience is dangerous.

And then there is anti-science. Not just pre-scientific, non-scientific or pseudoscientific. A movement of people who are lividly, angrily anti-science.

Their triggers are, among other things, vaccines, climate change and fluoride in the water.

Last week I wrote about Independent MLC Ann Bressington. She'd shared a ridiculous "Wanted" poster on her Facebook page, saying Health Minister Tanya Plibersek had committed crimes against humanity by allowing fluoride in the water.

For the record, she denies she put it on her Facebook page. But it's there all the same.

Over 50 years fluoride in tap water has proven a cheap way to protect people's teeth from decay. Without it, more kids have more cavities, which can have far more serious effects on their nutrition intake and health.

But for Ms Bressington, it feeds into a range of

conspiracy theories on politicians, toxins and mind control.

She is a parliamentarian and, as such, needs to be held to account. She is whipping up the anti-scientific flying monkeys. Enraged, they swoop through the internet, caps lock on, mouths frothing, calling for people who defend science to be shot, hung, fired.

Ms Bressington wrote on her page that I am an "agent of death", that I have no soul. Her followers gleefully joined in, saying someone or something had to shut me up. I was called "whory", a "shitard", a "moron", among other things.

I've been called worse.

But what I find devastating is that at the heart of their rage lies this detestation and mistrust of science, the thing that makes this world better, that brings us closer to truth. They believe that the science is not just wrong, but wilful deception, that scientists are somehow defrauding the public to make them believe that fluoride is safe when in fact it is dangerous and toxic.

Up close science can be messy. Mistakes are made, scientists are human.

But the beauty of science lies in the way it learns lessons. Science self corrects, see-sawing ever closer to a better truth.

If somehow all the scientists got it wrong, that it turned out the climate wasn't changing, that vaccines did cause autism, that governments really are controlling people's minds through fluoride in the water, then the scientist who proved that would be published far and wide. They would win a Nobel and be hailed as heroes.

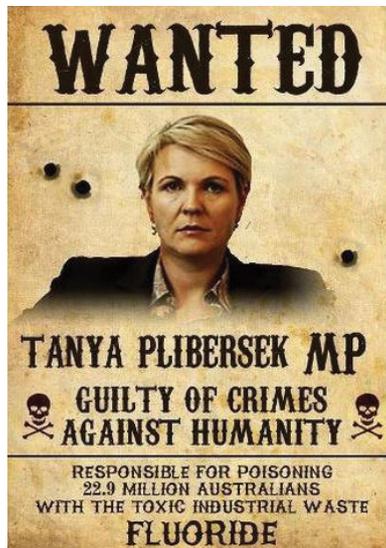
It hasn't happened.

If these anti-science keyboard warriors stuck to cyberspace, this wouldn't be as much of a concern. But they are influencing public policy in Queensland. Some councils will stop fluoridation and now, they have a representative right here in state Parliament.

As if there's not enough already wrong in the world of politics.

The article first appeared in *The Advertiser*  
4 March 2013

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Like thousands of parents across the country, we recently sent our eldest child off on her first day of school. Nervous and excited, she is most looking forward to learning how to read.

It's lucky, then, that we haven't sent her to one of the increasing number of public schools that offer dual streams: one of "conventional" teaching and learning, and one based on the philosophies of early-twentieth century Austrian guru Rudolf Steiner<sup>1</sup>. You see, among other non-evidence based practices, the Steiner system specifies that children should not be taught to read until they have cut their first adult tooth.

reverence. Activities such as beeswax modelling, mending, sweeping and baking are said to harmonise with the child's natural rhythms.

According to the website [steiner-australia.org](http://steiner-australia.org), too early an intellectual awakening will weaken

"...the child's vital forces, manifesting in frequent colds or other illnesses."

Instead, teaching about letters, numbers, reading and writing is held off until the child's "inherited physical body" has been remoulded into a new, self-created body and the child has been "reborn" — a time symbolised by the emergence of adult teeth.

## Wasting public money on the Steiner system

By Sarah McKenzie

At first glance, the Steiner philosophy sounds attractive and innocuous enough. Play, art and creative activities designed to "nurture the senses" attempt to develop the hidden potential in a child.

Anxious parents are told that in these "challenging times" of global warfare and violent crime, the mechanised mainstream education system lacks compassion and imagination, while the application of Steiner philosophies will create well-rounded, deep-thinking individuals.

All well and good, you might say. Who doesn't want their kids to "savour their childhood"?

However, digging a little deeper into the Steiner system reveals a hodge-podge of new age and religious ideas masquerading as education — ideas that clearly do not belong within a secular public education system.

There are currently six public schools in Victoria that offer a Steiner stream and no one will deny that many students who come out of the Steiner system are intelligent, decent people. Indeed, some of Steiner's increased focus on movement, art and music may even be beneficial in a mainstream system.

However, it should immediately ring alarm bells when the Association representing more than half of the Steiner schools in Australia describes its main aim as the advancement of

"...knowledge of the spiritual worlds underlying outer existence."

Among his many theories, Steiner's educational philosophy is based on the idea that child development can be divided into three essential phases. Up until the age of seven, children are said to have an intuitive sense of goodness and

From this time, children must write their own words and read their own writing before being allowed to work with printed literature. Never mind that evidence-based research shows that a rich literacy environment where children touch, hold and read from books are essential elements in developing literacy skills, a capacity for learning later in life and in shaping brain development.

It probably goes without saying that Steiner educators do not believe that children need to learn how to "push buttons on a computer" until the next stage of development (14 years+) because technology is believed to inhibit creative thinking. On the other hand, the study of the violin, viola or cello is compulsory from year 3.

Steiner school days begin and end with a verse in which students may thank God for various things, including planting the strength of human kind in their soul. Supporters, however, claim that the unspecified God mentioned is non-denominational and Steiner education is free from indoctrination.

According to Steiner's writings:

"The Steiner educator sees the child as consisting of body, soul and spirit."

Steiner believed that humans had three bodies: the physical, the astral and the etheric (a bit like an aura), which each develop at certain times in a child's life. Even if you do not class these beliefs as religious, they certainly require a suspension of the rational.

Aside from education, Steiner also had some interesting ideas on other topics. The self-proclaimed "occultist" was responsible for the development of the complementary medical movement, Anthroposophical Medicine<sup>2</sup>, which fused modern medicine with



homeopathy and spiritual awareness. Steiner spoke of having direct experiences of clairvoyance, and of being able to see into the souls of children and read the future. While not necessarily supporting our conventional version of astrology, he believed in a connection between stars and human beings, and in reincarnation.

No one is arguing that parents shouldn't have the right to educate their children within the philosophical framework of their choice. If some parents want their kids to learn that humans have existed on Earth since the creation of the planet

(although not in a physical form) then that is their prerogative. There should be no place, however, for such poorly-researched, spiritually-based hocus-pocus within our secular public education system.

Sarah McKenzie is a Melbourne-based freelance writer who has worked in the education sector for over ten years. She has published articles in *The Age*, *Herald-Sun*, *National Times*, *The Drum*, *The Punch*, *Crikey*, and more.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf\\_Steiner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Steiner)

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthroposophical\\_medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthroposophical_medicine)

The article first appeared in [www.independentaustralia.net/2013/life/education/wasting-public-money-on-the-steiner-system/](http://www.independentaustralia.net/2013/life/education/wasting-public-money-on-the-steiner-system/)  
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Please participate in PhD research regarding atheists — covering your experiences as an atheist, your involvement (if any) with secular organisations and your perceptions of discrimination and prejudice (if any) against you as an atheist.

[http://unrcfr.us.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_3QIZZFokgDdWBTF](http://unrcfr.us.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3QIZZFokgDdWBTF).

If you have already participated, thank you very much!

If you started the survey, but did not complete it, you should be able to click on the survey link and continue to completion. We are specifically seeking more responses from Australia because we have almost enough data for the responses of Australians to be identified at a statistically meaningful level.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and anonymous. Your responses will be combined with others, and no personally identifying information will be recorded. Your honest and complete answers are crucial to making sure survey results accurately represent the experiences of atheists.

The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, and will remain open until 27 March 2013.

Please feel free to share this link with anyone that you think would be interested.

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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.

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