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# The Australian Atheist

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Love

Blasphemy

Voluntary

Choice

Euthanasia

Abortion

Dignity

Same-sex marriage

Apostacy

Reason

RU486



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# From the Editor

It is hard to believe that a whole year has gone by since the hugely fantastic 2012 Global Atheist Convention. Whether or not it is hard to believe is irrelevant – it has been a whole year! As with the 2010 Convention, the AFA provided funding for a GAC Volunteers thank you get-together. With everyone being so busy with studies, work or other commitments, the 2012 “do” was organised as a one-year anniversary celebration. A small gathering enjoyed a sunny afternoon in Melbourne reminiscing over a few drinks and nibbles. All the volunteers received a complimentary DVD.

The 2012 Global Atheist Convention did not win the Ockhams award, mentioned in the previous issue, in the Best Event/Campaign category (hiss - boo) but our own Kylie Sturgess, compere of both conventions, won for *Token Skeptic* [www.tokenskeptic.org](http://www.tokenskeptic.org) in the best podcast category.

Congratulations, Kylie!

Voluntary euthanasia features heavily in this issue. Committee member Janine Gébert has written an impassioned letter to all state politicians in South Australia as a bill is to be debated in parliament soon. With that in mind, David Nicholls spoke with his local member of parliament and following his discussion wrote letters to the local newspaper.

Another atheist anniversary was celebrated this year, that being the 50th Anniversary of American Atheists. I have reproduced an article written by Don Lacey, their Arizona State Director. I admit to a certain bias toward his article because I am a fan of Madalyn Murray O’Hair, the woman who founded the American Atheist back in a time when it was even more unpopular to use the “A” word than it is today.

And, yes, I know many atheists disliked Madalyn with a passion. She was labelled “America’s Most Hated Woman” by *Life* magazine, but I think that was a huge compliment.

Congratulations to American Atheists on 50 Years of Reason.

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## Census Submission

Recent editions of *The Australian Atheist* have opined about the necessity to alter the format and the wording of the Census question on religion. “What is the person’s religion?” is bound to elicit the baptismal religion in some people even though they no longer follow any faith. This coupled with having the very large demographic of a no-religion box tucked away at the bottom of the form makes for a guaranteed distortion in results.

The AFA and other secular groups have made submissions to the Australian Bureau of Statistics and suggest that readers also might like to lend their weight by making similar submissions to the ABS. The deadline is 31 May. The AFA submission can be viewed [here](#). Just a few short sentences encompassing the above ideas are all that is needed. A true reflection of the changing religiosity of the Australian population is very important socially and politically. A few minutes of your time could make a lot of difference.

Details on making a submission can be found at the following website.

[www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2007.0main+features142016](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2007.0main+features142016)

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## Membership Renewals

To make the handling of renewals much less time consuming at the end of each June, we are adjusting the renewal dates to coincide with the date people joined. Over the next few months Julian and I will be sending letters and emails notifying everyone when membership is due.



# Annual General Meeting

## President's Report

Wednesday 20 March 2013

Shortly after the March 2012 AGM, the year began with a bang by the AFA conducting its second Global Atheist Convention in Melbourne in April. Laboriously detailed preparation made it a greater success than the first convention in 2010. The planned appearance of Christopher Hitchens as one of the Four Horsemen with Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris did not eventuate, with Hitch dying the December beforehand. That was sad and he was and still is missed. However, Ayaan Hirsi Ali graciously stepped in to make up the four.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 2012 Global Atheist Convention committee members. They all volunteered eighteen months of life to bring to fruition this outstanding achievement. It was accomplished with more than a pinch of panache. The majority had no rest from organising the 2010 GAC. It takes a certain devotion to duty to do this mammoth kind of enterprise twice.

Speaking globally, there are reasons why no other atheist organisation has held a convention anywhere near this magnitude. Those reasons are complete dedication and commitment for the seemingly endless time leading up to the convention, intelligent and continuous appraisal in working out problems, and fully accepting that once started, there was no getting off the train. Conventions the size of GACs are high-risk enterprises and many factors need to fall into place before entertaining the idea of holding one. They are mentally draining and financially risky, and cannot be entered into lightly.

However, world-class conventions such as this certainly are a great way to attract the media and the public to the atheist message. And what is that message? It is very simple in its basic form. If you want to use religion in the running of politics, evidence for your claims to supernatural knowledge must be backed up empirically. Australia is a good example where, to a growing number of the population, the penny is dropping concerning this.

The Atheist Foundation of Australia campaigned in 2011 to raise awareness that Census figures denoting religious adherents are skewed by various factors. By utilising its considerable resources, including spending tens of thousands of dollars on billboards, using Facebook effectively and promoting the idea that marking "No religion" on the Census was necessary, the AFA attempted to alter the erroneous status quo. There is no definitive proof that such a campaign worked or how well, but the results available in 2012 showed "No religion" numbers rose to a healthy 22.3 per cent. In combination with the "Not stated" of about 9 per cent, Australia is witnessing the fall of religion.

It is not going to happen overnight. But within a few generations, religion will have a minimal base of believers. The power structures of religion might persist in hanging on longer but eventually they also will fall by the wayside. With only about 7 per cent of regular churchgoers, who are aging, any other outcome seems unlikely. Even though the same cannot be said so confidently for the rest of the planet, there are positive signs that there is a historically rapid rise of freethinking even in the most religious of regimes.

The problem with counting the non-religious numbers here and in some other Western countries is how the question is asked. There is an assumption in many Censuses' questions that the person holds a religion. Australia is a good example, with "What is the person's religion?" The AFA Census Committee has made a submission to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to have this altered. The submission can be viewed here. (<http://atheistfoundation.org.au/assets/2016-Census-Submission-Form.pdf>)

Generally, the first port of call by visitors to the Atheist Foundation of Australia is our main website or one of the AFA's convention websites. Dave Fregon has built and maintained the latter and Julian Jordan has recently refurbished the former. Julian, as well as being the AFA treasurer, is a very competent technical person who we appreciate and stand in awe of at the amount of effort he expends on this side of the operation.

It has been an excellent year for the AFA Public Relations Team of twenty or so very intelligent and steadfast people who have answered inquiries from the public ranging from the banal to the more really-wanting-to-know type. The PR Team is an asset that the AFA is most proud of and one that fulfils a role no other secular organisation in Australia does so comprehensibly or so brilliantly.

The AFA Committee of Management has performed wonderfully over the last twelve months. The decisions and ensuing work achieved by the AFA Committee keep the secular pot boiling. Being on the AFA Committee is a popular item. Consequently, by unanimous vote, we have had to limit the number to twenty Committee Members to avoid a situation where confusion rules. Even so, twenty is a very



large committee for a non-profit organisation.

Some people may not be aware that the AFA Facebook page, managed by Jason Ball, Lee Holmes and Danny Jarman, is a very active location on the internet. It could be viewed as the general public mind of atheism. You may like to visit is sometime. Another indispensable part of the AFA is our Forums, supervised by Danny Jarman, who is the Administrator, with it being watched over diligently by our marvellous Moderation Team. It is a place where all are welcome to express ideas, seek help with problems and to share in an atmosphere where camaraderie mainly prevails. Why not take a look?

The flagship of the AFA is *The Australian Atheist* magazine. *The Australian Atheist*, under the editorship of Lee Holmes has gone from strength to strength over the years. It is a unique publication and many folk see it as their window to sanity every two months. Thanks, Lee and also to co-editor Tom Melchiorre, and not forgetting the indefatigable Nigel Sinnott, who hovers in the background as proof reader, pouncing as he should, and is well capable of, on English that is not English.

And last but definitely not least, it is obvious but should be remarked on that support by individual members of the Atheist Foundation of Australia is the reason we exist. The combination of the previously-mentioned people and the expanding numbers of members, supporters and friends is keeping the Atheist Foundation of Australia at the forefront of secularism in this country.

Well done, everyone, and thank you.

David

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Committee member Danny Jarman was interviewed by journalist Fiona Baker about Easter and children. The article appeared in the *Body+Soul* section of the *News Limited* Sunday papers on 31 March – Easter Day.

**“Questions about religion can be tricky to answer if you don’t have much knowledge about it or don’t want to overly influence beliefs.”**

Danny Jarman, of the Atheist Foundation of Australia, urges parents to talk to their kids about the roots of these religious holidays and the “mythology” that wraps around them.

“They are very interesting stories which kids can find fascinating — although the Easter one is a bit gruesome,” he says.

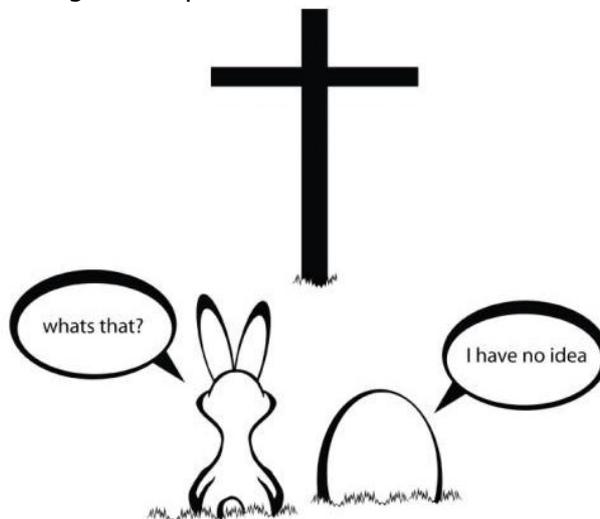
The father of four believes parents should talk to their kids about all religions in a way that neither indoctrinates nor judges.

“We need to raise critical thinkers who can learn to make their own decisions about religion and politics.

We want them to ask questions and seek knowledge, and parents can help with this.”

But finding non-religious information about Christian holy days can be a bit of a hard task. Many of the websites that spring up on a search have religious backing. Jarman encourages parents to be discerning about the information they share with their kids.

“It’s okay to be honest about your own beliefs and to preface any information with: ‘Some people believe...’,” he says.



# From the Inbox

The AFA often receives questionnaires from students to assist with their projects. This one was answered by PR Team Members Tracy (TB), Jac (JD), and Nigel (NS). Editor

## What is your purpose in life?

**TB:** I don't believe that life has an inherent "purpose". Instead, I think you mean what is the purpose I choose to give my life, and that would be to be the best me that I can be. I want to make the most of the abilities and chances I have. I want to give back to the community and world I live in.

**JD:** There is no purpose in my life, or for that matter, to my life or for my life or just plain life, other than having life. I generally attempt to make the most of it, I mostly do the best I can, mostly use such abilities as I possess or have acquired, and I do this mostly to make my life as secure and pleasant as possible for the short duration I'm on this rough and tumble old world. Any notion that there is a purpose to life is nothing more than shallow, empty-headed wishful thinking, and that is certainly *not* my purpose!

Be clear about this: no life has a purpose. Life just is. Call it a curse, call it a blessing, but the reality is it simply is. Period. Attempting to assign a purpose to life is like assigning a purpose to a rock.

**NS:** To be useful and helpful; to listen, read and learn; and to "do my bit" in society, to try to make a difference, if only in a small way. However, I do not think my life has an external "purpose"; I was not "put on the Earth" for some divine or mystical purpose.

## What is your source of happiness?

**TB:** I find happiness in friends and family. I find lots of small things make me happy. A quiet morning coffee with no disturbances, a sudoku puzzle I can complete, a favourite song on the radio, my cats curling up with me on the lounge, a child laughing, a kiss, human touch, rain on the roof as I go to sleep. My source of happiness is myself and my appreciation of the world around me.

**JD:** Happiness is at best a rare and fleeting occurrence. There is in reality no such condition as "happiness", except as perhaps experienced by the deluded and the insane. Every single human being is rather inclined to be generally "unhappy". It's just that we may experience short durations of being less "unhappy" than at other times. This creates the illusion of being "happy". Very occasionally we may have cause to be ecstatic, joyful and seemingly deliriously and deliciously happy: but those occasions are rare and barely persist. Ere too long we slip back into our mediocre grey state of being neither happy nor unhappy. Music, art, books, my family, my dog and the natural world allows me to temporarily escape the

unhappiness orbit.

Oh, and fast cars.

**NS:** There is no one source. I cannot be happy all the time; few people can. Being creative; having strong emotional bonds with others. I do not subscribe to the notion that you can find happiness by solitary navel-gazing; except for a few "loners", human beings are social animals, so we need friends, relatives, colleagues, acquaintances and lovers to maintain emotional health.

## What is your final destination?

**TB:** I don't understand the question. I presume implied if not heaven/hell, then where after death? Nowhere. My final destination will be University of NSW Medical Research Facility as I have completed the forms to donate my body to them after death.

**JD:** Like yours, in a box or a sack, under the surface or in an urn; sooner alas for some, than for others.

**NS:** H'mm! Well, most of me will probably be emitted as carbon dioxide and water vapour from a crematorium chimney; and the rest, ashes, will, if all goes well, be scattered by my elder daughter in a place I am very fond of. The wind and the rain can see to the rest.

## What is your meaning of suffering?

**TB:** Suffering takes many forms. At the most basic level it is the denial of aspects of this world that make us human; freedom, love, self determination, self respect, friendship, family, health...

**JD:** To live is to suffer, in between moments of unhappy/happiness.

**NS:** I am not sure that suffering has any cosmic "meaning"; it is more a feature of life in an imperfect world. Pain can have useful functions at times: warn us of injury and to rest or seek assistance. In other circumstances pain and suffering are debilitating and should be relieved as far as possible. I am very wary of glib notions that suffering "ennobles" people.

## What is your view on the afterlife?

**TB:** I don't believe in an afterlife. I believe we live on in the memory of those who loved us and to me that is enough.

**JD:** Poppycock. There's no logical reason to think there's such a thing. It's delusional, wishful thinking.

**NS:** A rather sad form of wishful thinking for people who cannot really accept that they are mortal. As far as I know, I did not have a "beforelife" before I was conceived, so when I die I reckon I am as dead as any other creature whose life is over.

## What is your view on abortion?

**TB:** I think it is a woman's right to choose what



she does with her own body. Having said that, I also know that it is not a decision a woman takes lightly. A woman making such a choice has already emotionally considered the options and does not need others weighing in on what is a very difficult decision. I would support any woman's choice.

**JD:** That's the business of the woman concerned, and absolutely no one else's. And, most certainly, not that of menfolk!

**NS:** I assume you are talking about induced (medical) abortion rather than spontaneous abortion (miscarriage). Induced abortion is a sad business (I know: I have sat and observed one), but a woman has the right to decide whether she will continue with a pregnancy. Induced abortion should be legal and readily available if the woman involved wants it. Forced abortions, as have occurred in totalitarian régimes, should be a criminal offence: assault occasioning bodily harm.

#### **What is your view on war?**

**TB:** I believe that all diplomatic avenues should be investigated before armed conflict. I think war is a travesty. Nobody ever truly wins. There are occasions where troops are required to stabilise a conflicting state (UN Troops assisting with food distribution, health supplies, etc). However, if I could make a wish and have it come true, there would be no war. Young people die, generally women and children are treated very badly, and all for the sake of

politics. There would have to be a very good humanitarian reason for me to support sending troops into another country.

**JD:** Disgusting! We ought to stop it right now.

**NS:** Something to avoid as far as possible. A lot of wars leave a legacy of pain and bitterness and can sow the seeds of another war. In very rare conditions war as a form of resistance may be preferable to being overrun and oppressed. As a general rule, democratic countries do not go to war with each other: they accept arbitration. Most wars since 1910 have involved a totalitarian régime on at least one and sometimes (World War II) both sides. Modern wars very often kill far more non-combatants than the armed forces on each side.

#### **What is your view on human dignity?**

**TB:** I see human dignity as a fundamental human right. Respect from others and, by extension, respect of self is a right of all of us. It is something I have actively spent my life advocating for on behalf of others.

**JD:** I'm all for it.

**NS:** Basically a good idea, for social and emotional health. People are entitled to feel safe and to feel they have a place in the community in which they live. Denying people dignity and respect demoralises and harms them, and brutalises the minority, usually an élite, who think they are better or "born to rule".

**I**t's an incredible con job when you think about it, to believe something now in exchange for something after death. Even corporations with their reward systems don't try to make it posthumous.

— Gloria Steinem

**W**e are at the very beginning of time for the human race. It is not unreasonable that we grapple with problems. But there are tens of thousands of years in the future. Our responsibility is to do what we can, learn what we can, improve the solutions, and pass them on.

— Richard P. Feynman

**O**ne's life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation and compassion.

— Simone de Beauvoir

**N**ever think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime.

— Ernest Hemingway



# Media Releases

## Warped – Thy Name is Religion

2 April 2013

The Atheist Foundation of Australia found the conversation on the ABC's Q&A program on Monday 1 April extremely disturbing. Below is the transcript on the ABC's Q&A website between presenter Tony Jones and Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane Mark Coleridge in reference to homosexuality.

TONY JONES: "So, sorry, can we just confirm what you're saying there? So if it is not chosen, that means God has created it?"

MARK COLERIDGE: "No, not necessarily at all. It can be — **it can be a warp in the creation** to use that rather unfortunate expression."

This was a statement from a man who is celibate, overseeing his part of a failing empire which has no credible evidence in support of its claims to supernatural knowledge. What can be more warped than pontificating about what he thinks are the thoughts of an imaginary friend when the consequences are so dire?

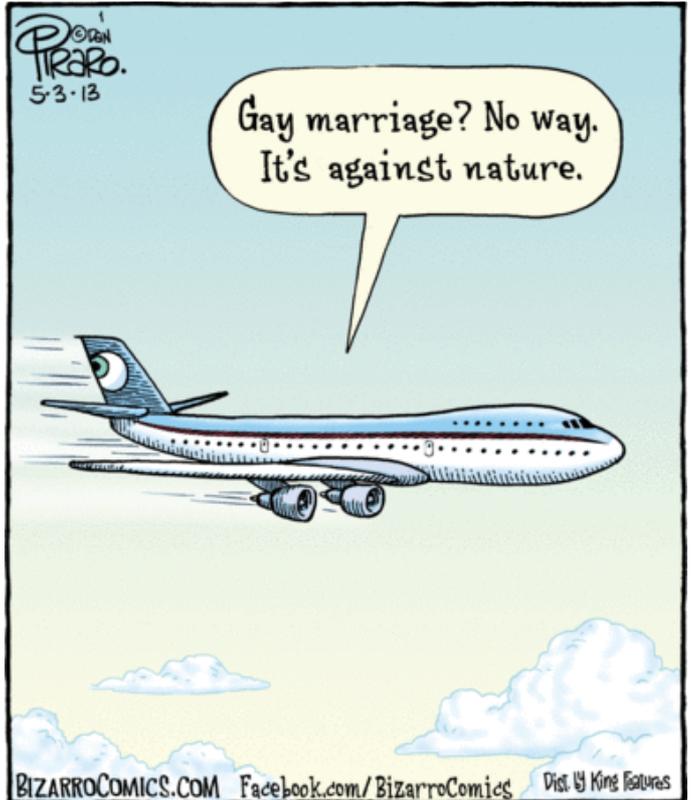
In typical style of praising only his alleged god for the good things and excusing it for what his church deems bad, Mark Coleridge added considerably to the existing prejudice toward homosexual people with this ignorant comment.

The Catholic Church, and indeed most religions, are floundering out of their depth about homosexuality and many other social issues. They are causing real harm to people, and even death, by reinforcing an anachronistic attitude about homosexuality that worldly-educated people have long ago realised was false.

Mark Coleridge can and should apologise personally for such a hurtful comment, but he can never say it was wrong according to present Catholic theology.

President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia David Nicholls said, "It is shameful that the media leave these comments unchallenged."

See: [www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/txt/s3717805.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/txt/s3717805.htm)



## Blasphemy is Bullshit

13 March 2013

It is a clear demonstration of an imaginary deity's impotency and incapacity to do its own bidding when humans have to make edicts to defend its alleged hurt pride. Blasphemy laws are more about the insecurity of the believer than an attempt to protect a god. Any god in need of such human intervention is a god not worth its salt.

People all over the planet are being threatened, imprisoned, tortured and killed by religious fanatics for daring to make comment about the veracity of religious magical thinking. This is one of the worst aspects of accepting mythology as fact. It turns humans into mob-ruled ideological monsters willing to destroy the lives of others in protecting their own doubts and fears.

Replacing freedom of expression and speech with legally binding penalties for a myriad of subjective notions is a recipe only benefiting tyrannical religious/political systems.

President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia David Nicholls said, "I urge all rational and reasonable people to strongly oppose any attempts at having blasphemy initiated into law anywhere on the planet."

See: <http://ex-muslim.org.uk/2013/03/14-march-2013-international-day-to-defend-apostates-and-blasphemers/>

**T**he Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) has urged the government to reject the recommendation of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) to publicly fund abortion drug RU486.

ACL spokesperson Wendy Francis said subsidising the controversial drug — a recommendation likely to be made by PBAC today — ignores the human rights of the unborn and the adverse effects this chemical has on women.

“ACL calls on the Health Minister, Tanya Plibersek, to reject the advice of PBAC. It is the duty of our government to protect the most vulnerable, and to protect women from potential harm. Subsidising RU486 does the exact opposite,” she said.

“Taxpayer funding of this means everyone who does not support abortion has their freedom of conscience trampled upon by making them complicit in abortion.

“The government should not force those who do not agree with abortion to help pay for it. There are question marks over the health impacts on women.

“Let’s not forget that in 2010, a Melbourne woman tragically died from infection after taking RU486.

“The Therapeutic Goods Administration told the Senate last year that since 2006 there had been 832 adverse impacts on women as a result of RU486 with 599 of these women requiring surgery to remove a poisoned embryo,” she said.

It is understood that this represents about five per cent of cases of the drug use.

“Women facing unsupported pregnancies should be offered real support — not a chemical which is harmful to both them and their unborn child,” Ms Francis said.

It’s understood public funding of the drug would make it available for around \$12, much less than the current cost of \$300.

The drug was approved in 2006, and the Therapeutic Drugs Administration (TGA) last year approved its importation into Australia.

[www.acl.org.au/2013/04/mr-acl-urges-government-to-reject-subsidy-of-abortion-drug-ru486/#comments](http://www.acl.org.au/2013/04/mr-acl-urges-government-to-reject-subsidy-of-abortion-drug-ru486/#comments)

## Subsidising RU486 - Don't agree? Then don't use it.

27 April 2013

**I**t is not surprising to the Atheist Foundation of Australia (AFA) that the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) is yet again attempting to force its narrow views on all women, this time in relation to subsidising the cost of the chemical abortion drug RU486, despite support for this from a democratically-elected government and the majority of Australians.

Their offensive claims that women need to be protected are based on patriarchal assumptions that women of all ages are unable to process information and come to their own decisions about what will and will not be harmful to them. And they obviously think that poorer women have even less ability to make informed choices, since this subsidy will allow them to now have access to a drug that previously only more affluent women could obtain.

The ACL’s statement that taxpayers opposed to abortions will be helping fund them again highlights their deliberate ignorance of how democratic systems work. Atheists’ taxes fund religious schools that still promote ownership of women’s bodies, and the resulting anguish, illness, and sometimes suicides from too many children or unwanted pregnancies. Our taxes fund private hospitals across Australia that refuse to perform abortions for women in need, and our taxes fund World Youth Day and other religious events. Millions of our taxes have been squandered over decades to incarcerate people for crimes, not against humanity, but against religion, homosexuality being one example.

Our taxes subsidise politicians in this country who want to use their religious beliefs as a weapon against women to force a ban on family planning and abortion in developing countries, where women die in the thousands from child-bearing and from the poverty associated with trying to provide for large families. The precedent for linking foreign aid to control of women’s bodies began with Senator Harradine and, though overturned by Rudd, is still currently promoted by some current Christian members of Parliament.

The ACL is not the official conscience of women across Australia, or anywhere else.

President of the AFA, David Nicholls said, “No one is being forced to use RU486, and no doctor is being forced to prescribe it.”

“It is time fundamental religious groups got over their obsession with using women’s reproductive function as a means of control and coercion, and focused instead on overcoming poverty, inequality and injustice for all,” he said.



# Letter to South Australian Politicians on Voluntary Euthanasia

By Janine Gébert



I was raised in a Catholic household. I recently married a devout Catholic, an ex-seminarian and daily communicant, with a large Catholic family. I respect that for him, death, no matter how hard, is in his God's hands. I will respect his position with my last breath. And the laws of the land will allow him that choice. What I want to know is who is there to respect and honour my position, arrived at arduously and intelligently.

I have a secular view of the world. But that has little to do with my passionate belief in my right as a rational adult to have some say over the manner in which I die. I meet regularly with other pro-voluntary Euthanasia supporters. They are Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist and atheists, and every position in between and either side. The belief in the right to die with dignity transcends all faith and non-faith positions. What unites us is our passion for the fundamental right to have a say in what happens to us at the end of our life, whether you think it is the only one we have or not.

Once again, some politicians are aiming to block another attempt to pass a bill that the huge majority of Australians want, a majority that will steadily increase as the population ages. This is a conscience vote I am told. But what exactly is that? Is that the right to secretly impose your view on to me, and others? Or is it to accept, that whilst this may never be your personal opinion or choice, other sane adult Australians have the same right to decide their own end of life choices as you do. A conscience vote means you cannot participate in a particular action. It does not mean you have the right to impose it on the majority of the Australian people who hold an alternative position. Democracy is about the conscious collective of the majority. It is not about imposing your conscience on the rest of us.

Ah, some say. But in the democratic process, those that oppose voluntary euthanasia can be voted out. How? It is a secret vote. Only the arrogant who believe they are on God's chosen mission are coming out. The rest are lurking in the sacred shadows of secrecy and deception.

I regularly see the pain of people who feel compelled, in the lack of any compassionate legislation, to take their lives before they are ready. The people with Motor Neurone Disease, who must act while they still have physical mobility, for to ask a loved one to help them when they are ready would currently put that loved one at risk of 12 – 25 years jail. The shame of knowing that in Australia most elderly people who want to end their lives hang themselves — alone.

When you vote against this legislation I think you honestly believe that you are saving lives. But I know you are taking years and years away from many good and decent people. Every time this legislation is blocked, my heart, and many others sink, and the years we have open to us diminish.

I am a cancer survivor. I don't want to be left incapacitated by a stroke or suffer the slow lingering physical robbery of Motor Neurone or Huntington's disease, or the identity theft of Alzheimer's. Some say that is selfish. I say do not sit in judgement on me.

And I know a little of what I am talking about. My experience is not all theoretical. I had to decide to let my comatose daughter die, through non-administering of food and water. No parent ever wants to go through that with the person they love and gave life to. My daughter and I battled cancer together. Both survived. But she never recovered from the depression that followed. As a nurse she obtained the means to take her own life. However, she did not die but was left massively brain damaged. She could have lived in a vegetative state. That would have been better for me. But we had discussed what we both wanted, and she did not want to be less than she was. The greatest act of love I could give, anyone can give, is to respect the wishes a loved one has made unambiguously clear to you.

No one of faith should attempt to interpret God for me. That is theological and spiritual arrogance of the highest order. It is un-Christian and unacceptable. You are not my conscience. As believers, are you telling me God would not have expected me to use the brains he gave me to make reasoned and rational



decisions? Most people, even terminally ill people, have an incredible will to live — with dignity. The definition of dignity is a demonstration of respect. Please, could you show me some?

And do not offend my intelligence with the slippery slope argument touted out by every reactionary since time began. I am old enough to remember when seat belts were introduced. It was going to kill hundreds of people who would have previously been thrown out of the cars. When capital punishment was stopped, murder was about to become an epidemic. Voluntary euthanasia is legal in Oregon, Montana, Washington, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Civilisation has not ceased and people are not lining up to kill themselves. Quite the reverse.

And do not insult elderly people by saying we will feel vulnerable, compelled to take ourselves off. We have minds of our own thank you very much. Of course there are vulnerable people — and unscrupulous people. But no one can legislate against bad people who do the wrong thing by some people. But they are doing that now!

And for those who believe that Jesus is God, remember that Jesus had the power to end his suffering, but chose not to. He had control of his suffering. And that is all we ask. We are also not asking to end our lives. We are asking to stop the protracted, technologically-induced, dying process. Medical advances mean we are living way beyond the biblical three score years and ten, as a result of human intervention. How is one form of intervention okay but

not another?

And these same men in suits (and they are still the majority) who deplore my end of life rights will have no hesitation sending my son or daughter off to die at eighteen in a war they choose but my children have no say in.

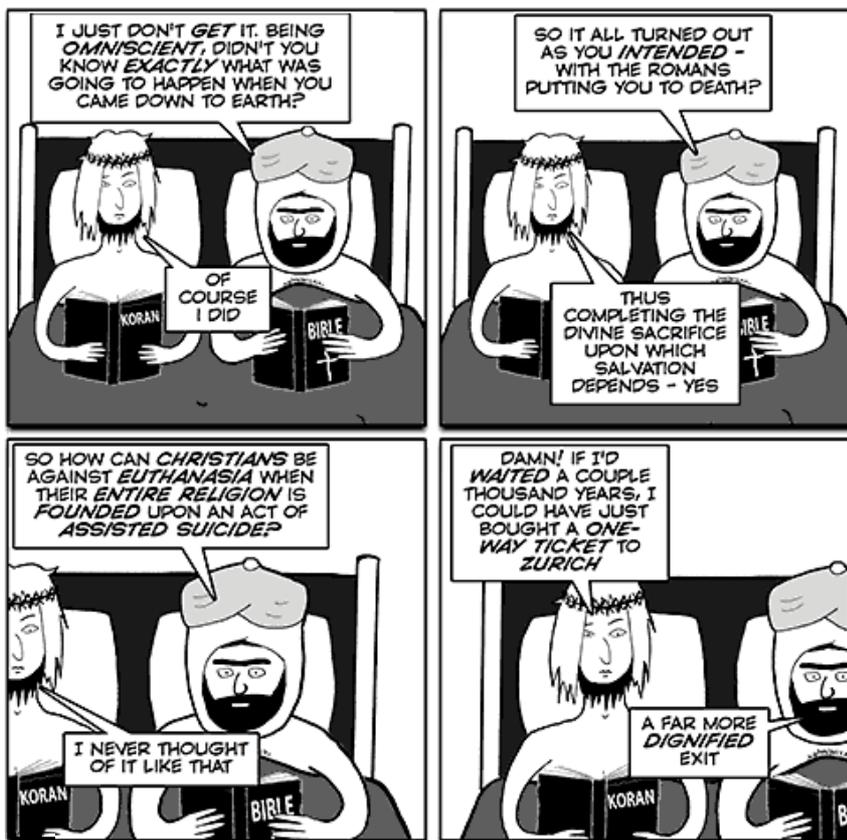
A conscience vote does not give you the right to be my conscience. I don't believe this should even be a conscience vote. No Catholic is being forced to end their life prematurely on the outcome of this vote. As no-one has to act against their conscience no matter the outcome, how is it this is a conscience vote? Whatever the vote, you are able to end your life as you wish. But how you vote, affects my quality of life now, and how it finishes. That takes it out of the realm of the personal, and into the domain of control.

I want to know, and so does the electorate, how each Member of Parliament votes on this issue. This is a public issue, and you are accountable to your electorate. A conscience vote in this case is an attempt to appease and privilege a minority religious position. And to do it in secret — let's be real. This is not about conscience — it is about ideology.

I ask all politicians of all faiths and no faith to vote on this legislation in the public domain and for the public good. We all have a say in how we live. Everyone is entitled to have a say in how they wish to die.

This vote is not about your conscience. It is about the right for everyone to exercise theirs — equally.

<sup>1</sup> [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15261001](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15261001)



## Jesus and Mo



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## Politicians abusing the democratic system

16 April 2013

Every one of us is in the lottery where we could end our days in unremitting suffering with a terminal illness and no legal way of dying with dignity.

Authorities acknowledge that palliative care, at its best, fails in a minority of cases leaving people facing a formidable, torturous and slow death.

There is a voluntary euthanasia (VE) bill before the South Australian parliament right now that could end this abysmal situation if it is passed.

Over 80 per cent of the population, by reputable market polling, are demanding the right to choose a peaceful end if they are unfortunate enough to find themselves in this position.

Our parliamentarians have been remiss in granting the informed wishes of this large demographic on many occasions in the past. Some have used the mischievous and evidentially false excuses of "killing granny" and the imaginary "slippery slope" arguments or it will lead to killing more people illegally.

All these so-called arguments have proven to be incorrect and unsubstantiated in the countries that already have legal voluntary euthanasia or physician-assisted dying. In fact, this is backed by solid and indisputable evidence.

I have forwarded Local MP, Stephen Griffiths such evidence and spoken with him on the subject.

If Stephen votes in support of legalising voluntary euthanasia, he fulfils the role for which he was elected.

If he votes against the bill because of private conscience, he needs to be reminded that he

was elected to do the wishes of an informed public, not impose personal minority positions onto the overwhelming majority.

The only democratically ethical option, then, is to abstain. Stephen is obliged to publically state how he will vote on the VE bill.

He is further obliged to supply solid evidence supporting the reasons for his decision.

David Nicholls  
President  
Atheist Foundation of Australia

## Euthanasia

23 April 2013

Parliamentary consideration of euthanasia may benefit from realising how dying patients suffer only when there is a failure to provide high-quality palliative care.

While some rare situations require the patient to be placed in a highly-medicated, semi-comatose condition, with appropriate hydration and nutrition, why should this be considered undignified?

But attempts to provide safeguards for legalised euthanasia have proven to be completely unworkable in Holland and Belgium.

David d'Lima  
Adelaide

## Leave things as they are

30 April 2013

I am writing in reply to David Nicholls' letter (16-3-13) about voluntary euthanasia.

Firstly, he is saying Steven Griffiths is obliged to state publicly how he will vote. I am sure Mr Griffiths will look at all sides of the argument before voting.

I don't know where Mr Nicholls gets his "more than 80 per cent of

the population" from, I have never been asked where I stand on the issue and I wouldn't be surprised if anyone on the peninsula would have been asked.

As for the bill, I find it rather disgusting it is even being considered by parliament, death is not the end of suffering, it is only the beginning for some people.

People are not like animals, they have a soul which lives on forever.

When it was legalised in the Northern Territory for a while, there were people there who were killed and could have been healed.

Does he realise this bill is so flawed even young people suffering from depression could be legally killed?

I feel sorry for the doctors who would have to kill people if the bill gets through.

Mr Nicholls, can you take a chance on facing eternity on your belief that there is not a God?

If you think it is okay to kill people who are sick, do you think it is okay to torture innocent babies?

In some cases, they are murdered while at the same age as those born prematurely and their lives are saved.

Sometimes, they are killed because there has been shown to be a problem with the babies while in the womb.

We have a very close relative who was said to have Spina Bifida before he was born and is now a teenager without any problems at all. If the mother had listened to the doctor who said she should have him aborted, this lovely child would not have been born.

In summary, I say leave these things as they are and don't interfere with God who knows best in all circumstances.

Robert Lawrie  
Yorke Peninsula



## Illusory slippery slope

In only three sentences of opinion, David d'Lima (23-4-13) says nothing which is factually correct about voluntary euthanasia (VE) law reform, and a number of things which are wrong.

Firstly, he talks only of "euthanasia" and not "voluntary" euthanasia which is the subject of the Ending Life with Dignity Bill in the South Australian Parliament.

Secondly, he wrongly asserts "high-quality palliative care" can always alleviate intolerable suffering at the end of life. It can't always. Palliative Care Australia acknowledges and holds a position of neutrality towards the legalisation of VE.

Thirdly, he opines a person suffering intolerably and without relief or any realistic chance of improvement from a terminal or advanced incurable illness ought to spend their final chapter in a highly medicated, semi-comatose condition with hydration and nutrition.

In fact, this could cause a person to languish in such a state for months and even years before death.

To some people that is a vile travesty of their personhood and life values. Why does Mr d'Lima assume his own beliefs and values should be forced on others?

And fourthly, Mr d'Lima asserts without giving a shred of evidence that "legalised euthanasia" has comprehensively failed in the Netherlands and Belgium.

His statements ignore the fact the rate of non-voluntary euthanasia (assisting a patient to die without a current, explicit request) has dropped very significantly in both the Netherlands and in Belgium since their voluntary euthanasia laws came into effect.

He also ignores the fact the rate of non-voluntary euthanasia in Australia, the only time it has been measured, was five times higher

than the Netherlands at the time.

The illusory slippery slope he tries to conjure out of thin air is just that: a figment of imagination.

Frances Coombe  
President  
South Australian Voluntary  
Euthanasia Society

## Democracy or theocracy

David d'Lima (23-4-13) did not mention his position as state officer of *Family Voice Australia* in South Australia, a Christian Ministry opposed to voluntary euthanasia.

It is very disturbing to read his statements against voluntary euthanasia, completely unsupported by evidence.

I advise him to investigate the freely available facts, supported by evidence, on the South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society (SAVES) website which has many links to numerous studies. If it is allowed that parliamentarians use the power the electors have given them to support their own personal supernatural views, then that is not democracy — it is a theocracy.

David Nicholls  
President  
Atheist Foundation of Australia

## Personal choice

I do wish correspondents like David d'Lima (23-4-13) would be honest and say, "I have religious objections to any attempt to change the law regarding subjects like euthanasia and consequently I am determined to try to impose my views on everyone else, regardless of their wishes or their belief systems". Instead of cloaking their real agenda behind an unctuous concern for the well-being

of sufferers of terminal illnesses.

Mr d'Lima apparently has access to an entirely different set of statistics from those available to me, regarding the effectiveness of palliative care and the laws in Holland and Belgium. Let's face it; no one is forcing him, or those like him, to take advantage of any changes to the law.

But if he has his way, his personal belief system would stop me and those like me from having the choice of a peaceful and dignified end to my life should I be suffering from an agonising terminal illness — and I do not like that at all.

Margaret Woods  
Yorke Peninsula

## LVE safe and effective

7 May 2013

It is certainly hoped Robert Lawrie (YPCT 30-4-13) is correct in that Steven Griffiths will look at the evidence concerning a system of legal voluntary euthanasia (LVE).

That evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates LVE is safe and effective in countries where it operates.

Here are some points Mr Lawrie should have taken into account with his response:

- If Mr Lawrie had looked at the bill he would know having depression disallows access to voluntary euthanasia.
- The *Morgan* and *Newspolls* are reliable methods for ascertaining public opinion. Those harbouring conspiracy theories might not think so.
- The existence of a God, souls and eternal punishment are irrelevant to the voluntary euthanasia bill. By the same reliable polling, the majority of religious folk also agree with LVE.
- Abortion has nothing to do with LVE.

Might I reiterate no one is excluded from the lottery where the



“prize” is ending up in unremitting suffering with a terminal illness.

As you lie there in abject misery with no hope of reprieve, will you then be so forgiving of politicians whose own personal religious interpretations not only usurped democracy but were responsible for your sorry plight? Think about it.

David Nicholls  
President  
Atheist Foundation of Australia

## Prevent intolerable suffering

An interesting point of view from Robert Lawrie (YPCT 30-4-13). His response to the prospect

of allowing people with incurable terminal illness to have the option of a dignified and peaceful death raised the same arguments that surfaced when chloroform for women in childbirth was developed in the 1800s.

It goes against God’s laws, the religiously inclined howled, women were meant to give birth in agony.

Not much would have changed if Mr Lawrie had his way, as he confidently states, “leave these things as they are and don’t interfere with God who knows best in all circumstances”.

Do I therefore assume Mr Lawrie eschews anaesthetics, antibiotics and pain relief medication for conditions like arthritis and would leave it to God to decide if he were to live or die should he develop any

illness?

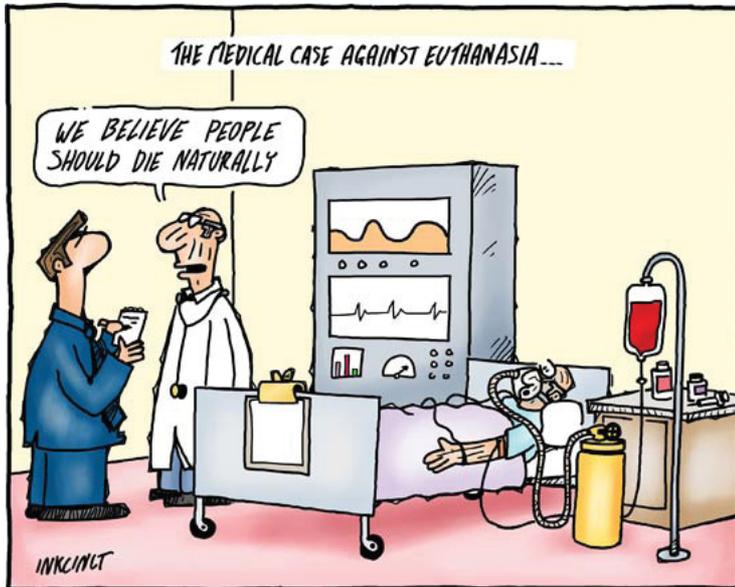
Leaving it to God would, I fear, bring back gangrene, the Black Death, cholera and the mindset that killed millions before Lister developed antiseptics.

I find his viewpoint that the proposed legislation would unleash wholesale slaughter of their nearest and dearest by one’s friends and neighbours rather odd.

I do not have this view of my fellow citizens. I tend to think their priority would be to prevent intolerable suffering rather than tell the sufferer this is what God wants for them.

But then, I don’t have Mr Lawrie’s understanding of God’s mind.

Margaret Woods  
Yorke Peninsula



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The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. To be your own man is hard business. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.

— Rudyard Kipling

Death is not the greatest of evils; it is worse to want to die, and not be able to.

— Sophocles



# 2012 GAC Volunteer's Reunion



Thanks for inviting us to the reunion, it was a nice afternoon with like-minded people and we could share the highlights of the last two conventions.

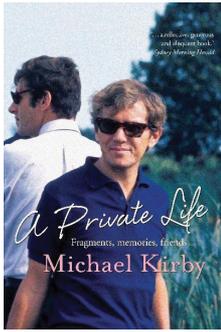
In particular we could remember being in the same small after party chatting with Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Lawrence Krauss, Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker (this last one in beautiful Spanish) — I wonder how many atheists can claim that!

David Jimenez



**Steven, Jack, David, Tanusharee, Marta, Jessica, James, Ted and Daniel.**

# BOOK REVIEWS



## A Private Life Fragments, memories, friends

By Michael Kirby

Publisher: Allen & Unwin May 2012

ISBN: 9781743311691

Reviewed By Rose Leaf

This memoir, by a man whom many admire, recalls not only his judicial record, but also his espousal of gay causes in Australia and overseas, including somewhat hidebound, developing African countries as well as more puritan institutions of our own, such as the Salvation Army.

It is a most stimulating, enjoyable, even gentle, read. One browses with him through his early family life in Concord, NSW, and even his unblushing crushes on film stars like James Dean. Kirby's true life of love with his partner, Johan van Vlouten, over many decades, is dealt with in a special chapter. It deals plainly, simply and honestly with the nature of their particular homosexual partnership.

Kirby's style is clear and direct, written with obvious sincerity as he takes us through many of the memories quoted in the subtitle as if, by recalling them with us, he can relive and enjoy them — which is as a memoir should be.

But it is in the chapter "The Salvos — A Surprise Visit to the Citadel" that two things impinged on this reader. The first was again the uncompromising honesty with which he tells of an exchange of letters with the then Commissioner of the Salvos (as he calls them) whom he took to task, successfully, for basically rejecting him as a speaker, probably because he was gay.

The other is a rather surprising but simplistic depiction of the Christ figure as a brave, reforming man of simple tastes in the modern sense: an idealised picture, almost

a caricature, that appeals to our modern, more sophisticated misgivings at the inherent commercialism and greed of our own society. I have met this kind of wish fulfilment stereotype of the man, Jesus, among my own good Christian friends. This is worrying and one asks oneself how much of this perception of Jesus is based on actual contemporary (with Jesus) knowledge of who Jesus was? Is it really satisfactorily authenticated in the Gospels and elsewhere and, especially, in real contemporary knowledge of the man?

I do not question in any cynical sense the motives and values of those whose own adherence to Christianity is based on this depiction of the Christ figure, but I wonder if they have asked themselves how accurate this version is. In his memoir, Kirby quite rightly points out that parts of the Bible, especially in Leviticus, should be regarded as now "inapplicable".

Yet he subscribes, apparently without qualification, to this idealised picture of Jesus garnered from writers, many of whom lived centuries after Christ and whose perceptions are at least questionable if not doubtful. Why do not these Christian intellectuals in our own day recognise that they cling and depend, at least in part, on an idealised picture?

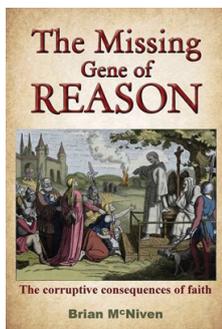
This reminds me, at the time of writing, of how the new Pope is being portrayed on all sides. It follows the same path, treating

Francis in the same "Suffer the little children to come unto me" image, based on both the Christ figure and the saint of Assisi. This image may contain elements of truth both for the Pope and for Christ, but in the case of the former, allowing for the film star-like hype, at least contemporary accounts are available. But in the case of Jesus, those accounts are seriously questionable. What we know of him is almost exclusively written by acolytes and apostles, often, as already mentioned, decades and centuries after Jesus lived. They clearly depended on hearsay and their views of him would have been very, very second-hand. They provide very little of real substance for the historians among us. How much of what he is claimed to have said are words put into Jesus' mouth (in Aramaic of course!)? Did any of these scholars and scribes actually speak the language Jesus spoke?

One can only conclude that those Christians today, who accept what amounts mostly to myth about the man who may have lived more than 2000 years ago, do so because they not only want to believe it but need to.

Nevertheless, Kirby's memories and commentary on his life provide an undoubted picture of a brave, honest man, forthright and always logically minded in the legal sense; and fortunately there is plenty of corroborative and confirmatory material of his strengths and qualities.





# The Missing Gene of Reason: The Corruptive Consequences of Faith

By Brian McNiven

Publisher: Publicious Self-Publishing (March 13, 2013)

ISBN-10: 0987222171 ISBN-13: 978-0987222176

Reviewed By Tracy Burgess

My response to reading this book is varied. Most of the book is a wonderful reference source for atheists. In particular, the author has provided a comprehensive history of the Catholic Church and the evil done in the name of the Catholic God. The political manoeuvring of various popes and cardinals, contrary to their own holy book, could be justified through interpretations that suited their own means. The book covers various Inquisitions, the loss of knowledge in the Dark Ages, and the subjugation of women through to modern times. The wars and pogroms undertaken against those with a different belief system, sometimes just a variation of the same belief, is almost ridiculous if it wasn't historical fact.

I am not sure I agree that theists are missing reason. The problem seems to be that reason is being based upon false premises. When mortal life is seen as a transitory means to an end, then the value of life is diminished. When the false premise of heaven is seen as the end goal, then life on Earth has limited value. When you believe that apostates are going to burn for an eternity, then I can understand the logic and reason behind burning them alive. Why not start the process for God to win brownie points for doing his work for him. In the words of the abbot during the Albigensian Crusade: "Kill them all; God will know his own". You can't argue with that logic when you recognise the premises that theists accept for their world view.

A lesser history of Islam is also

provided, but it is limited. The focus is mostly on the modern Islamic approaches with suicide bombers, terrorism and violence. The author is fair enough though to compare the modern Islamic terrorists with the Catholic Inquisitions and the brutality of the Christian churches in the Middle Ages.

The message I determined from the history aspect of the book was that all humans are born with the capacity to reason. We take information in and order it using our reason, taking action based upon our interpretation. When the premises are false and we are unable to accept that they may be false, then reason leads us to some very inhumane and destructive places.

There is also a section on supernatural beliefs and how they affect the reasoning of people. Again, this is about the acceptance and belief in false premises to guide reason. It is an interesting conundrum whether accepting false premises means that these people have a "missing gene of reason" as ascribed by the author or whether the false premises direct their reason to false conclusions.

One aspect of the book that I should warn potential readers of is the cognitive dissonance of the author. Almost 90 per cent of the book is a critique of theists and people who believe in the supernatural and why they lack reason. However, a small section in the beginning of the book and a small section near the end provide an insight into the author's own lack of reason through belief in karma and psychic phenomena as valid premises.

With comments such as "It

is easy to see why the greatest mind of his time, Albert Einstein, who advanced the karmic theory of conservation of energy, endorses Buddhism" (page 66), the author loses some credibility. It is one hell of a stretch to call the Theory of Relativity the "karmic theory of conservation of energy". Similarly, I have difficulty ascribing credibility to anyone who would write "There is too much evidence from reputable sources to deny the existence of paranormal influences such as psychic phenomena, mental telepathy, stigmata, miraculous healing, poltergeist and psychokinesis" (p. 317). I was left wondering how someone who doesn't believe in Jesus Christ can marry that against belief in stigmata. One would think those premises should cancel each other out. By far the oddest statement in the book is that "some people have been shown to have the ability to tune into the bandwidth of others by tuning into the energy waves left behind in the telepathic highway" (p. 318).

My ultimate recommendation for the book is to read it. I suggest though that the reader ignores pages 60 to 70 and from 317 to 355. Those sections detail the author's own bizarre beliefs. Brian McNiven would have been better served by an editor who would have removed those sections as they undermine his argument that theists are unable to apply reason. People who live in glass houses on the telepathic highway should never throw stones!



# The God Argument

## An Interview with A.C. Grayling

By Sam Harris



A.C. Grayling is Master of the New College of the Humanities (London). He is the author of the acclaimed *Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan*, *Descartes: The Life and Times of a Genius*, *Toward the Light of Liberty: The Struggles for Freedom and Rights That Made the Modern Western World*, and, most recently, *The Good Book: A Humanist Bible*. A former fellow of the World Economic Forum at Davos and past chairman of the human rights organization June Fourth, he contributes frequently to the *Times*, *Financial Times*, *Economist*, *New Statesman*, and *Prospect*. Grayling's play "Grace," co-written with Mick Gordon, was acclaimed in London and New York. He is also an advisor to my nonprofit foundation, *Project Reason*. [www.project-reason.org](http://www.project-reason.org)

Anthony's new book is *The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism*.

### **SH: What is your religious background?**

ACG: I was brought up in a non-religious household and was first presented with religious ideas in school; they did not persuade me but on the contrary seemed non-rational and misleading. In the study of history I became aware of the effects of religious divisions and sectarianism on individuals and societies, and came to think that freedom from religious influence is a human rights issue. I am an atheist, a secularist and a humanist.

### **SH: Perhaps you should clarify the differences between atheism, secularism, and humanism.**

ACG: The first is a metaphysical view about what the universe contains (about what exists), the second is a commitment to separation of religious organizations from state organizations, and the third is the ethical outlook of any reflective person who does not have any religious beliefs or commitments.

### **SH: What are the roots of humanism, in your view?**

ACG: The tradition of ethical thought stemming from classical antiquity is the foundation of humanism (and is a thousand years older than Christianity) — the study of these ideas suggests their living applicability to life, and I have been keen to alert people to this fact. Often people ask "what is the alternative to religion as a philosophy of life," and the emphatic answer is: humanism.

Humanism is a philosophical starting point for reflection on how one should live, according to one's own talents and interests and under the government of respecting others and not doing them harm, allowing them their own quest for an individual good life.

### **SH: Do you think a person can be both a humanist and a person of faith?**

ACG: No, religion and humanism are not consistent — unless you mean "humanism" in the Renaissance sense, where it denoted the study of classical literature. But this study soon showed people that the ideas and outlook of classical thought is at odds with religion, which is why humanism is now a secular philosophy.

### **SH: Do you have any advice on how to raise children as humanists in a world where most people are religious?**



ACG: Easy — make children conscious of their responsibilities to others, help them to be clear-eyed and to think, question, always ask for the evidence and arguments in support of any proposition — and explain how the legacy of mankind’s ignorant past survives in religious beliefs and practices, and what role these have in social life as a result of their historical embedding.

**SH: What would you say to someone who argues that we need religion, whether or not any religious doctrine is true, because religion gives us spirituality, rituals, etc.?**

ACG: I say that such pleasures and relaxations as a country walk, dinner with friends, an afternoon in an art gallery, attending a concert or the theatre, intimacy with a loved one, lying on a beach in the sun, reading and learning, making things, are all “spiritual exercises” in their refreshment, strengthening and promotion of connections with others and the world — these are the only “rituals” and observances required for an intelligent appreciation of what is good and possible in human life.

**SH: There’s one meme I find especially galling these days — it’s the claim that atheists (or the “new atheists”) are just as dogmatic as religious fundamentalists are. This is one of those zombie ideas that, no matter how many times you kill it, it comes shambling back at you. I’m wondering what your response to it is.**

ACG: There are two components to the answer: One needs to explain what “dogma” means, viz. a teaching to be accepted on authority not enquiry, and one needs to explain that robust opposition to religion in its too-common forms of bigotry, anti-science, anti-LGBT, anti-women, to say nothing of terrorism (and to “moderate” religion as the burka for all this, as you point out), is justified, and cannot be effected by compromise and soft-speaking. Slavery would never have been abolished by such means.

<http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/the-god-argument>

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“

We are, even now, killing ourselves over ancient literature. Who would have thought something so tragically absurd could be possible?

— Sam Harris

Misuse of reason might yet return the world to pre-technological night; plenty of religious zealots hunger for just such a result, and are happy to use the latest technology to effect it.

— A.C. Grayling

The difference between science and religion is the difference between a willingness to dispassionately consider new evidence and new arguments, and a passionate unwillingness to do so.

— Sam Harris

Religion and science have a common ancestor — ignorance.

— A.C. Grayling

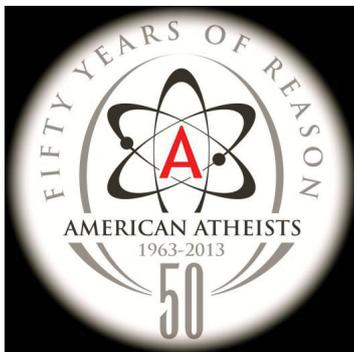
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# 50 years of American Atheists and the woman that started it, Madalyn Murray O'Hair

By Don Lacey

**R**eligion — religion, at best — at Best — is like a lift in your shoe. If you need it for a while, and it makes you walk straight and feel better — fine. But you don't need it forever, or you can become permanently disabled. Religion is like a lift in the shoe, and I say just don't ask me to wear your shoes. And let's not go down and nail lifts onto the natives' feet. — George Carlin, October 11, 1975 on the first episode of *Saturday Night Live*.



**I** just returned from Austin, Texas and the 50th Anniversary of the American Atheists. It is normally held on Easter weekend as it was this year. Activities began on Thursday and ended on Easter Sunday. This year there were 938 attendees. It was a diverse group, too. That's not too surprising given that the American Atheists was started by a woman.

Madalyn Murray O'Hair is responsible for the creation of the organization in 1963. She was in Austin, Texas at the time. Then, she was "the most hated woman in America." People hated her but she got needed things done and was outspoken and controversial. There were a lot of firsts associated with Madalyn. She was the first guest on the Phil Donahue show. On another appearance on the Phil Donahue<sup>1</sup> show in a debate with "The Chaplain of Bourbon Street," Bob Harrington, she said, "If America wakes up, what America will do is kick Christianity out." Additionally, she tried to straighten out the preacher on the definition of Atheism but Bob continued to talk over her. Her cantankerous manner got her an interview in *Playboy* along with appearances on Merv Griffin and *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson. However,

her most famous "first" was the fact that she was to address the United States Supreme Court as an atheist. She started her opening statement with, "Your petitioners are atheists..." Also included in her statement was the following excerpt which was silk screened on the back of this year's convention T-shirt:

"An atheist believes that a hospital should be built instead of a church. An atheist believes that a deed must be done instead of a prayer said. An atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death. He wants disease conquered, poverty vanquished, war eliminated."

In 1963, the Justices of the Supreme Court voted in favor of her petition 8 to 1 — a decisive victory for the separation of church and state.



Madalyn, William and Jon Murray.

Madalyn Murray O'Hair was born on 13 April 1919. She was a World War II veteran who served in the field of cryptography. She was college educated and trained in law. She worked as a psychiatric social worker for 17 years and was a supervisor at the Baltimore City public welfare department in 1960. Her atheist activism started with a lawsuit against the Baltimore City Public School System for requiring her son to participate in Bible readings in the school he was attending. Her case reached the Supreme Court in 1963. Please note, she was not the only one that filed suit against such practices. Her case was combined with *Abington School District v. Schempp*<sup>2</sup> and school prayer was previously eliminated by the court's ruling on the case *Engel v. Vitale*<sup>3</sup> in 1962. However, she was a lightning rod for controversy and unapologetically outspoken. She created the American Atheists and her "empire" had its own printing press and a loyal following.

In 1963 in an interview, Madalyn said that it would take one crazy person to end her life. That crazy person turned out to be David Waters, an ex-convict who served as the American Atheists office manager. He had been caught stealing from the organization and was fired. He took revenge on Madalyn, her younger son, and granddaughter by kidnapping them and squeezing what he could out of the American Atheists bank accounts. After 30 days of holding the family, he strangled them and disposed of the bodies. Ultimately, the disappearance of the trio would be solved but their bodies — dismembered, burned, and sealed in barrels would not be found for five and a half years. The entire story can be found at reference link 4 below.<sup>4</sup> It is estimated that Madalyn Murray O'Hair was brutally murdered on September 29, 1995.

I didn't know Madalyn but I know people that knew her. Some of the current leaders of American Atheists knew her well. Most that knew her, respected



**Jon Murray, Robin Murray O'Hair, Madalyn Murray O'Hair.**

her. She was remembered by many. She knew that, "There is no God. There's no heaven. There's no hell. There are no angels. When you die, you go in the ground; the worms eat you." The people that searched for her, found her, and attended her burial expressed the deepest sorrow for her. She got her wish when she said:

*I hope I live my life in such a manner that when I die, someone cares – even if it is only my dogs. I think I want some human being somewhere to weep for me.*

– Madalyn Murray O'Hair

... and they did.

<sup>1</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XEnj-ZVltU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XEnj-ZVltU)

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abington\\_School\\_District\\_v.\\_Schempp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abington_School_District_v._Schempp)

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engel\\_v.\\_Vitale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engel_v._Vitale)

<sup>4</sup> <http://holtz.org/Library/Social%20Science/History/Atomic%20Age/The%20Murder%20of%20Madalyn%20Murray%20O%27Hair%20America%27s%20Most%20Hated%20Woman%20by%20Lona%20Manning.htm>

Don Lacey is the Arizona State Director for American Atheists, the Organizer of Tucson Atheists, a Board Member of FreeThought Arizona, the Secretary of the Secular Coalition for Arizona, the Editor of the *Tucson Citizen FreeThought Blog*, and Podcaster on *Desert Air Podcast*.



<http://tucsoncitizen.com/freethought-arizona/author/donlacey/>  
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# MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR — TIMELINE

2 October 1960	Tells school her son William won't attend if prayer and Bible reading remain mandatory.
26 October 1960	Interviewed by a newspaper about her fight against school prayer and Bible reading.
27 October 1960	Interview about her fight against school prayer and Bible reading is published.
28 October 1960	William Murray (son) returns to school; mother kept him out to avoid daily prayers.
31 October 1960	William Murray refuses to pray at school, launching Murray (O'Hair's) famous legal case.
8 December 1960	Files suit against Baltimore public schools for sponsoring religious exercises.
2 March 1961	Court hears lawsuit from Madalyn Murray (O'Hair), will reject.
27 April 1961	Judge dismisses lawsuit against Bible reading in public schools.
9 January 1962	Murray v. Curlett argued: Bible reading and prayer in school.
6 April 1962	Maryland court rules against Murray O'Hair lawsuit to end Bible reading in public school.
15 May 1962	Appeals to Supreme Court over Bible reading in schools.
1 July 1962	The <i>American Atheist</i> magazine is started by Madalyn Murray O'Hair.
17 June 1963	Abington v. Schempp: court strikes down Lord's Prayer in public schools.
19 June 1964	<i>Life</i> magazine dubs Madalyn Murray O'Hair as Most Hated Woman in America.
14 September 1964	Files suit challenging "under god" in Pledge of Allegiance.
10 October 1966	Supreme Court refuses review of Maryland court decision upholding tax religious exemptions.
6 November 1967	Makes her first TV appearance on Phil Donahue's first show.
21 December 1967	Protests lighted cross on Austin, Texas federal building.
3 June 1968	Broadcasts first episode of <i>Atheist Point of View</i> on Texas radio station.
6 August 1969	Sues NASA to stop astronauts practicing religion in space.
23 September 1969	Files legal brief supporting elimination of church tax exemptions.
25 November 1969	Argues in court that astronauts shouldn't pray on the job in space.
16 September 1970	Says there isn't even a little bit of good in religion.
22 September 1970	Court rules against O'Hair's lawsuit to remove "so help me god" from court witness oath.
9 September 1971	Atheists try to block placing huge statue of Jesus Christ in Corpus Christi Bay.
26 September 1972	Calls Billy Graham a liar.
15 October 1975	Opens new American Atheist Center in Austin, Texas.
22 December 1977	Loses attempt to remove nativity scene from Texas Capitol rotunda.
3 November 1978	Arrested at Austin City council meeting for talking during prayer.
16 November 1978	Asks Texas governor to not use nativity at State Capitol during Christmas.
18 September 1979	Files suit to stop Pope John Paul II saying mass on Washington Mall.
3 October 1979	Lawsuit to prevent pope John Paul II saying mass in capitol is dismissed.
5 October 1979	Murray O'Hair's lawyer challenges court decision upholding permit for Pope John Paul II.
23 October 1979	Assaulted by Allen R. Hunter.
18 December 1979	Doesn't have to swear oath to god to testify at trial of her attacker.
24 January 1980	William Murray (son) has religious vision.
25 July 1981	Son William apologises for ending prayers in public schools.
12 August 1987	Madalyn files suit against religious oath for jurors.
26 August 1987	Files lawsuit to stop postmark honoring Pope's visit.
15 December 1987	Robin Murray O'Hair (granddaughter) jailed on civil contempt charges for refusing to take a religious oath in court.
1 July 1988	Madalyn gives interview about her legal fight 25 years ago.
28 August 1991	Judges can't force atheist jurors to swear religious oath.
1993	David Waters hired as a typesetter at American Atheists.
11 August 1995	Last known photograph of Madalyn Murray O'Hair is taken.
27 August 1995	Madalyn Murray O'Hair, Jon (son), and Robin (granddaughter) are likely kidnapped.
26 October 1996	Ellen Johnson of American Atheists says Madalyn Murray O'Hair is not dead.
2 October 1998	IRS holds auction of Madalyn Murray O'Hair's belongings to pay back taxes.
21 August 1999	David Waters gets eight years in prison for federal weapons charges.
8 December 1999	Gary P. Karr indicted for kidnapping Madalyn Murray O'Hair and her family.
27 January 2001	Madalyn Murray O'Hair and family found murdered.
23 March 2001	Bodies of Madalyn, Jon and Robin buried in unmarked grave.
30 March 2001	David Waters sentenced for murders of Madalyn Murray O'Hair and family.

Source: <http://skepticism.org>



# Apostasy and Blasphemy are our Right!

By Maryam Namazie

In less than 48 hours, more than three hundred individuals and organisations signed up to the call for action to defend apostates and blasphemers. Individuals included Iranian Campaigner Mina Ahadi, Lebanese writer and actress Darina al Joundi, Algerian author Djemila Benhabib, Scientists Richard Dawkins and Laurence Krauss, Moroccan atheist Imad Iddine Habib, Algerian Secularist Marieme Helie Lucas, Iraqi Kurd women's rights activist Houzan Mahmoud, Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin, Iranian/German author Siba Shakib and writer Ibn Warraq amongst others. Supporting organisations include Atheist Alliance International, Atheist Foundation of Australia, Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran, Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, Polish Rationalist Society, and The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. The updated list of signatories can be found here. <http://ex-muslim.org.uk/2013/03/14-march-2013-international-day-to-defend-apostates-and-blasphemers/>

Thousands more distributed the call via social media, Tweeted, and issued statements and messages of support. Petitions in defence of the ten highlighted cases saw a surge in signatures. Various acts of solidarity took place throughout the day, including the following:

Victoria Gugenheim, World Award Winning Bodypainter, has painted herself to mark today:



She explains why:

*The more we stay silent on the plight of Islam's apostates and blasphemers and women living under Islamic rules, the more we are allowing evil to flourish by doing nothing. And so I realised today, that I had to do something.*

*Art has a quality that words sometimes do not. It is visceral, immediate and full of impact when accomplished well. I wanted to lend my skills to today, to the apostates, the blasphemers, the women living under Islamic rules, to CEMB and to One Law for All to spread the message that there is real suffering and torment in Islam, and that our rights and freedoms (one could argue privileges since they can so quickly be taken away again) depend upon being outspoken against this encroaching force for harm.*

*What bodypaint can do that a veil can't is show you in detail just how much of the woman is lost when the veil is forced upon her. Here parts of her that are covered are both seen and unseen, and I hope this brings home that an item of clothing forced upon a person is not a liberating garment at all. It reduces a person to an object, dehumanizes them, suffocates their human spirit, and causes them to suffer as a result. And unfortunately, it's just the tip of the iceberg.*

*My ultimate goal is to make the world a better place to live in for everyone, and I hope that by standing up in my own way, that I encourage other people to do the same.*

# The Agnostic Question

By Lachlan Kent

**A**theism is increasingly viewed in the media as an extreme position on the existence of God. Some have even gone so far as calling us atheists (whoever “we” are) religious fanatics. Not surprisingly, I differ on that account of atheism, as probably do you if you are one, and here’s why.

I am not just an atheist; I am also an agnostic. That might sound at first like the kind of garbled language used by religious adherents to justify their position on any number of contemporary issues (my current favourite being the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane’s claim that his “sexuality” is expressed as “self giving”, another example of how the Catholic Church distorts normal sexuality); but I assure you it is a sound position if you take into account that there is a difference between the “facts” and the “evidence”.

I, like everyone else on this pale-blue dot, am agnostic about the facts. God may exist. Jesus may be the Son of God, whatever that means. Mohammed may have received the last and final Revelation. The Jews might have a Covenant with Yahweh. Durga might indeed have eight arms. None of these things are impossible in my world and I accept that I am agnostic about them because, to my mind, *there is no evidence either way*. I don’t know and neither do you, whether you’re religious or not.

On the other hand, it is on the evidence brought forward by religion that I am staunchly, sternly, stoically, and extremely atheist. I do not accept the gospels as either the literal or lateral Word of God. I do not accept the contradictory and cobbled-together-after-the-fact testimony of people who claim to have seen Jesus reanimate and then ascend unto Heaven. I do not accept that Muhammad was channelling the Creator simply because he said so. I do not accept that Moses conversed with God despite what he may have believed at the time.

I have a degree in psychology and instead accept

the very real and disturbing possibility that all the so-called evidence for God can be more parsimoniously explained by, firstly, the psychopathology of individuals and then, secondly, the normal social psychology. If I were to act as judge or jury in the case for God, not only wouldn’t I use scriptural or even current testimony to inform my judgement, I also wouldn’t accept them as evidence in the first place!

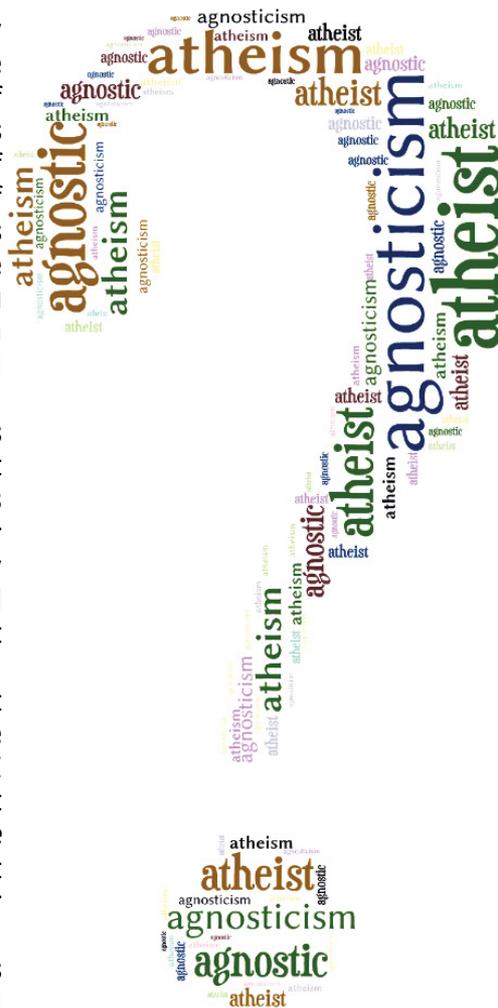
However, being extreme on the evidence for God does not make me extreme on the facts as they stand. Creation *ex nihilo* is as mysterious today as it was 2000 years ago and I cannot discount the possibility that intelligence or consciousness may have played or continue to play a role, for two reasons: firstly, scientists can’t explain consciousness and so don’t really know what it is; and secondly, scientists are still only guessing whether there was a time before the big bang or universes beyond. The good scientific evidence for a conscious-less creation remains inconclusive, and so I remain agnostic. “Not guilty, your honour!” And not because God didn’t do it but because there remains reasonable doubt.

Of course, that reasonable doubt is exploited by monotheism to the point of becoming “unreasonable undoubt”, i.e. faith, but atheists are in no position to deny that doubt exists, no matter how anti-theist

their leanings. Doubt is in fact one of the hallmarks of atheism, is it not?

And so it is on this moderate middle ground that atheists, I believe, can extend a warm, conciliatory hand to the professed agnostics by safely admitting that we’re all agnostic about the facts. God may have done it but, based on the evidence, we have to acquit him of Creation at this stage of the trial.

And saying “not guilty” makes you an atheist whether you call yourself an agnostic, an atheist or (like me) both.



**A**s a philosopher, if I were speaking to a purely philosophic audience I should say that I ought to describe myself as an agnostic, because I do not think that there is a conclusive argument by which one can prove that there is not a God. On the other hand, if I am to convey the right impression to the ordinary man in the street I think that I ought to say that I am an atheist, because, when I say that I cannot prove that there is not a God, I ought to add equally that I cannot prove that there are not the Homeric gods.

— **Bertrand Russell**

**T**here's nothing an agnostic can't do if he doesn't know whether he believes in anything or not.

— **Monty Python**

**A** man who is an agnostic by inheritance, so that he doesn't remember any time that he wasn't, has almost no hatred for the religious.

— **H.L. Mencken**

**I**t is often said, mainly by the "no-contests", that although there is no positive evidence for the existence of God, nor is there evidence against his existence. So it is best to keep an open mind and be agnostic. At first sight that seems an unassailable position, at least in the weak sense of wager. But on second thoughts it seems a cop-out, because the same could be said of Father Christmas and tooth fairies. There may be fairies at the bottom of the garden. There is no evidence for it, but you can't prove that there aren't any, so shouldn't we be agnostic with respect to fairies?

— **Richard Dawkins**

**A**gnostics are just atheists without balls.

— **Stephen Colbert**

**D**on't be an agnostic – be something.

— **Robert Frost**

**I** am an atheist, out and out. It took me a long time to say it. I've been an atheist for years and years, but somehow I felt it was intellectually unrespectable to say one was an atheist, because it assumed knowledge that one didn't have. Somehow, it was better to say one was a humanist or an agnostic. I finally decided that I'm a creature of emotion as well as of reason. Emotionally, I am an atheist. I don't have the evidence to prove that God doesn't exist, but I so strongly suspect he doesn't that I don't want to waste my time.

— **Isaac Asimov**



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Religious Belief in 3D

Deluded  
Dishonest  
Demented

John Dillon

# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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

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

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**Direct Deposit:** **Bank:** Commonwealth Bank  
**Account Name:** Atheist Foundation of Australia  
**BSB:** 065 503  
**Account Number:** 10120389

**IMPORTANT - PLEASE enter your NAME into the reference section.**

## 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.

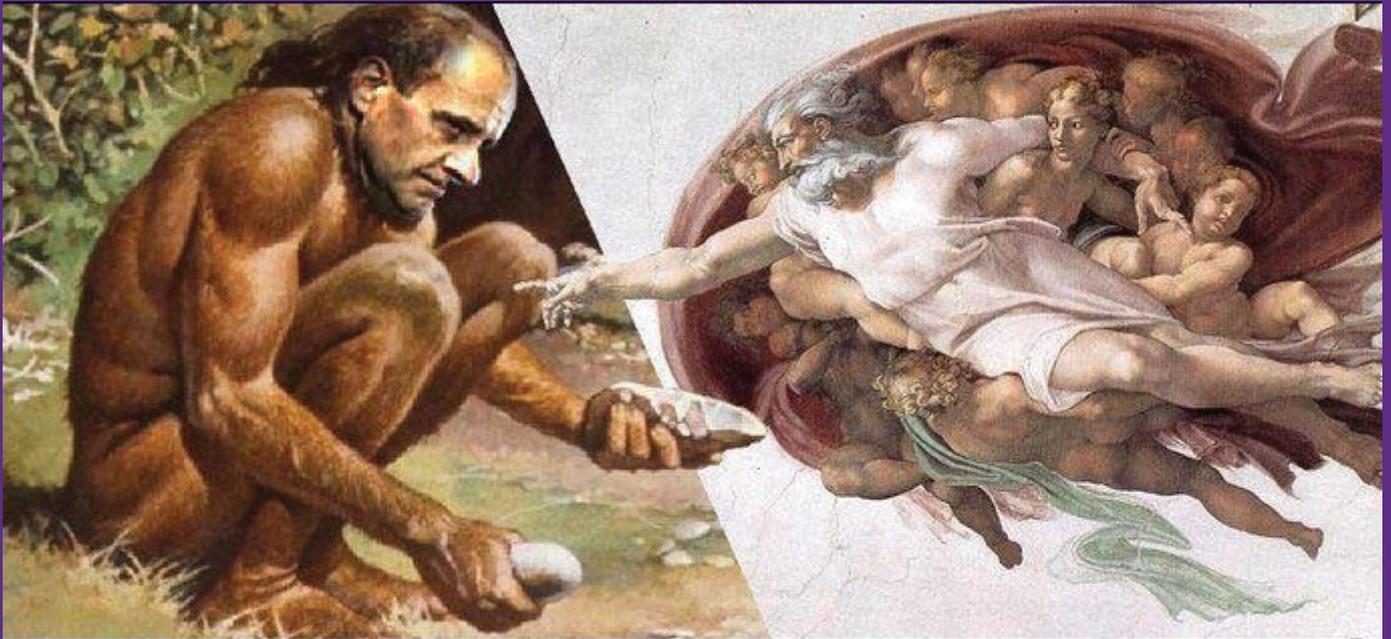
To safeguard the rights of all non-religious people.

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.

# 6,000 YEARS AGO



**THE LORD SAID "LET THERE BE LIGHT"**

**A SLIGHTLY CONFUSED CAVEMAN WHO HAD EVOLVED THROUGH  
NATURAL SELECTION LOOKED AROUND;  
SEEING NOTHING SAID, "OK".  
HE STRUCK A PIECE OF FLINT WITH AN IRON PYRITE NODULE,  
AND STARTED A FIRE.**

**THE LORD LOOKED AT THE FIRE, AND SAID, "IT IS GOOD."**

**THE CAVEMAN LOOKED BACK AND SAID,  
"WE'VE BEEN DOING THIS FOR 50,000 YEARS,  
ARE YOU NOT A BIT LATE?"**

**AND THE LORD LOOKED CONFUSED, HE SAID,  
"WHERE DID YOU COME FROM,  
HOW DID YOU GET HERE WITHOUT A CREATOR?"**

**THE CAVEMAN LOOKED AT GOD AND SAID,  
"I WAS ABOUT TO ASK YOU THE SAME QUESTION."**

**Atheist Foundation of Australia  
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ALLIANCE  
INTERNATIONAL**

FOR A SECULAR WORLD

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