

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

*Promoting scientifically credible & factually reliable evidence*

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# The Australian Atheist



## Easter

Because believing in the Easter Bunny would be silly

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# Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Established 1970

Promoting scientifically credible & factually reliable evidence

PO Box 1062  
Lane Cove NSW 1595

(08) 8835 2269

info@atheistfoundation.org.au

atheistfoundation.org.au

/atheistfoundation

@atheistaus

/atheistfoundation

/atheistfoundation

## Our 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.

## Our 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 community of non-religious people.

To offer verifiable information in place of superstition and to promote logic and reason.

To promote atheism.

The opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Atheist Foundation of Australia

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Web Sites – Julian Jordan & Dave Fregon

## IT TEAM

Dave Fregon  
Danny Jarman  
Julian Jordan

**Anthony G Pickham** BCom FCA MTax FTIA  
Senior Client Director

Kelly+Partners Wollongong  
276 Keira Street, Wollongong, NSW 2500  
PO Box 1649, Wollongong, NSW 2500

**T:** (02) 4226 1000 **F:** (02) 4228 0907  
**E:** Anthony.Pickham@kellypartners.com.au  
**W:** www.kellypartners.com.au

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Hello readers,

Welcome to the April to June issue. There are a lot of wonderful contributions in this issue and I would like to thank all who contributed.

There is an update on the member survey and that will continue over the next few issues. Almost two thirds of our members answered the survey, which is fantastic. I'm also pleased that the majority of responses were positive about the AFA, where we are and where we are going.

Many members responded to the survey, saying that they would like to contribute and be active. For those who would like to write, draw or be creative in anyway, I am always after contributions for *The Australian Atheist*.

Contributions to the magazine can be sent to [taa@atheistfoundation.org.au](mailto:taa@atheistfoundation.org.au)

I received the following letter since the last issue that I thought I would share:

*Dear Tracy*

*Now that there is knowledge of the Big Bang event, in addition to the earlier knowledge of Darwin's natural selection theory, it looks as though there soon won't be many believers in a god.*

*My argument for atheism is that, (given the existence of disease and suffering in the world) it is not possible for there to be a god who is good, omnipotent, and omniscient, as an omnipotent creator who created a world in which disease and suffering was a possibility would be bad, not good. If unable to create a world free of disease and suffering he, she or it would not be omnipotent.*

*I don't know the history of events before the Big Bang, whether there were earlier Big Bangs or not, but I go along with the idea that there was no beginning to it all (so no creation), that there were always some things no matter how minute or sparse (maybe analogous to the particles of atoms).*

*There would have been constant movement and change.*

*When it was discovered that the particles of atoms are in movement, moving at great speed and passing through the individual atoms, it was said that change is constant. Change involves movement and we know that objects move along the line of least resistance. I would say that everything works by the movement of objects along the line of least resistance.*

*When the world as a whole advances from belief in a supernatural I believe that it will be saner and more peaceful. Church attendances are declining now and the atheist movement is growing stronger. Future generations will have the knowledge to reject ideas of there being a supernatural.*

*Yours sincerely*  
*Len Bergin*  
*AFA member*

I could not have said better myself!

Until next issue, take care

Tracy

# President's Message

Hello AFA Members,

The AFA has been busy since the last issue. In March we had the Annual General Meeting. From that meeting we said a sad farewell to some valued members of the Committee of Management who decided not to renominate. I would like to offer my thanks to those members

- John Amadio
- Jac Dittmar
- John Ganas
- Mary Gilmore

I would also like to thank our returning members:

- Tracy Burgess
- Dave Fregon
- Janine Gebert
- Mark Gilroy
- Ian Michaels
- Michelle Newton-Greene

Finally, I would like welcome our newest members:

- Victor Franco
- Andrew Skegg
- Kylie Sturgess

I accepted the nomination to continue as president and that was carried. The other Executive positions were also continued with the same people:

- Vice President – Danny Jarman
- Vice President – Joel Kilgour
- Hon. Secretary – Karen Joyce
- Treasurer – Julian Jordan

I was pleased to see AFA members in attendance, both in person and via the teleconference option made available. We plan to have further technological options available at the next AGM to allow for as many members as possible to attend.

I am pleased to say that the draft constitution was passed with sufficient majority. A huge thanks is owed to all members who reviewed the draft and contributed

suggestions and amendments. The new constitution is legally compliant and reflective of the member base. It is a document that will be reviewed regularly to ensure it stays current and continues to represent the needs and expectations of the membership base.

We continue to focus on the sex abuse stories arising from various tribunals, commissions and courts. A copy of a Media Release put out recently was focused on this theme. It is one that the entire community finds unacceptable and it is beyond time that religious institutions are called to account for systemic abuse and cover up.

George Pell leaves our shores at a time that is incredibly convenient. The focus is on the Catholic Church and Pell in particular for his possible knowledge of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. He will be moving to a country with no extradition treaty with Australia, should that ever be required. We will wait to see whether the Catholic Church improves its reporting processes and management in light of recent events.

In February we commenced a survey of all AFA members. The response was fantastic. Nearly two thirds of members responded to the survey. You told us what you like, what you want and what you would like to see changed. The predominant message from the survey was that members are happy with the current direction of the AFA. That is great to know and really assists the committee in moving forward. The other theme that came out of the survey was that members want to be active. You want to be actively part of the AFA and everything it does. We are trying to respond to that need from members. In the near future we will be establishing sub committees for

various activities.

The sub committees to be established include:

- Public Relations
- Membership
- Education
- Events
- Affiliations
- Philanthropy
- Human Rights
- Rules and Governance
- Political Engagement
- Social Media
- Magazine

Some members gave an indication in the survey as to which areas their interests lie. Others did not. Those who indicated a preference will be contacted. Others are encouraged to contact the Membership Officer if you are interested in being on a sub committee.

So as we move forward into 2014, we have a lot of areas to focus upon. No doubt there will be more added as the year progresses. Thanks to all members for your support.

Michael Boyd, *President*



# My Year of Theology

- Mike Meyerson

*Mike Meyerson is a member with a lot of on his mind. There will be a few articles over the coming issues. This one was certainly my favourite. He enrolled in tertiary studies for theology and tells his tale of how that worked for him.*

In 2009 I enrolled to study Theology as a distance student. I intended to answer my assignments using logic and critical thinking and see whether the department would pass my work or give acceptable reasons as to why I should fail, should my work not be in agreement with the conventional teaching of Christian Theology. Most importantly, should the Theology Department not be able to refute my work, would they alter their teachings and beliefs in light of the presented evidence? This is in keeping with expectations of an academic institution such as a university.

So what did ensue? My first assignment was to discuss the ways in which scripture is authoritative for Christian theology. For the purposes of my argument I used the terms "clergy", "Christian theologians" and the "Church" interchangeably. This I considered valid because the clergy are also theologians. I made clear that when I referred to God of the Old and New Testaments I also meant Jesus and when I referred to Jesus I also meant God. This is standard teaching amongst theologians i.e. Jesus is God and conversely God must therefore be Jesus.

I was taken to task only three sentences into my assignment for defining God as "a perfect supernatural entity". This seems a fitting description for a god whom we are told is perfect and who obviously fulfils the criteria of being a supernatural entity. I was, however, told that my definition was a philosophical one and not a Christian definition. The truth is: how does one define an entity whom no-one has ever seen or heard, and for whom there is no proof of existence? Yet the God that the theologians talk of is certainly described as being perfect and it is unquestionable that

he possesses supernatural powers. I was criticised for this approach, being told that I was not making an argument but indulging in a diatribe.

The thrust of my argument was that if we are to accept that the scriptures are authoritative for Christian theologians, then it follows that Christian theologians must live in accordance with Jesus' teachings as elaborated in the scriptures. Conversely, if Christian theologians fail to live according to the standards proposed by Jesus then the scriptures



are not authoritative for these theologians. It was a simple matter to demonstrate that the scriptures are in fact not authoritative for Christian theologians. I had only to read parts of the first Gospel (Matthew) to find more than enough examples proving this to be the case.

A few such examples are:

Jesus instructs his followers to live according to the Jewish laws and traditions and to exceed the standards of righteousness set by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20). Christian theologians fail to observe the dietary laws, the Sabbath, mandatory circumcision, the many fast days etc.

Jesus instructs his followers to engage in self mutilation and to cut off body parts such as eyes and hands should they offend us (Matt

5:30), and to undergo castration (Matt 19:12). Theologians are not well known for self mutilation.

Jesus requires his followers to give up their houses, brethren, family and land. (Matt 19:29). Few theologians comply.

Jesus instructs his followers not to store up treasures on earth. (Matt 6:19-20) The Catholic Church has built up a massive storehouse of treasure in the Vatican and elsewhere.

Jesus instructs his followers to pray in the closet. (Matt 6:6). He also stipulates that prayer should be non-repetitive. (Matt 6:7). The clergy pray openly in huge and elaborate Churches. Their prayer is often repetitive in nature.

Jesus criticised the Pharisees for the harsh way they treated their labourers and the fact that they refused to assist them in their labours. (Matt 23:4) The clergy were ardent supporters of slavery. I can find no record of the clergy assisting slaves in their labours.

Jesus did not approve of fancy clothing. (Matt 23:5). He complained that the Pharisees were too showy in their dress and that the borders of their clothes were too wide. The clergy dress up in ostentatious robes, gold for the pope, (a huge gold mitre atop his head), flaming red for cardinals, deep purple for monsignors. Their clothes have wide borders.

Jesus was against erecting fine tombs (Matt 23:29). The clergy have built exceedingly ornate tombs.



I demonstrated that the scriptures were not authoritative for Christian theologians. This, however, was not the answer that was sought. I was criticised for not engaging deeply with the various arguments made by theologians. I was told that I was not making an argument but a diatribe because I did not consider counter examples or instances of repentance or change.

My supervisor made the strange comment that I had attempted "to show that Christian theologians do not themselves take the scripture as authoritative in their personal lives". My supervisor maintained that I had read the question about the 'authority of the Scripture' personally and descriptively, rather than "theologically and normatively".

In summary my course supervisor said "Overall this was a disappointing essay. You clearly have the capacity to write with energy and passion. However, rather than engage seriously with the arguments of the texts, you used this essay to rehearse your own assumptions and frustrations. I am giving this essay a bare pass, but for next time you will need to engage seriously with the readings in order to pass the subject." The supervisor concluded with the confusing question. "How do you then understand theologians like Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero-who died in the service of justice and freedom?" This of course was not the subject on which I had been requested to write about. I was writing on "the ways in which the scriptures are authoritative for Christian theologians".

The subject for my next assignment was "How can a good God allow evil and suffering". The presumption that God is good creates several difficulties, including how a good God can allow evil and suffering.

It was a straightforward matter to prove that God is anything but good. My argument was based not only on the scriptures, but also on the natural and man-made catastrophic events that bedevil our world.

From the beginning there are issues with God's behaviour. God created the universe and placed the first two humans, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God provided an apple tree but forbade the eating of apples, although being omniscient God knew that Adam would eat an apple. All future humans would henceforth be born sinners and condemned to damnation. This is neither just, nor loving.

God drowned all the inhabitants of the earth including the animals and insects. The only exceptions were Noah and his family, and a male and female of each type of animal. God justified this mass murder on the grounds that humans had become wicked. (Genesis 6:7) This can only be described as a gross overreaction.

God instructed Abraham to kill his son. God then aborted the murder at the last moment, satisfied that Abraham had exhibited sufficient faith. Ordering someone to kill their own child is hardly an act of kindness. (Genesis 22:1,2)

God killed all the first born of Egyptian families (including the first born animals) (Genesis 11:5). Collective punishment including that of innocent individuals and animals is not justifiable.

The New Testament also describes a God who is far from good. Think not that I am come to bring peace on earth: I am come not to send peace but a sword (Matt 10:34) For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be those of his own household. (Matt 10:35,36). These are hardly the words of a benign entity.

Jesus encourages us to desert our homes and family. (Matt 19:29)

Theologians are clearly wrong! The scriptures depict God as anything but good and support Richard Dawkins' famous description of God as follows: "The God of the

Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully". Indeed we are fortunate that this god is fictional. So if we are set on deluding ourselves that there is a God and that the Bible is his word then at least we should be honest enough to admit that the God portrayed in the Bible is not good and does not in fact care how we humans suffer.

Despite the abundance of evidence to the contrary, theologians doggedly insist that God is both good and omnipotent. Theologians have a dilemma of their own making. They indulge in lengthy, complicated, and spurious arguments in support of their position.

Although my answer was well thought through and gave incontestable proof that if there is a God he cannot be good, I failed this assignment, and therefore the year. I received comments such as "Your biblical interpretation is entirely literalistic. It is true that there are difficult and troubling texts. It is also true that there is also metaphor, hyperbole in teaching and a range of other genre and literary devices that you have not identified".

It is disconcerting that a subject such as Theology is taught in a university but it's unacceptable that a university department is prepared to teach a subject claiming it to be an academic pursuit in defiance of acceptable academic principles, namely that one has to change one's position should the evidence prove it to be wrong. The contention that God is good can easily be shown to be false. This department of Theology prefers to ignore the evidence and shoot the messenger-a concept with which Christian Theology is well acquainted.

# The Appeal

*The tale continued when Mike sought an appeal on his results.....*

As a full fee paying student I thought it was appropriate to apply for a re-mark in order to at least give the theology department a chance to reappraise their position and hopefully alter their stance and their teaching. Here follow excerpts from an at times amusing correspondence.

My appeal was on the basis that the Theology lecturer claimed that theology is a science. The lecturer quotes Karl Barth, who said that "Theology...is the scientific test to which the Christian Church puts herself regarding the language about God peculiar to her" and also claimed "Theology is therefore, part of the larger human enterprise of the sciences, understood in the broadest sense as 'the search for truth'".

I therefore stated in my appeal that I took the lecturer at her word and wrote the assignments in the belief that Theology is a science and therefore my work should be assessed according to the rigours of science. Critical analysis of the available evidence (the scriptures) demonstrated that God is not a good entity and that the scriptures are not authoritative for Christian theologians. These findings did not, however, concur with the beliefs of the lecturer. The lecturer made numerous comments, but aside from pointing out a minor misunderstanding with regard to the required reading of one of the theologians, she seemed unable to fault the arguments I presented.

I also wrote in my appeal that in keeping with the scientific method, should an adequate examination of the evidence come to a different conclusion from the prevailing body of opinion, and the new conclusion cannot be disproved, then the correct thing is to accept the new conclusion rather than dismiss it. I failed my

second assignment simply because the evidence I presented did not agree with the faith-based beliefs of the lecturer. Of course, one can alter or dismiss evidence to suit one's beliefs, but in the case of a science this is not acceptable.

In response I was told that my application for review of my grade did not fulfil the five approved grounds listed on the Application for Review of Grade and that I was fixed on the term "science" without paying attention to the lecturer's clear statement that in theology this term is used broadly in the sense of the search for truth. Moreover it was stated that the School of Theology sits within the Faculty of Arts, indicating that theology is more a Humanities discipline than a Science discipline and therefore does not work within the framework of the physical sciences. I was told that I failed not because the lecturer disagreed with my position but because I failed to engage sufficiently with the content of the subject, which would have enabled me to see Theology as a hermeneutical enterprise. An offer was made to have another lecturer cross-mark a clean copy of my essay. I accepted this offer and replied as follows:

In the assignment, "How can a good God allow evil and suffering?", I demonstrated that if there is a God, and if this God is as described in the scriptures, then this God is clearly not good. This makes it easy to understand why this God allows evil and suffering to exist in the world. This is an important realisation because it means that all the prescribed theological readings on this matter are incorrect. It also explains why the theologians have to resort to such complex and spurious arguments to maintain that God is good despite the evidence to the contrary. Once it is

proved that the theological position is incorrect it is senseless to further engage with the prescribed writings on this matter.

I realise that it would be unlikely for your department to accord the assignment a pass mark because the theological mindset over the centuries is one of discounting or altering the evidence to suit their beliefs, rather than examining the evidence impartially and adjusting their beliefs in accordance with the evidence. I would, however, be especially interested in finding out in what way my interpretation of the scriptures is incorrect. This does not mean telling me that I have read the scriptures too literally. If one is to interpret everything one disagrees with in a metaphorical manner then we would have no way at all of knowing what is meant by the words in the Bible.

Needless to say the third marking of my assignment came up with the same result; a fail grade. The main objection again was insufficient engagement with the scholarly view of theology.

I couldn't help but wonder how this same school of Theology would have marked Galileo if he had written an assignment describing the relationship of the sun and the earth while needing to incorporate the scholarly views of the theologians of the day. We are fortunate indeed that the theologians no longer have the powers to force one to appear before the Inquisition for a spot of torture, or a roasting should we not agree with them. Nevertheless one is still left with the feeling that in some ways the more things change the more they stay the same. The study of Theology does not belong in centres of academia such as universities.

# Travels Among Theists

- Justin Murray

*Justin Murray takes us on his further adventures to experience different theist groups. In this issue, he takes us to an evangelical Church. His description of his own personal experiences, as always, provides insight into theist practices.*

"We are all sinners, we are all broken, we are flawed..." Man with the cordless microphone.

The man in blue has lied to me twice now. Yet he is saying that no-one will die for a lie. First, he said that he has studied and understands all the history of the development of his holy book. He also has studied the life of the Jewish man he considers to also be a deity. Yet when questioned about the writers of the holy book being present at the death of the Jewish man, he lies and says that they were present. Given the history of the holy book and the time at which was written, that is highly unlikely.

Secondly, he says that historians agree that the Jewish man was a deity. Given his stance on not dying for a lie, I am troubled by lies he is telling me. Maybe they are just convenient lies, to help bring another person into his faith community. Or is it that he just believes them so strongly that he does not consider it lying. Or maybe if you believe it to be true then it is not a lie.

The man talks of his family being all non-adherents to his religion and that he shared that position until his mid-twenties. He talks of using "all the dirty debating tricks" of non-adherents and non-believers. I stifle a laugh, disguising it as a cough.

I suspect he is hiding what he really thinks about non-adherents and non-believers to his faith tradition. He says that they will not suffer, except to not be able to socially interact with his deity after their deaths. He believes that he will go on living, in the presence of his deity, after his body ceases to function. That seems like an idea that I cannot confirm or deny and would normally put aside. So, I put it aside and keep listening.

The man in blue talks to me about the education program that runs in his group, it takes the children into a separate part of the building and gives them craft activities to complete, themed around their deity.

The man in blue thinks other forms of Christianity cherry-pick from the holy book that they share. So, a close reading of that book is important. Having said that he admits that they don't actually read the whole book. It is too long. So they choose seven passages from the book to focus on in any given week. So much for not cherry-picking, I think.



The man in blue talks about the mid-week holy book study classes, admitting that it "takes about 1 year for it too work". Before I can clarify what he means, he offers that "after the study group all questions are done and we are on the same page." I am amazed that anyone would actually want to stop examining their world and not ask questions about it.

The man in blue tells me that their church has 110 adult members. He later tells me that there are 200 members in the group. I would not expect him to have the entire group's demographic data at hand, but wonder at the discrepancies in these descriptions.

I ask him about how he came to believe that his god exists. He tells me that he met a man that was training as a minister, a shoe salesman. At this time, the man in blue confides in me that he was an atheist. He was from a family of atheists. He thought that the holy book related to his god was "religious rubbish" – he now believes that historical evidence backs up this holy book. In fact, now he is convinced that no one can deny that the god described in this holy book was a real human being. He says that the history of this human formed deity is confirmed by historical records, including persons such as Pliny the Younger. This is a blatant lie; Pliny was responsible for the trials of Christians. He tried and executed them. Christians are also mentioned by Tacitus and Suetonius. None of these authors had anything to say about whether that human-god was real or not.

The man in blue says that this human manifestation of his god was either "crazy, a liar or a real deity". He wanted to prove that this human-god didn't perform supernatural feats. He states that people have died because they refused to admit that this human-god didn't perform supernatural feats.

The man in blue lies and tells me that the authors of some key parts of his holy book personally knew this human-god. Since we were speaking of supernatural feats, I ask if we can see such feats now. He admits that no such feats happen now, but that he was sure that they did happen in the past.

Again, I wonder if his god is actually all-powerful as some who also believe in this god claim. The man in blue says that the lack of supernatural feats is important; rather this human-

god was sacrificed to ensure that humans are safe from the anger of his main god. I am confused by what appears to be a claim of polytheism.

The man in blue goes further to say that when his god first “created” humans, they were perfect, but without the ability to make moral decisions for themselves. Then the humans did something that he told them to not do, even though they did not have the ability to understand why they should not do it. This made god very angry. So, the god disowned the humans. Later his god regretted doing this and sent the human-god to be sacrificed that will mean that the original mistake would be forgiven.

Given this sacrifice, I wonder if the man in blue thinks that humans have to lead good lives. He says that we do not, but it might be good to do some charity work. On that theme I ask what happens to those who do not believe in his god. He notes that they will be “eternally tortured”, and that this would take the form of separation from his god. This is even more puzzling, because if the non-believer is separated from something that they do not think exists, how would they know the difference between those two states of being.

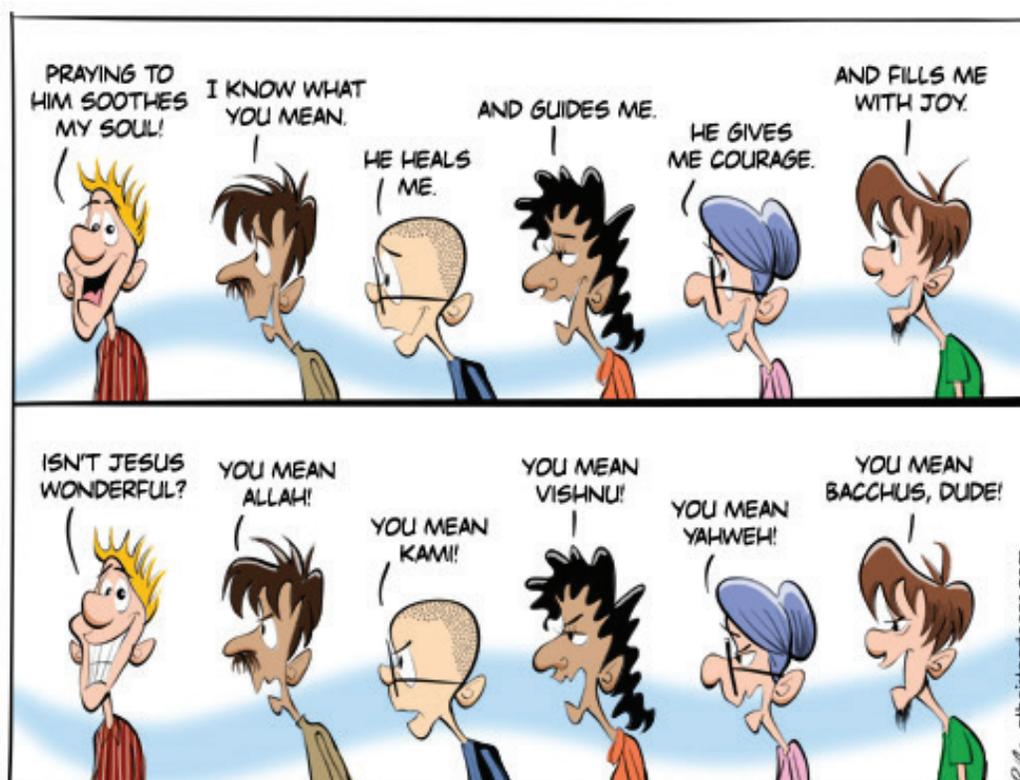
The man in blue insists that I meet the man with the cordless microphone. I have suspicions that the man with the cordless microphone does not share the unbridled enthusiasm and blind adherence of the man in blue. We chat and I mention that the idea of the existence supernatural beings is not something that can be proved. Surprisingly he admits that “all the classical arguments for the existence of deities are flawed. It is just a matter of having...” My poker face must have slipped because he has stopped mid-sentence and looks at me with caution.

I silently remind myself to surrender to their definition of reality and catch the way they make sense of the world, but it is too late now on the matter of his deity’s existence. Realising that it is time to change course, I ask about his holy book. It was written a long time ago, the first part being older than the second. The first part has many antiquated ideas about social norms of the time and punishments for breaking them. These include: clothes not to be worn, food not to be eaten and with whom people can have sexual relationships. Having stated that his holy book is the true word of his deity, I ask about these norms. He says that he makes jokes about the ones concerning food and

clothes. That they are not to be taken literally, but the ones about sexual relations must be taken seriously.

The man with the cordless microphone counters the problem of evil with the idea that his god cannot take away the free will of humans. I raise an eyebrow at this idea, so he admits immediately that in his conception god is not omnipotent and omniscient. I mentally note that he skips the idea of god being omnibenevolent. He argues that the world as we know it is the best of all possible worlds that his god could create. Having admitted that his god is not all powerful, he notes that his god could not create a world without evil and suffering. This is a troubling thing for me, and that trouble is not eased when he says that it does not matter what we do in our life, his god has the power to torture people forever and we do not know who that god will save from that torture.

The core of the doctrine of this church has left me confused: they are committed to convincing others to believe what they do, but cannot present any benefits of practicing their religion. In fact they deny that practicing such religion is important, yet they still meet every week.



# It's On The Money

-Bob Irwin

Bob has worked in the fields of Earth Science and Business Creativity, and is an author. He is currently preparing a book-length critique of Christianity, and the claims and contradictions which underpin this religion and its ruling hierarchies. Where possible, he takes a light-hearted approach, such as with the inclusion of cartoons.

Prominent Christians assert that their religion's foundations are on the money: precise and true in every detail, and their religious text, the Bible, is the absolute word of God, never to be doubted. Their claims have had a major impact on world history, right through to today where there are Christian leaders who believe they rule with God's blessing, or at least have a connection to Him. In some cases the 'it's on the money' idiom is applied literally.

## It's in their Blood

Empires and hereditary monarchies and have led the way in declaring a divine right to rule, or to reign by the grace of God.

This is no recent phenomenon. Caesar Augustus, formerly named Gaius Octavius, the first Roman emperor, in a vain self-promotion took on, in 27 BC, the name 'Augustus' because it signified he was divinely favoured – a valuable identity for a powerful yet precarious leadership position.

Over three centuries later, Emperor Constantine assumed a semi-divine persona as if he was an intermediary between his God and his people. And why wouldn't he desire such an image? After all, it was Constantine who, for his own political ends, gave official impetus to a persecuted and zealous religious movement: Christianity. Constantine's pragmatic choice of Christianity as the religion of his Holy Roman Empire led to the first 'official' head of the Church: the pope. The chain of popes adopted a semi-divine link back to Simon, their St Peter, their spiritual predecessor. They continue to live out their internally-developed fantasy and expect their 2.3 billion followers to concur.

The popes' self-proclaimed relationship with Simon/Peter seems as weird as the divine associations claimed by some heads of royal families. Former Japanese emperors' imaginary connection to the Sun God was a Shinto fantasy of convenience going back over a millennia, only to be relinquished with the stroke of a

U.S. pen at the end of World War II. (A polite and respectful royal family survives to offer joy and fidelity to the Japanese people.) The French royals' belief in their rule by divine right ceased... severed by the guillotining of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in 1793.

Upon the restoration of the English monarchy – following the English civil war and the death of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell – when an exiled Charles, Prince of Wales, returned home and, in 1660, was placed on the throne as Charles II, to a be a king of the people. His was not to be a divine kingship like that claimed by his father Charles I, who was beheaded in 1649 for treason. Centuries of tradition based on pompous claims over divine sovereignty was abandoned at the drop of a hat, well, head, to be followed by a somewhat watered-down version for the monarchy – a God-association nonetheless.





In earlier times, English monarchs believed that they had been appointed by God, and they ruled and behaved accordingly. For example, King James I of England was head of State and Church, ruling from Queen Elizabeth I's death in 1603 until his death in 1625. James believed he had a divine right to be king. (His name was given to the King James version of the Bible, and, thanks to the power and influence of Church and State, became the most widely published text in the English language.)

These days, Queen Elizabeth II rules merely by the grace of God, having been – in the words of Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby at the ceremony celebrating her 60 years on the throne in June 2013 – ‘brought by God to the throne’ in 1953. Welby reminded the gathering that at age 27 the Queen had prayed at the high altar of Westminster Abbey at the commencement of a reign ‘demanding devotion and utter self-sacrifice, a path she did not choose, yet to which she was called by God.’ Contrary to the Archbishop's sentiments... the real reason for her

queen-ship at such a young age was hereditary: her birth into the British royal family; her only sibling being a younger sister; and the untimely death of her father, King George VI.

There is no doubting Queen Elizabeth's devotion to duty, her charm and Christian commitment. While speaking fervently about the birth of Jesus in her 2013 Christmas message, the Queen noted that baby Prince George, her great-grandson, had recently been ‘baptised into a joyful faith of Christian duty and service.’

#### It's in their Minds

Countries which already had, or adopted, a Judeo-Christian religiosity in developing their societies offer many examples of political leaders who believe that God has directly and personally affected their political status. The Church and the laity have given impetus to their wishful claims.

Such political figures claim their God influences their decisions and any outcomes, and even the intentions of voters in acquiring their elevated

position... ipso facto, God has a personal interest in them. Here are three recent examples.

American President George W Bush stated that God told him to launch the Iraq campaign in 2003. Bush said he'd sought guidance from ‘a Higher Father’ in his decision to go to war. Mr Bush believes Jesus is his personal saviour.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that much of his policy-making was underpinned by his Christian faith, and that history and God will eventually judge his decision to go to war with the U.S. in Iraq. God, Blair believes, plays a role in such judgements.

Current Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has a long and strong attachment to the Catholic Church, and had trained for the priesthood. His spiritual advisor is the unshakably-fundamental Catholic Archbishop of Sydney Cardinal George Pell (now the Vatican's head money man \*). Mr Abbott offered ‘thanks to God for the honour I have been given’ in being elected Prime Minister.

The shaky and uncertain foundations of the Christian religion are not grounds for the statements made by these Christian politicians or for the lofty place the Church and its leaders have assumed across much of the world. Cocooned in their indoctrinated mindsets, their thinking defaults easily to their God.

**To Coin a Phrase**

Links to God and divine favour for monarchical reign are, for some, literally on the money.

Coins of the United Kingdom have Queen Elizabeth II's profile with the Latin inscription *ELIZABETH II DEI GRATIA REGINA FIDEI DEFENSOR*, or an abbreviation of these words... meaning Queen Elizabeth II 'rules by the grace of God' and is the 'defender of the faith'. (Elizabeth, as monarch, is supreme head of the Church of England.) Fidei Defensor was first conferred by Pope Leo X on King Henry VIII in 1521, but when Henry broke away from Rome in 1534 he lost that designation. Parliament gave it back to him in 1544.

Profiles of Queen Elizabeth and preceding monarchs, and Christian references appear, or have appeared, on coins from Australia to Canada, Sri Lanka to Fiji, and India to the West Indies. These godly references might be on the money, but do the people really pay

attention? Maybe not consciously, however there might be a subliminal effect, which could, in effect, be contrary to the separation of Church and State. And it's not just Christians who comprise the British populace, indeed the 15 other Commonwealth realms for which Queen Elizabeth is the Head of State, but also those of other faiths, and increasingly, non-religious people.

When Queen Elizabeth passes on her sovereign role, the profiles and faith-based words for Prince Charles or Prince William (or over time, both) will be minted onto the coinage. And into the future, all being well and good within the royal family, for His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge, the prospective King George VII. What a joyful prospect that must be for anti-republicans, and long-time monarchists such as Tony Abbott, former director of Australians for Constitutional Monarchy.

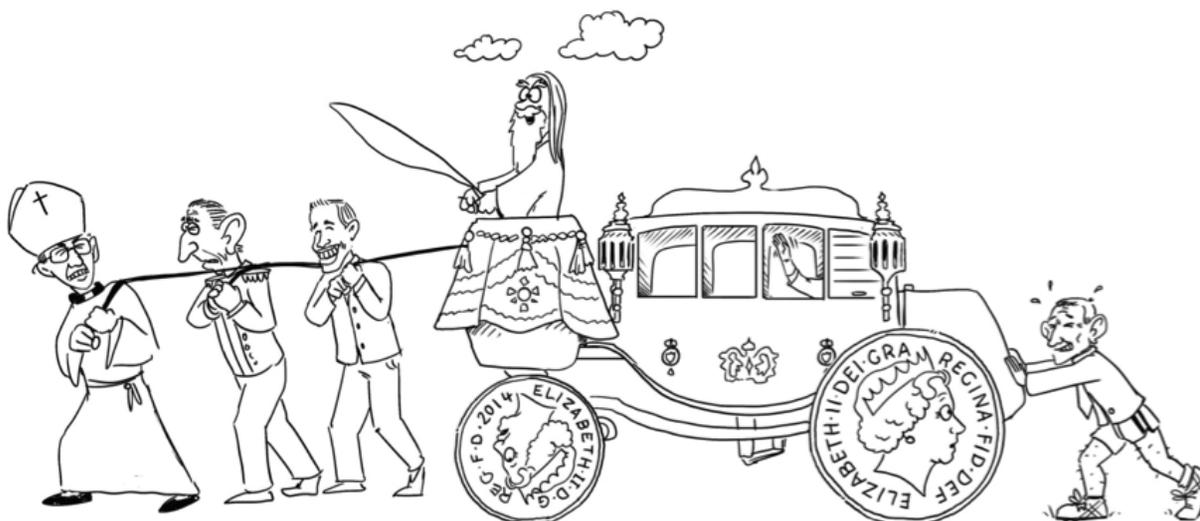
The U.S. currency simply reminds the population that 'In God We Trust'.

**No Real Purchase**

Leaders of empires, monarchies and countries who have tried to cash in on claims of possessing divine privilege, or a link to God, do not have the footholds to support their stances. The convoluted and error-ridden history of the Christian Church, and the contradictions and falsehoods

contained in the Bible give them no legitimate basis to make such outlandish, even vain, assertions. While it might appeal to the Church and a proportion of the population, their posturing is simply not on the money.

*\* Cardinal George Pell has been appointed to head the Vatican's Secretariat for the Economy. Pope Francis established this new bureaucracy in response to corruption scandals which have plagued the Holy See, including at the Vatican Bank. Presumably, Cardinal Pell was selected for this Catholic Church senior management position because of people- and financial-management skills. The Cardinal would not have included in his CV for the job The Prince - Faith, Abuse and George Pell, David Marr's penetrating critique, the Quarterly Essay 51; or have referred to his out-of-touch performance at Victoria's parliamentary inquiry into child abuse, and his error-ridden statement prior to the establishment of a national royal commission into child sexual abuse: that it was not necessary. Cardinal Pell will be managing something like a ministry of finance – for a city-state which does not have the proper credentials to even be a sovereign nation.*



# Interview with Christopher Johnson

-Kylie Sturgess

*Kylie Sturgess is a Philosophy teacher and podcaster from Perth, who has presented at both Global Atheist Conventions in 2010 and 2012. She currently writes the Curiouser and Curiouser column for the Skeptical Inquirer website, blogs at Token Skeptic on the Patheos website and has started a new radio show at [www.urbanlegendaryradio.com](http://www.urbanlegendaryradio.com).*

*Chris Johnson, is the creator of the book *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without God* – a book that documents a hundred atheists from around the world. From the seed of an idea, to Kickstarter, to planning and producing the book – it's been quite an adventure over the last few years for Chris!*

*"The myth persists. Even in our modern world, countless people believe that without God, one's life has no purpose or meaning — that the lives of atheists are devoid of joy and happiness because they are not religious.*

*Explore the meaning and joy of life with 100 atheists in this book of photos and commentary featuring Richard Dawkins, Dan Dennett, Steven Pinker, Penn & Teller, Julia Sweeney, Alex Honnold, Derren Brown, and more."*

*Chris Johnson is a New York based photographer and filmmaker. He received his undergraduate degree in film production (along with a minor in religious studies) from Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. His photography has been seen in *The New York Times*. He has spent the last two years working on *A Better Life*, traveling across the United States, Canada, the UK, Ireland, and other countries.*

**Kylie Sturgess:** Just to set the scene, what's it like for atheists or people without faith in the USA? I mean, we hear lots of stories about persecution or people hiding. What was it like for yourself, for example, coming out as an atheist?

**Chris Johnson:** Well, for me, I didn't grow up with a religious background so I don't really have the experience that many people do, who escape from religion. But I've always found the topic very interesting. I think it is very difficult for people who are religious who decide at some point in their lives that they just don't believe anymore and to move on from that can be quite difficult. There's a lot of persecution here. People are ostracised from their family in some cases. It can be quite difficult for people.

**Kylie:** But your own background, beyond being without faith - you've got a background in freelance photography. What was the initial inspiration for the book which is, "A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy and Meaning in a World Without God"?

**Chris:** I was on a road trip with my brother, traveling through the

southwest United States and just surrounded by all the natural beauty in that area. It got me thinking about these issues, these issues of joy and meaning and just how amazing the world is out there and experiencing it from an atheist perspective, from a nonreligious perspective.

I wanted to share that and show that people can still have lives of purpose, meaning, and joy even without a God. I think it makes these experiences and the beauty that you feel that much more meaningful because life is finite, because it's not going to last forever. You're not going to go to heaven and experience it for the rest of eternity. Because we only have a limited amount of time it makes even that much more special.

**Kylie:** Who is the target audience? Did you initially think, "Oh, this is for atheists to celebrate," or, "This is helping get a message out"?

**Chris:** Well, I think it's for both? I think that it's a good tool for atheists to pick up and look through and identify with the people in the book and realize that they're part of a diverse, broad community, which has many different things to say about these topics.

But I also think religious people can get something out of it, to look at this community which they might not know that much about or be scared of or be curious about. I think it humanises atheism in a way that I don't think we've seen before.

**Kylie:** Of course, it's one thing to have an idea. It's another thing making it into reality. Was Kickstarter your first choice when it came to funding. I noticed that you managed to not only get to your goal, but overset your goal with eventual funding.

**Chris:** Yes, Kickstarter really was the missing piece of the puzzle for me. I had the idea. I even had some people lined up and I thought, "Well, how do I want to do this?" It wasn't until I found Kickstarter that I thought, "OK, this is a way to do it. This is a way for somebody who's not well known, who doesn't have money, who doesn't have the resources but has an idea and wants to do this that makes it possible." I think that's one of the brilliant things about Kickstarter and crowdfunding, in general, is that it really levels playing fields. If you have a really good idea and you can sell that idea, you can do a project that you wouldn't normally get to do otherwise.

I don't think that traditional publishers would have wanted to do a project like this because of the subject matter for one. The expense for two and three, because I'm not anybody known so I don't think they would have said, "Here's a chunk of money to go do this," so I had to do it all myself.

**Kylie:** Was it stressful? I mean, for that goal, has it been fairly smooth sailing? I mean, you have a background in photography so you had that skill set already, ready to go.

**Chris:** That's a good question. It was very stressful. It wasn't something that you just put it out there and everybody finds it and gives you money. I wish things were like that. It was a very stressful experience because you have to sell it. You have to keep selling it. You have to really promote it and that's something that, even now in selling the book now that it's out, I have to work on myself because I'm not necessarily good at being promotional as far as part of my skill set.

So yeah, you have to do a lot of work and it takes a lot of effort but it does pay off in the end, hopefully.

**Kylie:** Yeah, it's a whole different world being an advertiser of oneself. You have to put aside the ego and say, "No, sorry. The project means more. I have to do this." It's tough.

How did you figure out the logistics of achieving all the interviews? I mean, again, you've got an idea. People were behind you. You've got funding and then it's like, "Right. How are we going to do this?"

**Chris:** Google Calendar was my friend!

**Kylie:** I love Google Calendar!

**Chris:** It's amazing. I just set up Google Calendar. I plotted out roughly where I needed to go and how long I needed to stay in each place and just put together an itinerary and then said to people, "OK, I'm going to be in Austin, Texas," or, "I'm going to be in London," or, "I'm going to be in Los

Angeles from this date to this date. Are you free any of those days. Let me know which one."

And then everybody would select a day and it actually worked out surprisingly well, considering the amount of people involved in the project. Everybody was able to get a day and it all worked out fairly well.

I also didn't do it all in one chunk, so it wasn't all 100 scheduled all at once. I did a piece at a time so that made it a bit more manageable.

**Kylie:** How long did it take overall?



**Chris:** It took about a year and a half, almost two years. It took quite a long time.

**Kylie:** Amazing. What was it like designing the book? Did you have alternative versions, people you had to leave out or pop in at the last second?

**Chris:** There were people I got at the last minute. I would get suggestions from people who were already in the book who would say, "Oh, I love this. This person that I know would be interested in doing it. They would be a great addition."

I kept spots open throughout the process because I knew that would happen. That is actually a really great way to get new people involved because it's all about who you know, right? So everybody knows everybody else and you get it in that way.

And so, that really helped in diversifying the group of people involved, so it wasn't just people that I knew or knew of in some

cases. People I'd never heard of that someone would suggest made it in.

**Kylie:** Excellent. I think the photos are fantastic in the book. I was particularly struck by Chris Steadman's socks. I thought they were really quite snappy.

**Chris:** Yes. He has great socks!

**Kylie:** Did you have any particular favorite photo shoots that you ended up doing?

**Chris:** Oh, it's so hard. It's like picking your favorite children.

**Kylie:** Oh, no! They'll hear and they'll get upset. Everybody was loved. Everybody!

**Chris:** Everybody was my favorite! There were certainly some very memorable shoots. Really, I can't say enough how grateful I am that people took me into their lives and showed me things and showed me what gives their life joy and meaning. That really meant a lot to me. There were so many experiences. Each shoot was unique. Each shoot was different and it was really a lot of fun.

One of my favorites in particular was Derren Brown over in England. We met him in this beautiful old hotel in the English countryside. It was just such a beautiful little spot and if you look at his photos in the book he was amused that the couch cushions matched the couch that he was sitting on so he would cover himself in the cushions and try to disappear into the couch. It was pretty funny. We had a really good time.

**Kylie:** Magicians. They disappear whenever they have the opportunity. Who were some of the groups who helped you out? There must have been conferences, of course, involved in this because that's one way you can get a whole clump, as it were. I'm not sure of the collective noun of atheists... I think clump's a good word. A clump, a non faith of atheists together, in order to get the interviews done.

**Chris:** A gaggle? I think a gaggle is a good word.

**Kylie:** That one I like too!

**Chris:** Different organisations were involved in helping promote the project when it was in Kickstarter. The American Humanist Association, Freedom From Religion Foundation, various organisations helped out and promoted it and said, "This is something worth supporting."

Even when I was running around doing shoots, I still kept up with some of the people involved in the organisations and we'd give little updates and things like that.

**Kylie:** What was the biggest adventure or surprise out of the whole thing? I was kind of surprised that Christopher Hitchens, for example, was included since I know that he passed before the book was done but it was a lovely inclusion to have.

**Chris:** Yeah. I mean, that turned out really well. He's not in it physically. He's in with his wife, but there are just so many adventures and things that came along the way and just the number of people who, as I said, opened themselves up and wanted to be a part of this project and made time in their busy schedules to do

this really meant a lot. And so, it was quite the experience.

**Kylie:** What's been the overall response? What plans have you got next?

**Chris:** Ooh, that's a good question. Well, the response has been great. I've gotten some really great reviews, great feedback. It's really struck a chord with people and that makes me feel great that something that has been in my head for so long, that people are seeing it and they're getting the books now.

They're saying, "This is really a game changer. It's changing the way I'm thinking about X, Y, or Z, or the way I'm thinking about atheists." That really makes a difference to me. It's something that you do that takes so much time and effort to put into and it really helps people.

As far as the future, I'm not exactly sure. I took video of all of the interviews I did, so there could be a film in the works. I'm not sure yet what exactly the plan for that is, but it's something I definitely want to work on for sure.

**Kylie:** Now I'm going to be sneaky and throw in a final question here. What gives you joy and meaning?

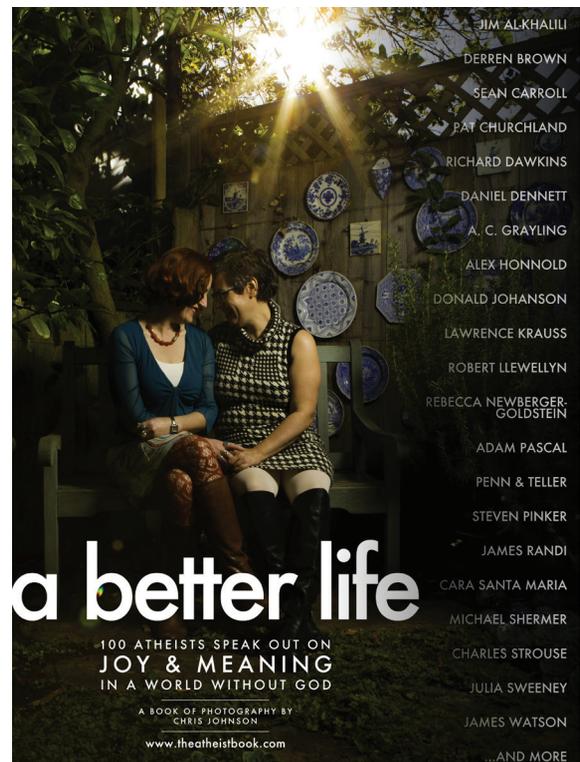
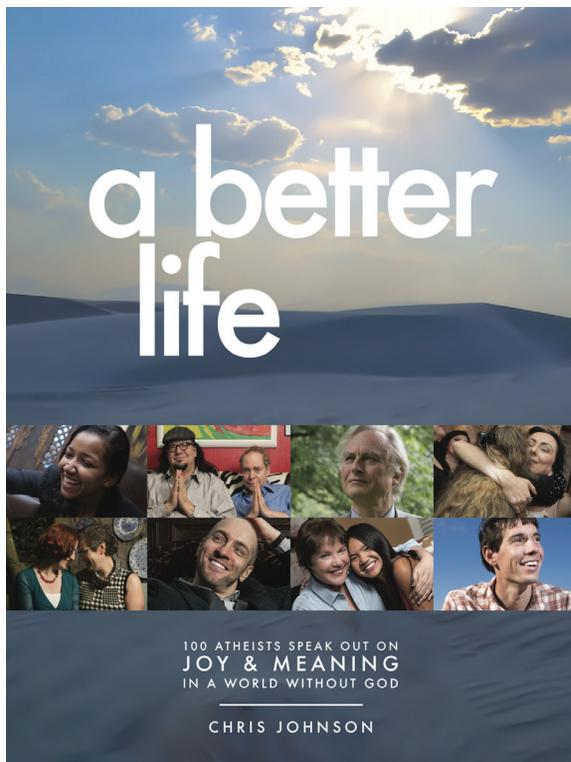
**Chris:** That's the big question, isn't it?

What gives my life joy and meaning? Many things do. I think there are certainly common threads that run throughout the book. Things that apply to everybody including me, believe it or not - family, friends, relationships, art, nature. They're the things that inspired the project in the first place.

It was being in New Mexico and seeing the incredible beauty there, being out in the middle of nowhere with nobody around and just looking at the beauty of this world and how amazing that is. That really makes me feel incredible when I'm in situations like that.

And so to be able to try to capture those emotions and put them in a book is kind of a tall order, but hopefully people get something out of it and people appreciate what I'm trying to get across.

***A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without God by Chris Johnson can be purchased online and can be ordered at the best local bookstores.***



# Taste of Religion

- Iman Rasmanesh

Rites and ceremonies are integral components of any religion. These are held regularly on a specific schedule. Normally, nothing new is invented, discussed or studied and the main aim is to reread and repeat religious values. There are some stark similarities between such ceremonies and brainwashing, but they aren't exactly the same thing.

"Brainwashing" is a general term that refers to the involuntary re-education of core beliefs and values. This term was first used by the American journalist, Edward Hunter.

In the middle of the Korean war, 21 American soldiers were captured by the Chinese army - they accepted communism and refused to return to the USA. Hunter believed that their beliefs had been manipulated and controlled by the Chinese. The brainwashing process would change the thoughts and beliefs of a person against his or her "will". Whilst people throughout history have gone to church, synagogue or mosques at their own will, these people are mostly born believers and have been raised with religious beliefs.

Religions are concerned that their victims will access new information provided by minds that aren't under its authority and as a consequence, the victims rebel against the system. But the issue is that religion has used this method in an era in which there was not any kind of advanced communication facilities, and some of these rituals were not exclusively designed to practice collectively but also in solitude. Why is it that religion cares about our solitude and insists on not leaving us alone?

Around two hundred thousand years ago, the modern human opened his eyes in the African deserts. In addition to all the living and abiotic enemies that were devastating human beings,

there was another enemy with a close relationship with man, his cousin neanderthal. But the encounter between the cousins didn't take place until modern humans (homo sapiens) emigrated from their homeland Africa to the other corners of the world. Neanderthals were very similar to us. Both neanderthals and homo sapiens evolved from the same species. Competition between two cousins became intense and led to hostilities which sealed the fate of humanity.

There are a few theories about the extinction of neanderthals. Homo sapiens were much more creative than their cousins. They were very capable of winning battles against the other species. They could make better military tools and defeat even the strongest neanderthals. They sewed their clothes with bone needles to better protect themselves from cold weather and consequently, they consumed less food. Modern humans formulated plans, so they were much better prepared. The neanderthals made tools as well, but their tools were not advanced.

Scientists believe that this significant difference between the two cousins stems from their habitat. The birthplace of neanderthals was Europe, where access to water and food wasn't difficult. It was a haven full of blessing. In such a haven, all that's required is a strong and healthy body to chase the hunt. Life was not that easy for homo sapiens. They lived in a hot, arid and dry land in which it was difficult to find a shadow. They couldn't chase the hunt constantly and spent a lot of time in the shade, waiting for the right time to come. Situations like this might occur when they were waiting for rain to pass, but this time of expectation gave the homo sapiens much more time to think, form ideas and even create art.

"We should not teach children the sciences; but give them a taste for them." Those were the words of the French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau. Science has different tastes in itself but maybe the most intense taste is wonder.

Man had experienced this wonderful taste before the creation of religion, when in his solitude he was staring at the sky and watching rotating stars, when he made the first fire, he had tasted this unforgettable taste.

Religion is aware of this favorite of human beings because religion itself has been made by the hand of the modern human. Religion has always utilised miracles to answer their consumers demand for this taste. That's why so many religious people are turning to the science market in order to gain a much greater, interminable and pure source of "wonder". This new source is based on evidence and real world occurrences that give homo sapiens a real source of wonder that can't be stopped. It's filling in the void for the knowledge gap which was never provided by religion.

Religions are aware that science tastes better, and if somebody tastes the latent, pure wonder in science then it could spark the end of religion in their lives. Religion tries to remove thinking time from a person's life, filling his or her time of thinking with rituals and ceremonies until it finally shoots its last bullet to the victim's thoughts in the form of "religious faith". Perhaps if religious leaders could play the role of nature, they'd have preferred for neanderthals to survive and for homo sapiens to become extinct. This way, the religion could remain undisturbed for hundreds or thousands of years. But, undoubtedly, someday they would eventually open their eyes and rebel against the big lie, "God".

# Secular Apostate

- Geoff Rogers

For one reason or another, I'm addicted to the idea of intellectual honesty. I don't always achieve it, but I strive for it constantly. It's very tiring. And it is this, if it is anything, that has rendered me an atheist despite an upbringing steeped in religion.

But it spills over into other areas of life too. All other areas, really. It's like liquid oxygen – the surface tension's so high it crawls out of the bottle and gets everywhere. It permeates my life, and my perspectives.

Call it scepticism, if you will, but not a combative scepticism. Indeed, it's more a curiosity – and I needed to develop sceptical thinking in order to counter my natural gullibility, but more on that another time. Anyway, whatever it is, I find myself increasingly unable to leap to conclusions based on bugger all data. And it can cause some not-insignificant personal friction, when others don't quite get it.

The problem arises when I don't immediately agree with an opinion

someone espouses. I'm sure we've all been there. In a society rife with woo, it can be wearying being a non-believer. But for me it extends further than the issue of supernatural bollocks, into actual issues that are subject to, well, subjective bollocks.

I was recently involved in a discussion regarding privilege and disadvantage in Australian society, and was asked why some schools allow kids of a certain background to take a break whenever they want – an option not available to other kids. Why this was being asked of me I'm not sure, as I'm in no expert on such matters. However, I pointed out that it may be that the attempt is being made to redress some of the imbalance of disadvantage that these kids, on aggregate, suffer in every other aspect of their lives, and thus work toward some form of social justice and equality.

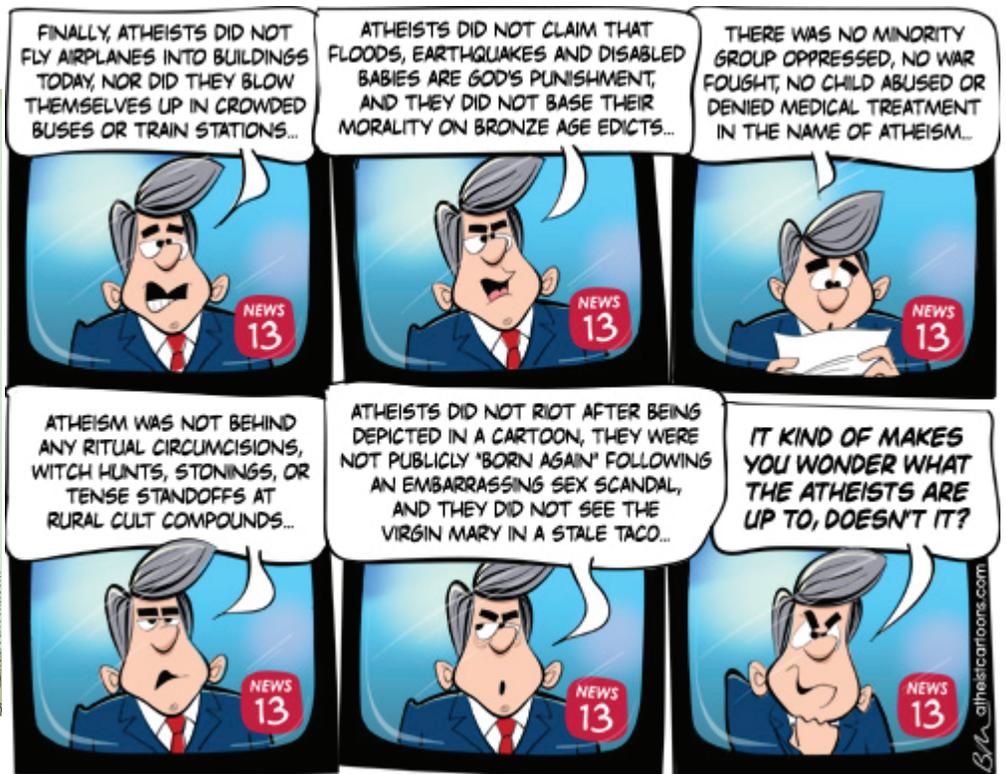
Anecdotes, second hand, were offered, as justification for why this doesn't work. I'm sorry, I can't make judgements based on anecdotes. I

need data. And then I'm accused of talking bullshit, and not knowing how things work in the real world, and effectively of being an apologist for ... well, something or other.

Which is interesting. I've explicitly stated that I'm not pretending to be an expert, and I don't have a firm view, but perhaps it might be worthwhile to look at the current state of academic social research to understand why things are being done in this way. However, because I don't subjectively and immediately agree that this is bullshit, I'm accused of being an enemy sympathiser.

Which is essentially what it is. I don't join with you in condemning the out-group? I must be a bad person. Sure, I'm a bad person, but not for that reason. There are plenty of others to choose from. But I'm not going to join with you in that behaviour. It's the same behaviour I find abhorrent in the religious, and I'll not take part.

Pariah, apostate, call me what you will. I simply cannot believe.



# One God Too Many

- Sten Bjerking

Sten is an active member on the AFA forums. He has written a book on the christian god and we will be serialising it. This is the third segment

*Man makes his Gods himself, to suit his Needs,  
And fabricates his Rituals and Creeds,  
Builds temples to these Manufactured Myths,  
And then on self-grown Superstition Feeds.*

Moses is arguably the best known character in the Old Testament after being brought to life so well by Charlton Heston in the movie; The Ten Commandments. The movie producers added a lot of detail that is not in the book Exodus and took considerable artistic licence in the way the story was told, but it is a very entertaining film.

Moses is raised as an Egyptian although born a Hebrew. His mother had set him adrift on the river to save his life because the Pharaoh at the time wanted to kill all Hebrew male babies. (The Hebrews were slaves of the Egyptians then and having a rough time of it.) The Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and raised him as her own son. (Exodus 2:1-10)

When he reaches manhood Moses kills an Egyptian who is about to kill one of his fellow Hebrews. The Pharaoh finds out about it and wants to execute Moses for the crime but he escapes. He travels to a distant land, gets married to Zipporah, and has a son. (Exodus 2:11-22)

Moses tries his hand as a shepherd for a while and one day he and his flock are near a mountain called Horeb, which according to the locals is the place where God hangs out. Taking a break from tending the sheep, Moses climbs the mountain to check it out and finds a burning bush. A voice emanating from the bush quickly identifies itself as God. (Exodus 3:1-6)

After a short exchange of pleasantries, God tells Moses he has a job for him to do. He informs

Moses that he has heard the cries of his people, who have been suffering in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years, and it had jogged his memory about the covenant he made with them via Abraham. He tells Moses he has decided to free his people from the Egyptians and Moses is going to be the man on the ground for him.



Moses gets a bit weak in the knees and tries to get out of it, using the excuse that he is not good at making speeches. God is annoyed but tells Moses he will send his brother Aaron (who has the reputation of being a silver tongue), to help him out. God equips Moses with a rod that he can turn into a snake at will, shows him some other tricks, and sends him on his way. (Exodus 3:7-12) (Exodus 4:2-90)

This account raises a number of questions about God's ability and commitment. Christians believe that God is everywhere, so what is he

doing confining himself to a mountain and talking from a burning bush? He is also supposed to know everything, so how does he forget his special people and is only made aware of their plight when he hears their cries after so many years of suffering? Where was God's commitment to these people?

Moses does as he is told, bundles the wife and kids onto the family donkey, and heads off to Egypt. All is not smooth sailing however because God's behaviour becomes erratic. Firstly He decides to make the task for Moses more difficult by "hardening the heart of the Pharaoh" after he has been softened up by Moses performing miracles and putting the pressure on. (Exodus 4:21) Then God tries to kill Moses! (Exodus 4:24)

There is no explanation of why God wanted to get rid of Moses. Moses has been doing what God asked him to do, so why should God want to kill him? On the other hand why should God find this hard to do? From the beginning of creation He had been slaying people in the thousands with little effort.

Zipporah manages to thwart the attempt on her husband's life by grabbing a sharp stone and circumcising her son with it. She throws the foreskin at the feet of Moses and calls him a bloody husband. For reasons unknown this does the trick and Moses is spared an untimely end. (The only thing that makes sense or has any consistency here is God's fixation regarding foreskins.) (Exodus 4:25-26)

Moses and his entourage continue their journey to Egypt, rendezvous with Aaron, and have a meeting with all the Hebrew elders, where Moses, via Aaron, tells them what they are about to do. The Hebrews believe them, are very grateful, and get on with some serious worshipping. (Exodus 4:29-31)

True to their word, Moses and Aaron confront the Pharaoh about freeing the Hebrews. The Pharaoh is not swayed by the arguments and refuses to do as they ask, so Moses does all the tricks that God has taught him. He turns the special rod given to him by God into a snake, transforms the Nile into a river of blood, creates a plague of frogs, then lice, and finally flies. (Exodus 5 to 8)

The Pharaoh flip flops saying he will let the Hebrews go, and then changes his mind a couple of times. God is playing both hands, enabling Moses to do his stuff and then getting into the Pharaoh's head and hardening his heart, as he told Moses he would do. Moses manages to keep his cool in these difficult circumstances although many would have told God what he could do with his job long before this.

This episode makes little sense. We have to ask why God would do this? Was it his intention to make the Pharaoh, along with everyone else including the Hebrews, suffer as much as possible or did he just want to drag the situation out so that he could show off with all his tricks?

God via Moses is just warming up and there's plenty more to come including a hailstorm, killing the

Egyptians livestock, and a plague of locusts. The Pharaoh continues to flip flop so God gets tired of the game and decides to play his trump card. He knows this one is going to do the trick and he tells Moses it will. Moses displays great patience and does not ask the obvious question, "why didn't we do this first up?" (Exodus 11:1)

The final plague that God brings down is supposed to kill all the first born in the land including men and cattle. As God took care of all Egyptian cattle in a previous bout of smiting this is a little puzzling.

The Hebrews are protected by painting their doors with lambs blood, and God tells them to have a special meal and celebration while the Egyptians are dropping like flies. (This is the origin of the passover feast that Jews celebrate to this day, celebrating that the plague passed them over.) (Exodus 12:21-22)

The Pharaoh relents as God predicted and the Hebrews are set free. God decides he wants to give the Pharaoh a final drubbing however, so he hardens his heart again. Pharaoh gets all his troops and chariots together and heads off in hot pursuit of the Hebrews, with the intention of doing a bit of smiting himself. (Exodus 14:4-5)

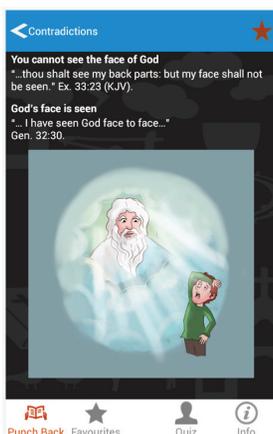
The Hebrews are backed up against the sea when the Pharaoh's troops come bearing down on them. Things are looking a bit grim until Moses manages to part the sea so that his people can walk across to the other shore and then drops the water on the Egyptians who foolishly try to follow. (Exodus 14:21-28)

Being free now, the Hebrews are happy with the way things have turned out. Moses overcomes his stage fright and leads his people in song about how well God does war. (He seems to slip up in one verse when he compares God to other gods - God is supposed to be the only god - but his exuberance may have got the better of him.) (Exodus 15:1-11)

That the Hebrews are special in God's eyes is fairly obvious from the time that he made his covenant with Abraham and he refers to them as "my people" a number of times. It is not until a little later in the book of Deuteronomy that God finally comes out with it and refers to the Hebrews as his "chosen people". (Deuteronomy - 14:2)

I wonder why Christians are not troubled by the knowledge that the God they believe in was once only interested in looking after one small group of people and seemed to regard the rest of humanity as the enemy. How can a God who behaves in this unfair manner be described as just and loving?

"But Jesus came along and changed all that", I have heard them chorus, "Jesus came for everybody". These claims are somewhat contentious and are dealt with later, but disregarding that, we still are left with the question about the millions of people who lived before Christ, who were not Jews, and therefore God's only interest in them was to kill them himself or get someone else to do it for him.



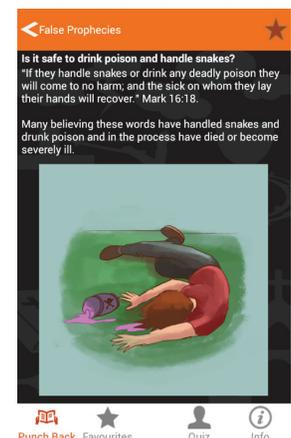
### Atheist App for Android

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# Easter

- Gerard Williams

## What is Easter?

In April, when the Easter holidays are over, and everyone is discussing the myriad acts at Bluesfest as the tent poles are being stowed, and the video images of the devout faithful on procession behind golden-robed prelates fade in the memory, perhaps it would be a good time to look at what Easter actually commemorates. That is, why do we get a 4-day weekend?

To Christians, Easter celebrates the death by crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Good Friday, and his resurrection on the third day, Sunday. It is not a fixed date, like Christmas, but occurs on the first weekend after the full moon following the equinox, more or less, and can occur anywhere between the 22nd March and 25th April.

Easter is linked to the Passover, a pilgrimage of the people of the Kingdom of Judah to the Temple in Jerusalem, and is fundamentally Jewish. It is one of the many celebrations common to the Jewish and Christian traditions, and commemorates the freeing of the

Jewish people from Egyptian slavery by God. In Exodus, God helped the Israelite slaves flee Egypt by inflicting the ten plagues on the people of the Pharos. The Jewish celebration of Passover is complex, starting with a special meal called the Seder, and lasting for the next seven days.

For Christians, the Seder meal becomes the Last Supper, where Jesus announces his impending trial and death to the disciples. The Passover, or Pasach, is the Jewish term for the Easter celebrations. Easter, the modern Christian term, is thought to derive from the name of the Indo European Dawn Goddess, Austro, which became the goddess Oestre (old Northumbrian), or Ostara (old high German). Although, some have argued that oestre means 'the month of opening'.

Christians of Jewish origin were the first to celebrate Easter as the anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus, incorporating it into the festival of the Passover. Evidence for the celebration of Easter begins to appear around 1500. However, the first known reference, by Melito of Sardis, describes the festival as a well established one. Easter has become the most important period in the Christian church, and is preceded by lent, a period of 40 days of fasting. Although, that is generally not observed very strictly.

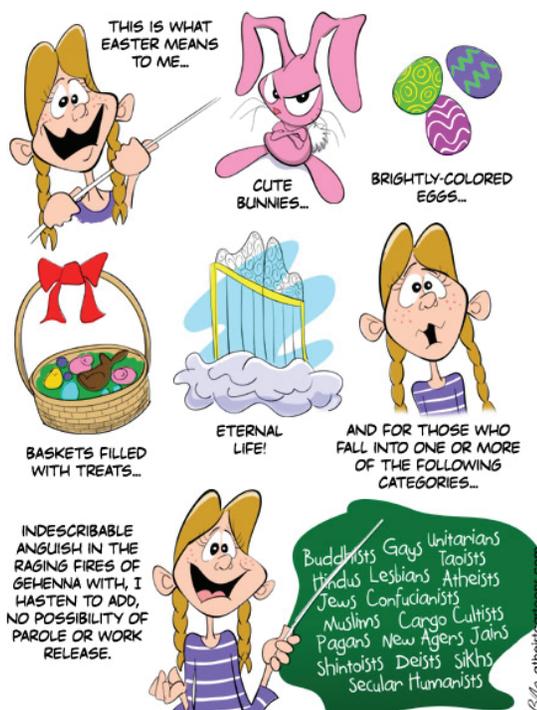
Current customs, including Easter eggs and the Easter bunny, have become intrinsic with Easter celebrations, whether Christian or not. Some Christians maintain that the egg symbolises the resurrection of Jesus, as the egg gives life to the bird (or lizard); others say that it symbolises the

tombstone which was rolled back on Easter Sunday for the resurrection. Societies have always celebrated the start of spring, which more or less coincides with Easter in the northern hemisphere; eggs and rabbits (which are well known for their fecundity) therefore, became enduring symbols of the spring celebrations of Ostara. This was all subsumed in the Jewish and Christian celebrations of Passover, and then Easter.

The practice of decorating eggs predates Christian traditions, dating back around 5,000 years to ancient Egypt and Sumeria. The Christians of Mesopotamia adopted the custom in Easter celebrations, staining the eggs red to symbolise the blood of Christ. Bunnies were probably just incorporated because there were a lot around in early spring.

So what is Easter? Primarily, a celebration of spring, which has been subsumed into the Jewish ritual of Passover and later the Christian celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ. Spring is real of course; the others require faith.

We get a 4-day holiday because Anglo society was overwhelmingly Christian, celebrating Good Friday as the death, Sunday as the resurrection and Monday as whatever. The four day holiday was subsequently subsumed by entrepreneurs to put on four-day music festivals, drawing huge crowds with the extra travelling time, making a lot of money and generating a lot of great music. In Byron, the only thing that is certain in Easter, is that there will be a bluesfest.



# Omnitheism

- Jonathan Omnitheon Carter

*Jonathan Carter is a Melbourne violinist with an English PhD and publications in peak international journals.*

Back in 1999, a Canadian philosopher brought out a very neat book about fiction. Now fictional objects either exist or they don't. And the common view is that they don't. But in that case, she asked, why do we so easily talk about them as if they do? It's perfectly natural. It can be interesting and intelligent. And there's a hell of a lot of it, in writing as well as conversation about short stories, novels, films, TV one-offs and series, songs and musicals and all the rest.

somehow have to explain exactly how. And most end up saying fictions exist as abstract things, not concrete things, possible things, not actual things. In that case though, those things aren't really invented, but discovered, since they seem to have been round all the time as possibilities. Before they were even thought of or written down! Icky.

So that was the state of play before Thomasson made her argument. I'm happy to say it's embarrassingly simple and should've been thought of

empirical world; and atheists because they believe supernaturals don't exist at all. They'll say they're fictions but if pressed on the point, they're unlikely to say that fictions exist because in that case God exists. Or seems to.

Which is very precisely my point. God exists. All Gods exist. All supernaturals exist. Just not in the way they're imagined to exist by supernaturalists themselves. And this allows us to talk sense with our opponents—to talk about their stories as stories—without conceding this or



Then too, if fictional things don't exist—people, things, events—that's an awful lot of different names for nothing. And an awful lot of different names for different kinds of nothing: just as many and even more than we have for all the things that actually do exist. So if you don't believe in the existence of fictional things, you've still got a lot of work explaining all of that.

Not that you're alone in your embarrassment since those who believe fictional things do exist,

long ago. First, fictions are abstract not concrete things: like numbers or compass directions. Second, they exist in, and through, particular acts of speech or writing. (If the text is lost, so are all the fictional things it contains.) And third, they require an audience to make sense of them. So talk about fictions now makes sense because fictional things exist.

Best of all, you can embarrass not only theists but atheists as well: theists because they believe supernaturals exist in this our concrete, real,

that or the other of the many is The One True Story.

It should even allow the various supernaturalists to talk to one another with a little intelligence and grace. Above all, we can all admit we take fiction and literature seriously instead of making mealy-mouthed noises about the value of arts we don't in fact believe in.

So I hope you'll join me and become an Omnitheist: an advocate of Omnitheism.

# The Greater Tragedy of Islam

- Eman Extinguished

*Eman is an islamically raised writer born and educated in Sydney Australia. He studied engineering and works as a corporate professional with a growing interest in writing about the subject matter of this article series. Up until his late 20s he'd identified as muslim and was part of a devout family with conservative leanings. Prayers, fasting, alms giving and sacredness were upheld and his father performed hajj at Mecca several times. Growing up he'd be the one who went against the grain by freely socialising with non muslims, travelling to different continents, taking up hobbies regarded as alien to the median Islamic majority and generally being western cultured. He is the lone member of the family to have questioned Islam to the point he parted ways with it and all other forms of organised religion.*

*Eman is a regular contributor to the Australian Atheist magazine. His mission is to introspectively look at the tenets of Islam and discuss them in a light that is unhindered by the taboos he encountered. With this, muslims should be better informed about the fundamentals of their belief and the scepticism and interrogation that one outside of it would subject it to. It's also designed to give an assisting perspective for those muslims that are in the contemplative phase that he once was and for spiritual leaders to contemporise the religion and make it more adaptable to new understandings of co-existence and human self growth.*

*And as for those who believe not in the Hereafter their hearts refuse to know, for they are proud."*  
Quran (16:22)

This kind of thinking is abetted by an article written by Martin Robbins responding to a tweet by Richard Dawkins "All the world's Muslims have fewer Nobel Prizes than Trinity College, Cambridge. They did great things in the Middle Ages, though". Understandably Robbins takes umbrage at the perceived arrogance and linear measure of intelligence. His closing line of the article is "Richard Dawkins - a man who knows the definition of everything and the meaning of nothing". Of course muslims would nod to each other in approval, particularly because it was an independent non muslim who made the conclusion.

I, myself, have read the God Delusion by Richard Dawkins and I have a different take on his style. For a long time having believed in something that was given credence by force of congregated numbers, 'feeling' right, and a test to your conviction in overcoming the immediately apparent 'illusion', I was quite taken aback and grinning at his ability to expose the denial system I had built. In much the same vein, you tip your hat to somebody who liberated you from a false understanding and set you straight.

In this endeavour, there is no room for being apologetic and diluting your argument, otherwise your argument is not genuine. The man is passionate about his purpose and he genuinely sees religion as a vice, warping the psychology of defenceless and impressionable people.



Those who perceive this tone as offensive are perhaps those hiding feelings of embarrassment described earlier. Having an insecurity brushed. Famous comedian Louis CK satirically muses "Offending people is a necessary and healthy act. Every time you say something that's offensive to another person you just caused a discussion. You just forced them to have to think".

The second precursor to a strong denial system and interwoven quite cleverly into the creed of Islam is the emphasis of a world beyond the seen.

*Know that the life of the world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children; as the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the husbandman, but afterward it dried up and thou seest it turning yellow, then it becometh straw. And in the Hereafter there is grievous punishment, and (also) forgiveness from Allah and His good pleasure, whereas the life of the world is but matter of illusion.*

Quran 57:20,

The reasoning proceeds that nothing is apparently as it seems and the devil is very clever in contorting truth. He's wrapped his damnation capsule into something completely palatable and fair seeming. God let it be this way, because he purposefully set up a very difficult test to sift the genuine, obedient and good hearted from the not so. Of course none of this is falsifiable so it can't be disproved. If embedded within your mind from a young age, this is quite hard to shake off.

A deeply steeped superstition and one that breeds paranoia fuelled by a suspicion there are corruptive forces in the world (i.e) the illuminati, freemasons and other secret orders that are aligned with secrecy and darkness that have helped non-muslim nations rise to prominence and furthering this illusion. Now

I can't say I ever got to the bottom of the mystery of these cults and orders, but if that's the proof god had in mind to show us the devil exists then it's one that's not so intuitively arrived to.

The common theme with these faith forewarnings is that they call upon you to bypass your immediate cognitive senses and logically rationalising brain and access the faculties of the heart to understand. The brain that comprehends based on what it sees and can logically and empirically extrapolate is deceiving. Does god loathe us using our head? Are we going to be brought to account on the day of judgement for doing so? The same organ that tells us the concept that two of every species got on an ark while a flood

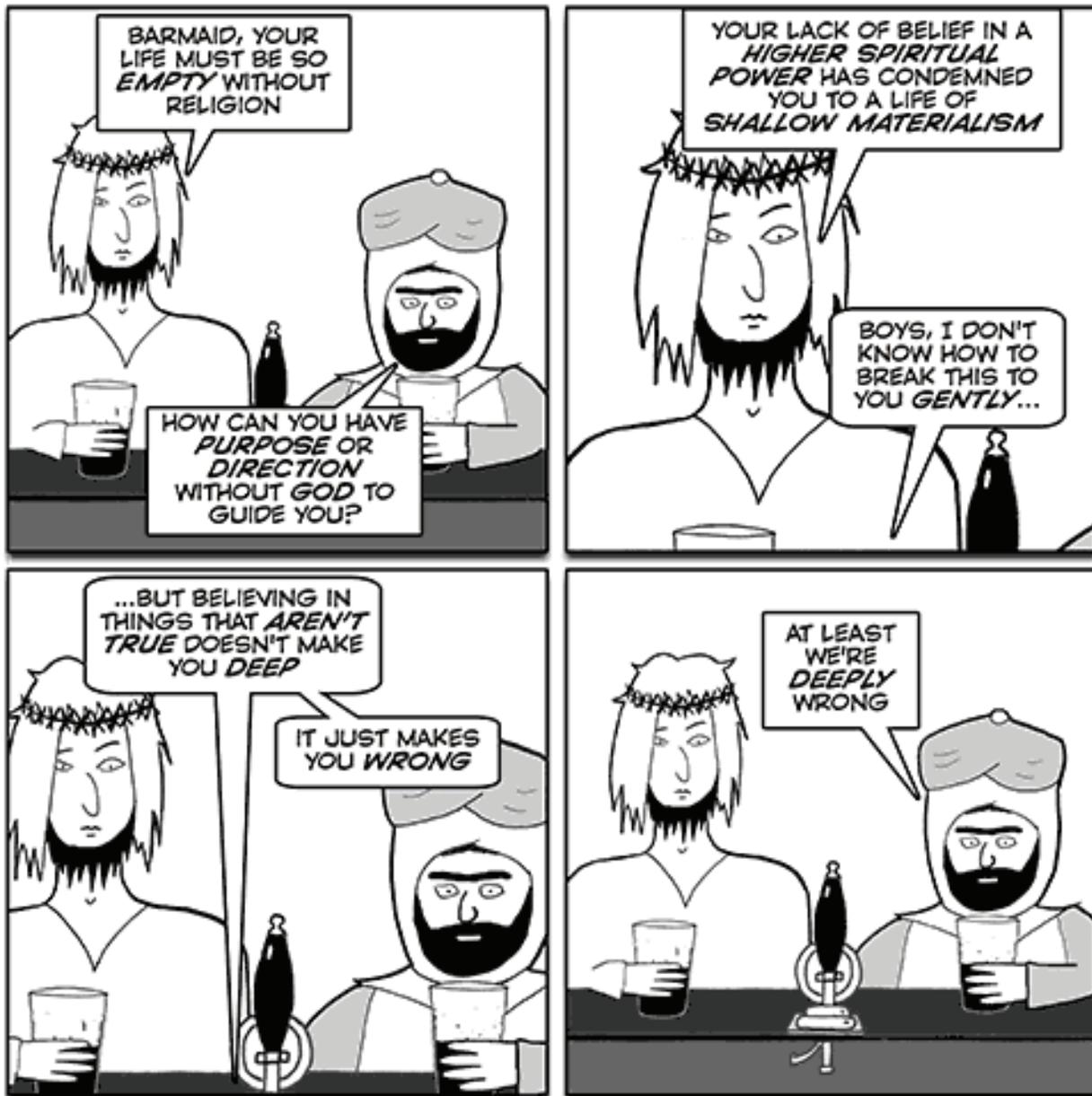
consumed everyone else is absurd. Or that the bodies of prophets don't decompose. This organ is not to be entirely trusted to act on its own.

The dedicated muslim maintains it's within god's power to do what he wants and only those that liberate their hearts will come to see the logic in the Islamic tale. Admittedly sometimes that irrational 'sixth sense' associated with the heart does provide some evolutionary and practical benefit.

Muslims that sense their community is not at the forefront of fresh ideas, success in life and unsure why that isn't the case. Unsure how to take their community forward while keeping to the tenets of their belief.

The numbers of these people living with this dilemma far outweigh those militant flavoured muslims that have tendencies to outward violence and absolute political control.

Ideally, I, myself, who still has warm and close ties to some great people in this community, would like to see those who are consumed in this doubt to have the courage to not let it enslave them any further. Or another yet favourable outcome is for the muslim community to take stock of these cited shortcomings and come up with a model within their belief system to afford the freedoms required for self growth to occur as it should.



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# Would You Get Into Heaven?

- Mike Meyerson

*Mike Meyerson is a member with a lot of on his mind. This is another he submitted. Would you get into the christian 'heaven' using the bible as a guide.*

## THE SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

God made the universe about 6000 years ago. The task took six days and was concluded with the earth at the centre, and the sun revolving around the earth every twenty-four hours. God made the first human, Adam, and later created a wife for him from one of Adam's ribs. They lived together in the Garden of Eden having free run of the place but for a single prohibition: God forbade the eating of apples. Adam, however, ate an apple. God, we are taught, is loving, merciful, just, compassionate and forgiving, but on discovering that Adam ate an apple the Lord became enraged. God's punishment was severe. He banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. He also declared that all future humans would now be classified as sinners from birth. God's Kingdom was set to remain vacant for eternity.

Heaven remained virtually unoccupied for the next 4,000 years but then God came up with a solution, an elaborate plan that would provide an escape clause from the sentence of eternal damnation for all humans. There would now be a means by which humans born after the early part of the 1st century CE could gain admission to heaven. The scheme is not available for those who lived before this time. The plan required God, as a ghost, to impregnate a betrothed Palestinian virgin called Mary. Joseph, her fiancé, was not informed of the plan. The virgin duly gave birth to Jesus, the son of God, who is at the same time also God and was therefore also responsible for impregnating his mother. God, as Jesus, subsequently allowed himself to be killed by humans - a type of self sacrifice. In this way Jesus/God, although a supernatural deity, died. The death was only temporary but allows us all to be forgiven for the

sin that none of us committed, and thus gain entry to heaven. The only condition, according to the ministers, is that we must believe the story and have faith in Jesus. No belief, no admission. Too easy, one might think.

According to God's own manual, however, the situation is not entirely as the ministers would have us believe. Read on, then complete the quiz to determine your personal chances of qualifying for heaven.

## CONDITIONS FOR ADMISSION

### **Faith in Jesus**

Christian ministers emphasise that the only condition for entry to heaven is that we accept Jesus as our saviour. Their proof is verses such as John 14:6: "Jesus replied, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me". John 14:6

Believers in faiths other than Christianity are therefore excluded from heaven. Also excluded are all those who lived before the time of Jesus, those who have not heard of Jesus, those who die before they are capable of accepting Jesus, and all non-believers.

### **Faith in Jesus is not sufficient**

The Lord insists that belief in him is not the only requirement for entry. We must also live a good life and do good deeds. God, and Jesus, separately and together, emphasise the importance of living a good life on several occasions. Some will find this news disconcerting. It does trim down the number of admissions.

For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Matt 16:27 (KJV)

I am coming soon, and bringing with me my recompense to repay everyone according to what he has done!.... Revs 22:12

... the dead were judged by what they had done.... Revs 20:12

...Everyone was judged on the record of his deeds. Revs 20:13

And unfailing love is yours, Lord; you reward everyone according to what he has done. Psalms 62:12

### **Charitable deeds**

Jesus tells us to do our charitable deeds in secret or be barred from heaven.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Matt 6:1 (KJV)

Not much earlier, however, Jesus had insisted that we do our charitable deeds openly.

Like the lamp, you must shed light among your fellows, so that when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven. Matt 5:16

So while it seems clear that doing charitable deeds facilitates one's entrance into heaven, Jesus provides conflicting instructions regarding how these deeds are to be done. We are instructed to do these works in secret or be excluded from heaven, but at the same time we are told to be open about these good works. If Jesus is in conflict about this issue, then how are we to know the best way to make our charitable donations?

### **We must observe the Judaic law**

The situation is more problematic. The Lord makes it plain that we also have to observe the Judaic law and be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees.

I tell you: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a dot, will disappear from the law until all that must happen has happened. Matt 5:18

Anyone, therefore, who sets aside even the least of the law's demands, and teaches others to do the same, will have the lowest place in the kingdom of heaven, whereas anyone who keeps the law, and teaches others to do so, will rank highest in the kingdom of Heaven. Matt 5:19

I tell you unless you show yourselves far better than the scribes and Pharisees, you can never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Matt 5:20

This is unnerving. Some requirements would include keeping the Sabbath on the Sabbath,— the seventh day. Keeping the Sabbath means no work at all, including "tasks" such as writing, driving, cooking and switching on the TV. Multiple days of fasting each year require abstinence from food and drink for twenty-four hours on each occasion. The eating of pig is banned, the same goes for shellfish. Minor genital mutilation is compulsory for males. There are hundreds of other restrictions and regulations with which we must comply. In essence we would have to observe all the Jewish laws and traditions.

### **Very few are admitted**

More bad news. Few souls gain admission to heaven. Make every effort to enter through the narrow door; for I tell you that many will try to enter but will not succeed. Luke 13:24 and Matt 7:14.

We are told the exact number of souls that will gain admission. It is only 144000 out of all those currently living, those who have already died, and those yet to be born. Their religion has also been decided.

I heard how many had been marked with the seal—a hundred and forty-four thousand from all the tribes of Israel. Revs 7:4 The 144000 chosen all belong to the tribes of Israel. They are therefore all Jewish. Gentiles are excluded. This is not the only occasion that Jesus emphasises that gentiles will be barred from Heaven. For example, Jesus said to the disciples:

...Truly I tell you: in the world that is to be, when the Son of man is seated on his glorious throne, you will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28) Jesus is speaking to his followers and explains that they will join him in judging the twelve tribes of Israel in order to select those that will enter heaven. Gentiles are therefore excluded.

### **Being a virgin is helpful**

Heaven only accepts virgins. Furthermore, they have to be male—Females need not apply.

...the hundred and forty four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth....

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.... These were redeemed from among men...Revs 14:3,4 (KJV)

You know where you stand on this one.

### **We need to be in a state of poverty**

...Truly I tell you: a rich man will find it hard to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Matt 19 :23

...It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Matt 19:24

We should abandon our homes and family

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. Matt 19:29 (KJV)

### **Castration is an asset in selection**

...there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven's sake...Matt 19:12 (KJV)

### **Bastards are excluded**

A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation. Deut. 23:2(KJV)

If you are a bastard, or if there is one in your lineage going back up to ten generations then you are excluded from heaven. Even if you are confident that you, yourself, are not a bastard, it's worth remembering that the number of people in ten generations is 1024. It's therefore quite likely that one or more bastards could be lurking in your background somewhere.

In summary those who follow faiths other than Christianity, and those of no faith, are barred from heaven because they are not Christian. Only 144000 people are to be accepted into heaven. All of them have to be Jewish. Christians are therefore barred because they are not Jewish. Further categories of exclusion make the situation even more watertight. Women are barred because they are not males. Males are barred if they are not virgins. Good family values are a handicap. The wealthy and home owners have little hope. The scriptures are clear. No-one qualifies for heaven.

For those who remain unconvinced complete this simple questionnaire:

Are you Christian?

Are you Jewish?

Do you belong to any other faith?

Are you a non-believer?

Are you a female?

Have you lost your virginity?

Do you have ties with your family?

Do you have home, money, or other assets?

If you are male, do you still have your testes?

Are you a bastard, or is there one in your lineage (up to ten generations)?

Have you defiled yourself with women?

Have you failed to keep the Judaic law as diligently as the Pharisees?



If you answered “yes” to any one of the questions in the quiz then the answer is “no” you will not be going to heaven. The news, however, is not necessarily all bad – you could look on the bright side. You will not be residing in a place of violence. Forget those doubts with respect to your faith in Jesus. Cherish your family ties. Feel free to defile yourself with women. You can do good deeds, openly and in private, just for the sake of doing good. Hang on to your home and contents. No need to empty your bank account. Have no qualms about being illegitimate. Males need not book in for circumcision and castration. No need to be more righteous than the Pharisees.

Self delusion is, however, more appealing than reality. It's therefore safe to predict that most believers will refuse to believe that they do not qualify for heaven. They will insist that the only condition required for entrance is the one the ministers stress, that of having faith in Jesus. The inspired word of God will be discounted.

Theologians and ministers, if confronted, are likely to allege that the verses denying us entry to heaven have not been interpreted correctly because they are made up of allegory and metaphor. This is their way of saying that “what is said is not what is meant”, if it does not fit in with what they teach (the theologian defence). Let's be charitable and accept this argument. In so doing we accept that admission to heaven is granted on the single condition that the applicant has faith in Jesus. There can then be no protest should we examine this single condition, that is neither metaphor nor allegory, in some depth.

Faith, interestingly, has things in common with pregnancy. You either have faith, or you do not have faith. Similarly, you either are, or you are not, pregnant. One can test for pregnancy using the familiar do-it-at-home pregnancy detection kit. Similarly, there is a do-it-at-home faith detection kit. This has been supplied to us by Jesus himself. Jesus said if you have faith anything

is possible. With very little faith you can even shift a mountain. Truly I tell you: if you have faith no bigger than a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “move from here to there!” and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you. (Matt 17:20)

We can therefore easily put the question of whether we possess faith to the test. We'll keep it simple and instead of using a mountain we shall use a pebble. Place the pebble on a flat surface in a windless room (or container). Now, using your faith in Jesus, instruct the pebble to rise. (A few centimetres is sufficient). Should the pebble rise then you have faith. You will go to heaven. If the pebble does not move, then you need not apply for admission. It's all up to you. Put your faith to the test. Faith, according to the ministers is, after all, all that you need.

If after all this you remain convinced that you'll be going to heaven you need realise that the scriptures inform us that heaven may no longer exist or indeed may never have existed.

**Heaven itself may no longer exist.** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Matt 24:35

How many of us realise that heaven may already be a thing of the past? What becomes of the 144,000 residents once heaven is extinguished?

**Heaven in fact does not exist** Ecclesiastes 9:5 tells us that there is nothing after death.

True, the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing. There is no more reward for them: all memory of them is forgotten. Eccles 9:5

### THINKING EXERCISE

Truly I tell you: among all who have ever been born, no one has been greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Since the time of John the Baptist the kingdom of Heaven has been

subjected to violence and violent men are taking it by force. For until John, all the prophets and the law foretold things to come; and John is the destined Elijah, if you will but accept it. (Matt 11:11-14)

How many problems can you detect in these few sentences?

1) Jesus has told us that violent men have taken possession of heaven by force. (Matt 11:12). The least of these individuals is obviously not of good character. Yet Jesus tells us that even this individual is greater than John the Baptist. This does not show John up in a good light. How do evil men gain admission to heaven?

2) Why did God stand by and allow these violent men to take heaven by force? One wonders what damage they inflicted on the other souls. Can souls do battle and sustain injuries?

3) Jesus maintains that John, despite possessing a character inferior to the least of the unsavoury individuals in heaven, is Elijah. John, however, bluntly denied that he was Elijah. (John 1:21) Either Jesus or John is wrong. Naturally one would not expect Jesus, who outranks John, to be wrong. On the other hand one would expect the real Elijah to own up to his job description. How else would we know who he is?

To deny that one is Elijah, when one is Elijah, is clearly absurd, especially as you are denying who you are to the messiah, who therefore knows who you are. The dispute can, however, be easily resolved. Elijah by definition has to usher in an era of peace on earth. This has not occurred. Therefore John was correct in denying that he was the prophet Elijah.

4) Finally there is a problem with men (violent or not) residing in heaven before the death of Jesus. This is because the ministers are adamant that those who gain access to heaven can only do so through faith in Jesus. Yet Jesus described souls residing in heaven. These souls belonged to people who had never met or heard of Jesus. How is that possible?

# Anti-Chris - Review

Two of our AFA Committee of Management members attended a show by Chris Wainhouse at the Adelaide Fringe Festival in March called 'The Anti-Chris'. They have each provided their own review of the show.

- Karen Joyce

My own attitude to performance artists, especially comedians, is "get 'em started and let 'em rip!"

No sooner had he introduced himself to his audience, Chris Wainhouse got on with ripping into the shred-able fabric of superstitious mysticism and idiocy. Don't go there expecting an hour of mere rave interspersed with anti-religious jokes. Chris does far better than that. He is very aware of his audience, he knows who is responding to what and he deals out his material at an entertaining pace.

Part of the entertainment is his subtlety. The logical and emotional connections he makes in his narrative work on more than one level. What might be mistaken for a dick joke.. sure, yes, it is undeniably a dick joke but if he includes it in a performance that you go to, don't just smile at it (or frown at it). Take in the whole context of what he is saying and when you

get what he is thrusting it at, parts of your brain which operate above the waistline will also get a laugh or two.

Chris seems to keep track of what portion of his audience comprehends the undercurrents. Fortunately, he never pauses to explain but moves along with plenty of colour, content and action so that everyone there has plenty to occupy their attention.

There is his cheerful demolition of some precious eastern mysticism, with his good natured narratives about a version of Christian family life and some very special family values indeed. Some of the content gave me a deep chill, enabling me to really appreciate my luck in having enjoyed an almost secular upbringing. He provided plenty to think about in the days following his performance.

So, infringe a child's human rights using religion as your excuse;

not only will you give someone a shipping container of pain that spills its contents into their adult life, you might just produce the impetus for an eloquent and incisive comedian. Though surely there are kinder ways of unleashing the scalpel edged logic wrapped in genial humour that we heard from Chris at the Fringe.

And if any mystico-religioso tries the "Gee! That guy is carrying some baggage," type of line, I could tell them this...

Baggage? Yeah, and not just a basket or two. Not just a few satchels and suitcases. A great camel train of radioactive cargo and you guys better run, if he opens any of it up. It will be kryptonite to your super hero deity. And with such a wealth of material to draw upon, none of his camels will be extruded through the eye of any needle, any time soon.

- Janine Gebert

The venue was a small intimate tent, with a mixed age audience, all very responsive to the easy and relaxed conversational delivery style, refreshingly free from strained and over worked one liners.

The humour was seamlessly integrated into the storyline as the audience was taken on a condensed jaunt through Chris's fundamental religious upbringing in a family that he described as a mix of Amish and Baptist.

There were a few New Zealand sheep jokes, and the usual penile

humour aimed largely at the blokes in the audience, but appreciated by most of the women as well.

Religious references were largely confined to particular passages from the Old Testament, which were displayed on boards to provide a backdrop to his parents' beliefs, including resistance to medical intervention.

Whilst the passages from the Bible are safely distanced in history, chilling references were made to the current Accelerated Christian Education method of learning that he

experienced first hand, where a God centred 'curriculum' is imposed by untrained supervisory staff.

Overall the show was enjoyable and highlighted the ridiculousness of religion, without denigrating anyone in particular.

If anyone has the opportunity, his show is well worth a look and listen.

# Recollections

- George Leslie

*George Leslie is a nom de plume of an AFA member who is 86 years old and would like to share memories of his childhood, growing up in a predominantly theist society in Australia. George is looking for atheists that he can correspond with from his aged care facility. If you are interested in corresponding with George, please email the editor at [taa@atheistfoundation.org.au](mailto:taa@atheistfoundation.org.au)*

Prayers and rubbish still echo in my brain, especially in the quiet of night. I often lay awake with Restless Legs Syndrome and I muse of my childhood anecdotes, such as:

The times I used to creep into the classroom at the convent school at lunch time and get the cane that the nun used on us. The classroom had bare boards which were cyprus pine and they had a lot of knot holes. I used to drop the cane down one of the knot holes and watch her search for it on her return from lunch.

Or the times I used to get a note from my mother excusing me from attending school as I had a headache, or some such. She never dated the notes, so I used to get them out of the waste paper basket where the nun threw them, take them home, iron them out and re-present them the next time I wagged school - which was often. Somehow, the nun cottoned on to me and called me out to the front of the class and denounced me as nothing but an imposter.

There were two priests at the local parish. One was Father Michael O'Kelly and he had shares in a racehorse and used to go off to Randwick every time the horse was running. The other priest was Father Boyle and he was once hearing the 'confession' of my mother, who had told him she didn't have money for food and he put his hand in his pocket and gave her two shillings.

At the Marist Brothers at Kogarah, there was a Brother named Valarian and one day in the classroom, he called out to a student at the back of the class "Farrell come here". He was intending to cane Farrell for not paying attention, but Chookie, as we called him, wouldn't move. He was busy packing his bag with his books, and he went out the back door into the quadrangle, and that was the last we saw of him. He never returned!

I wagged school for months from the time I was 13 and I got a job selling newspapers at Kogarah Station steps each morning from 5:45am until 8:45am. The students used to come by on their way to school and say "Brother Giles said to come to school

today". I would reply "Tell Brother Giles, I am getting four pounds a week!". I used to finish work and get on a train and travel to the city and that's how I finished my education.

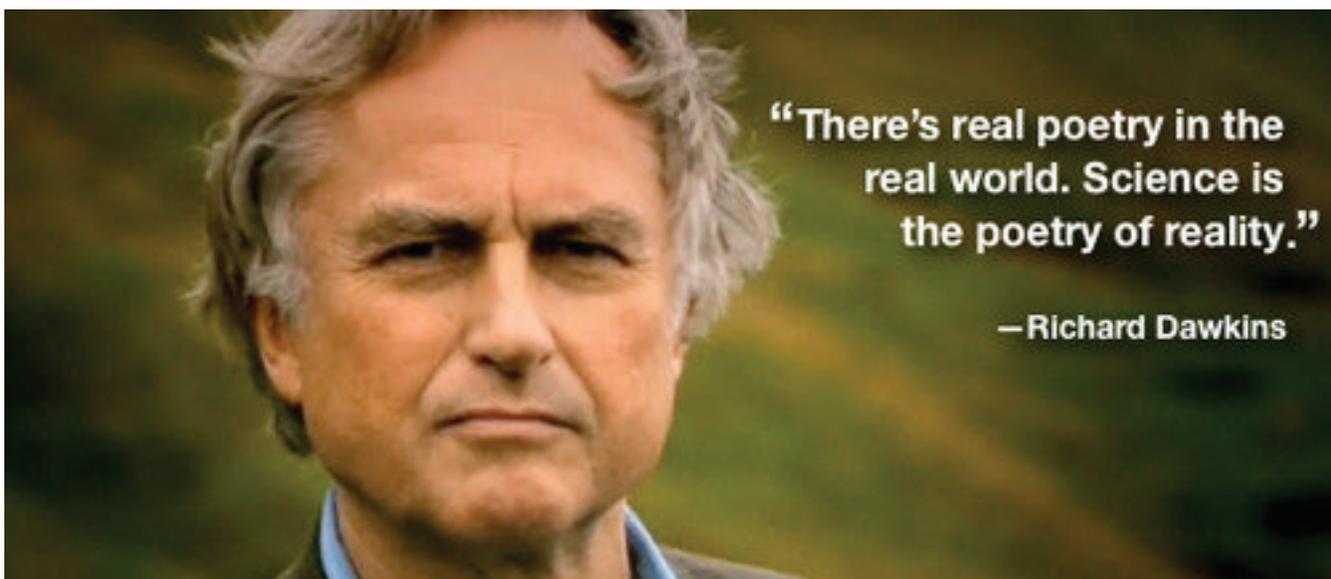
In writing all this, I am reminded of the profound statement made by the Scottish Robert Burns, circa 1770 "If only we had the gift to see ourselves as others see us". When I was at school, I had the feeling I was different to the lads I knocked around with and didn't realise that I had been programmed with the rubbish in the catechism. It was taught every day and it started with:

Question: "Who made the world?"

Answer: "God made the world"

The use of the word "who" brands it as a question and a statement too. All reference to 'who' means it is addressing humans.

I want to give you an insight of the effect religious indoctrination has after 80 odd years and why I am so passionately against the indoctrination of children.



### The Pell Tolls for Church Sex Abuse Compensation

The Atheist Foundation of Australia welcomes the news that George Pell has been promoted within the Catholic Church to the position of Prefect for the Economy of the Holy See. A main function of this role is management and reform of the Vatican's finances.

The news continues to flow from the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse of the systemic cover ups and stand-over tactics used by churches to prevent justice for the victims. It's reasonable to anticipate that examples of abuse of this type are going to continue to become public and that the public outrage and compensation claims will continue to grow.

What the Vatican needs right now is a man who has his priorities in the correct order. Will George Pell be prepared to open the Vatican finances to scrutiny, and make them available to compensation claims by victims?

In the heat of the lead up to the Royal Commission battle, he famously stood his ground and demonstrated that his church clearly comes before the rights of any victims explaining the church protocol for priests who hear a confession from another priest of child sexual rape.

"If that is done outside the confessional (it can be passed on), (But) the Seal of Confession is inviolable. If the priest knows beforehand about such a situation, the priest should refuse to hear the confession. That would be my advice, and I would never hear the confession of a priest who is suspected of such a thing."

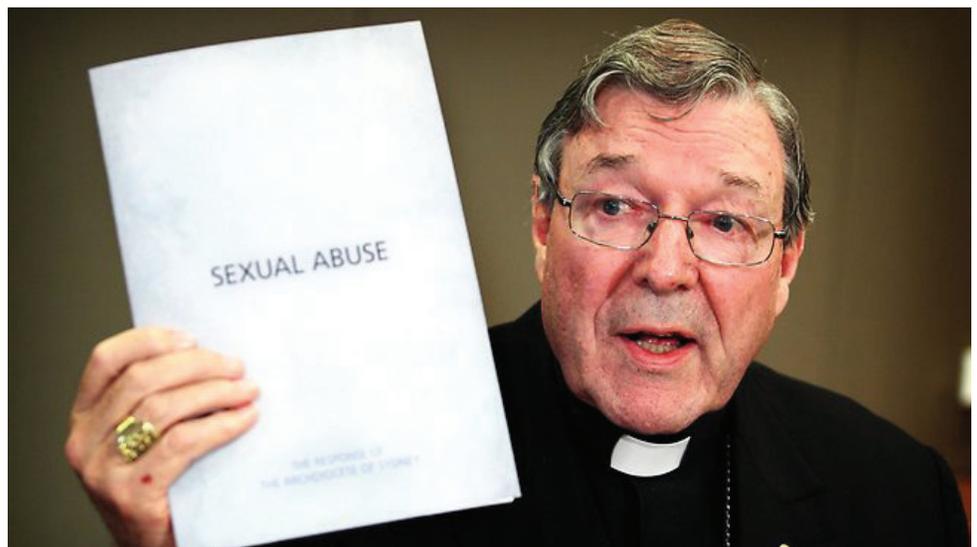
Why not simply contact the authorities for each and every allegation?

Abuse survivors and advocacy groups rightly consider this appointment to be a slap to their collective faces. George Pell was singled out by the Victorian Inquiry for his central role in the Catholic Church's repeated failures to recognise and address abuse, and properly compensate and support victims. He is also due to appear before the Royal Commission, which may bring further evidence of this to light. Yet despite this context George Pell has been promoted to Rome, rather than censured, by the church. The church almost daily tells the world that it has learned from the mistakes of the past. Has it? Is George Pell's appointment a sign of a future in which victims will receive fair compensation and perpetrators will be pursued with vigor, or a continuation of past practices?

Congratulations George Pell. The Vatican clearly recognizes and appreciates your value. Will you do whatever it takes to protect the riches of this archaic club, or move swiftly to make church assets available to victims? If this appointment reflects a commitment to past practices, the Catholic Church will speed its demise and disappoint many believers and non believers alike. Do the right thing George!

Michael Boyd

President  
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc  
PO Box 1062  
Lane Cove NSW 1595



# AFA - Social Media

The Atheist Foundation of Australia actively promotes atheism and provides a community for atheists through social media. All atheists are encouraged to connect with the AFA through its social media channels.

Everyone is encouraged to access the forums and become part of the larger atheist community. When you check in, introduce yourself. If you need any assistance, find a moderator:

## Facebook

The AFA maintains a Facebook presence. You can "like" us at:

<https://www.facebook.com/atheistfoundation>

## Forums

The AFA Forums are linked on the website. The direct url is:

<http://atheistfoundation.org.au/forums/>

The forums provide discussion areas on a range of topics, including:

- Welcome
- Atheism
- Secularism and Social Issues
- Science, Logic and Reason
- Atheist Foundation of Australia
- Religions, Cults and other Woo
- News and Social
- AFA Members Only Area

Within each of these areas of the forum, you will find a variety of subcategories and topics being discussed.

It is indeed a community of atheists, supporting and encouraging one another. The latest news is dissected and discussed. Religious websites and other illogical topics are reviewed, analysed and dissected. Theists are welcome to discuss their own beliefs through rational and reasoned debate.



- Annie
- Darwinsbulldog
- davo
- djarm67
- Fearless
- Logic please
- Loki
- Lord Blackadder
- odd
- prudie
- Rayne
- two dogs
- wolty

The AFA Facebook site is very active. At the moment we are reaching thousands through Facebook. All members are encouraged to like and share the interesting posts and threads on the AFA Facebook site.

Wolty is working hard to keep the site active and needs assistance from everyone.

## Twitter

The AFA maintains a Twitter feed through the handle @atheistaus

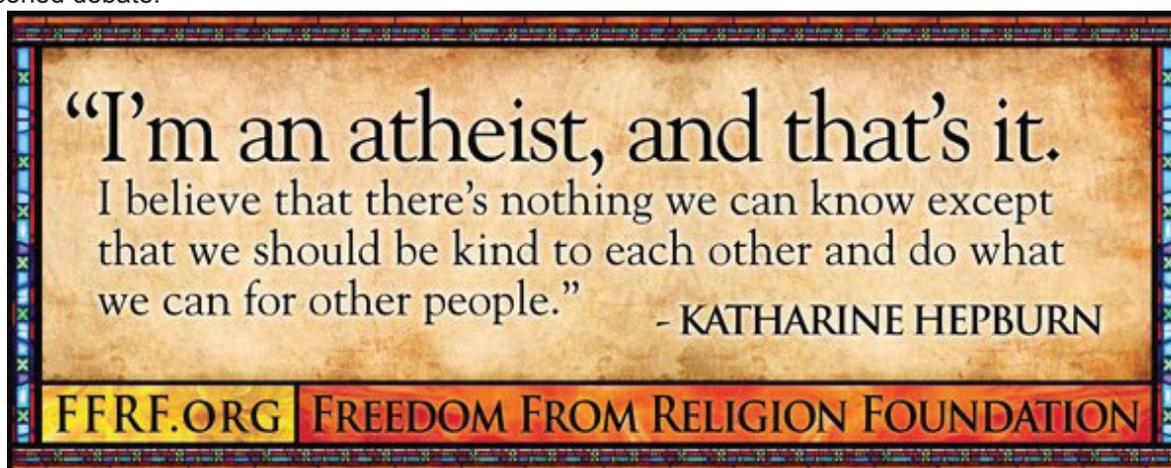
Askegg is working very hard to keep the Twitter account active, interesting and varied. Everyone is encouraged to assist and support him by retweeting and discussing.

## Youtube

The AFA maintains YouTube channel. It can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AtheistFoundation>

You will find videos on a range of topics related to atheism. Everyone is encouraged to watch and share the AFA videos.



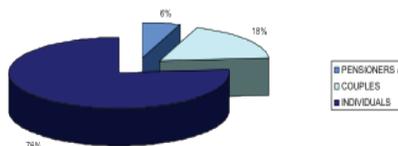
# AFA Member Survey

In order to better understand our members, a survey was undertaken in early 2014. The results of that survey will be made available over the next few issues.

The response to the survey was very high, with nearly two thirds of members responding. Generally, the responses indicate that the membership is happy with recent changes made to the approach by the AFA and that members are seeking opportunities to contribute time and effort to the greater cause. Opportunities will be developed to make use of members skills, abilities and willingness to contribute.

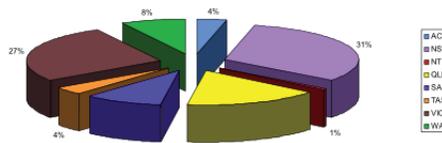
## Membership Types

AFA membership is available in three different types; Individuals, Students / Pensioners and Couples. The breakdown for the three types are:



## State Distribution

The majority of members are Australian. The state breakdown is:



International members include those from the following countries:

- New Zeland
- Papua New Guinea
- Thailand
- Phillipines
- Hong Kong
- Japan
- Switzerland
- Iran

## Magazine

All AFA members receive a copy of The Australian Atheist magazine. 57% receive a hard copy and 43% opt for the electronic version. However, 37% of members receiving the hardcopy indicated in the survey that they would consider switching to the electronic version.

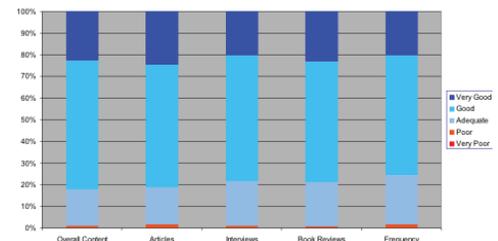
The electronic version is available up to two weeks before the hardcopy version can be delivered. Members wishing to transfer to the electronic version are able to do so at any time and are prompted during the membership renewal process.

## Quality

Members were asked to rate the quality of difference aspects using the rating system:

- 1 = Very Poor
- 2 = Poor
- 3 = Adequate
- 4 = Good
- 5 = Very Good

The results were positive. Less than 2% of members felt the magazine was poor. Over 98% of members were satisfied and 80% or more thought each element was good or very good.



[www.AtheistAlliance.org](http://www.AtheistAlliance.org)

The Atheist Federation of Australia is an AAI Affiliate



**Promoting Secularism and the rights of non-believers**

**Challenging religious faith, Superstition and Privelege**

**Working towards a world based on evidence science and reason**

# Reason Wins

- Norman S Kent

we have been called name after name,  
 name callers try to add to their fame,  
 reason & logic have no meaning,  
 fairy tales & deception allow a type of preening,  
 "we are right, & all others are wrong",  
 infantile "sacred" books add to their song,  
 whatever the religion, whatever the belief,  
 from the "sin" & "guilt" there is no relief,  
 atheism is a reasoned statement,  
 but theists argue with no abatement,  
 that atheism is a "religion", but with no shred  
 of evidence, just a worn out catch cry bled  
 to death, again & again, to try to win the upper hand,  
 defying science, logic & fact – all panned!!  
 creationists also refuse to debate  
 on the billions of years since the date  
 of our magnificent galaxy, our abode  
 began, the origins of human life, also "snowed",  
 theists also conveniently overlook  
 the facts that every "sacred" book,  
 every aspect of all religious belief,  
 was invented by humans, that's the brief,  
 so my dear friends, we have nothing to defend,  
 it is the theists who will remain ignorant to the end,  
 proclaiming at the appropriate time,  
 their deity will call, & they will climb  
 the golden stairs to "the hallowed halls",  
 not realising only human remains will be confined to the walls  
 of the cemetery where the burial takes place,  
 "god", "soul", & "heaven", all part of the fairy tales in our space.

N.S.K.



**Eating your children. Bible Style.**

**2 Kings 6:29**  
 So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son so we may eat him,' but she had hidden him."

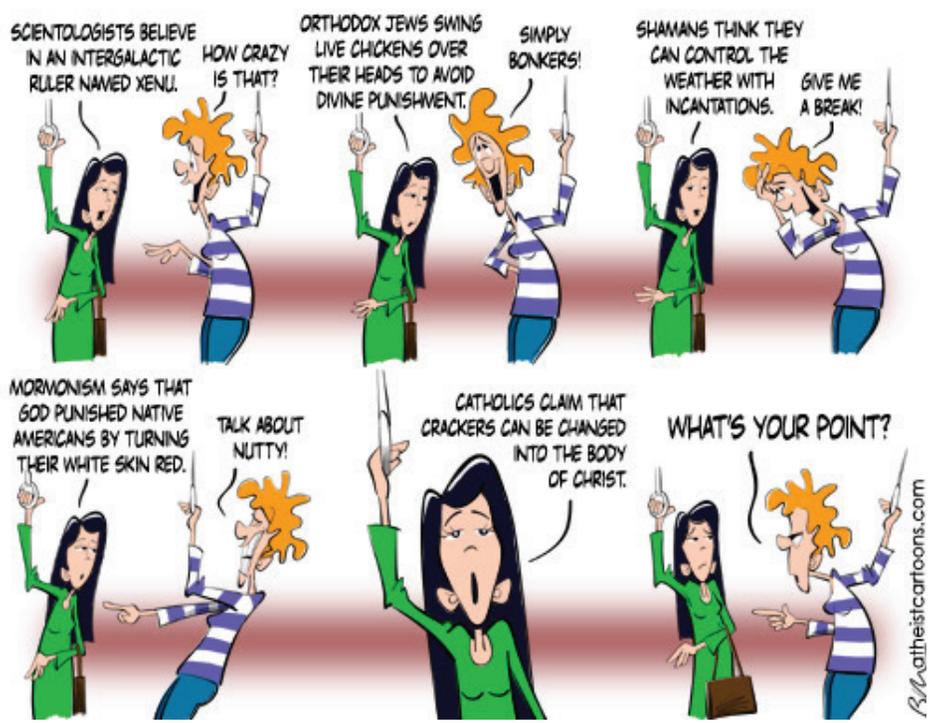
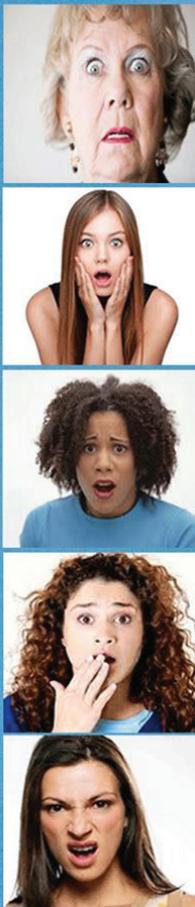
**Deuteronomy 28:53**  
 Because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you.

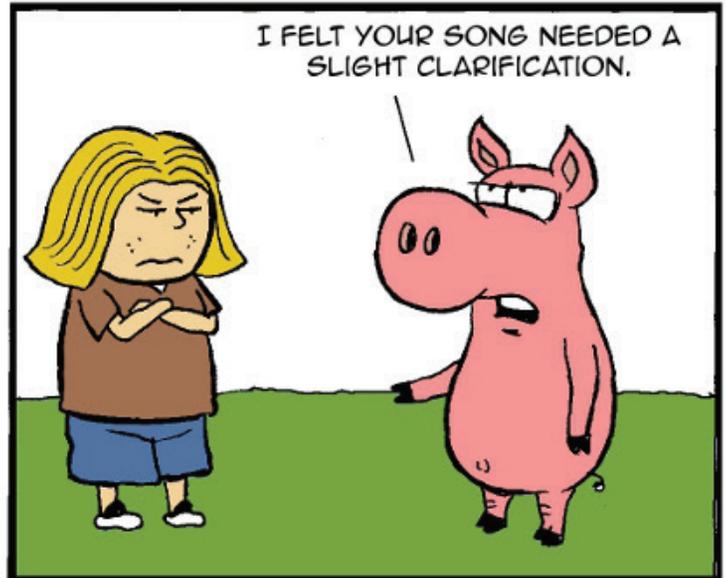
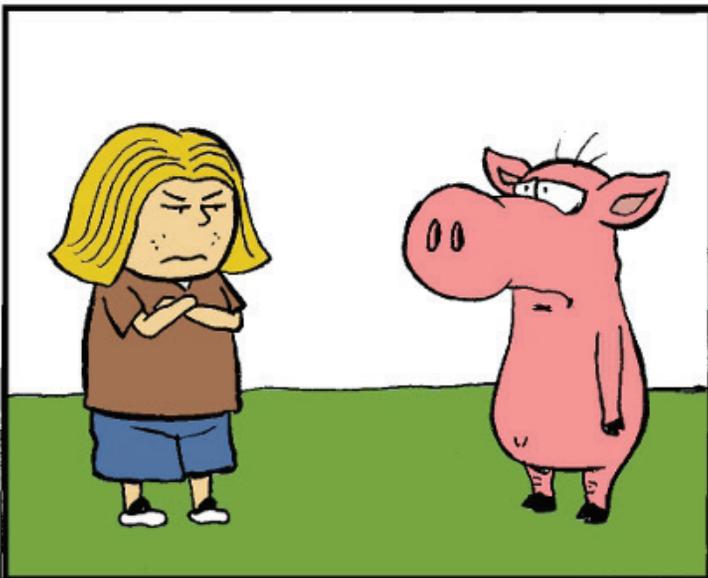
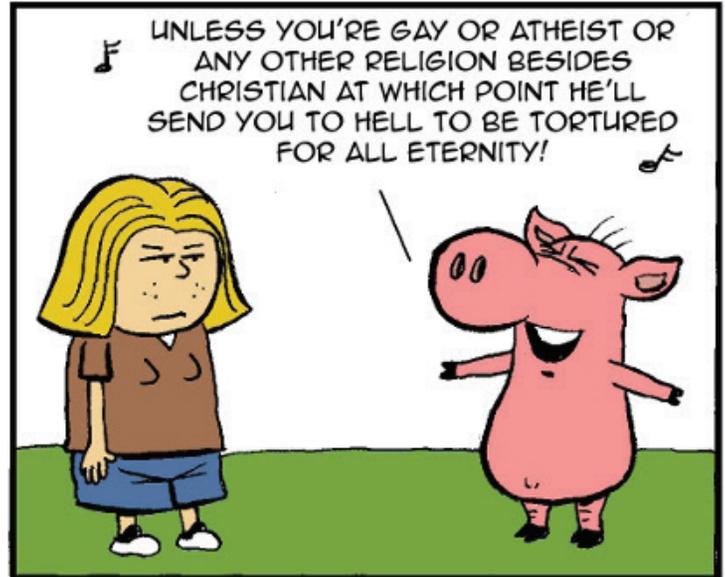
**Jeremiah 19:9**  
 I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh because their enemies will press the siege so hard against them to destroy them.'

**Ezekiel 5:10**  
 Therefore in your midst parents will eat their children, and children will eat their parents. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds.

**Lamentations 4:10**  
 With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed.

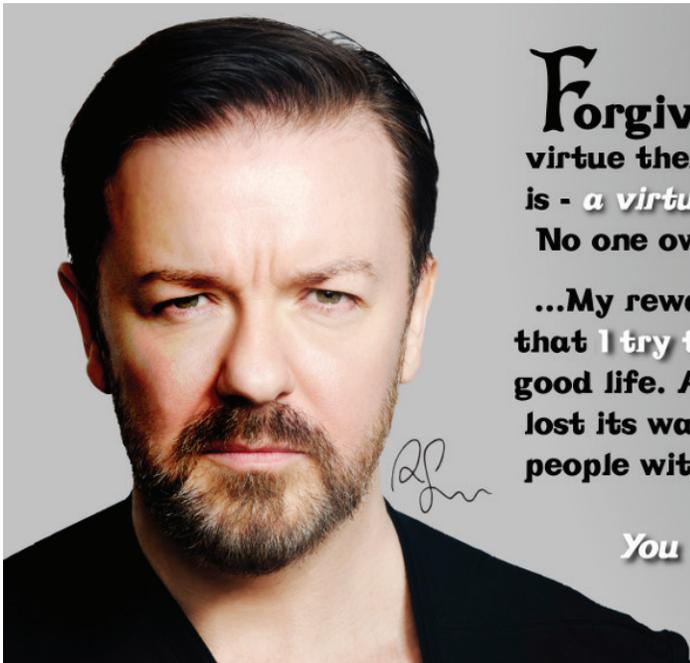
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theadtheistpig.com

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**F**orgiveness is probably the greatest virtue there is. But that's exactly what it is - *a virtue*. Not just a Christian virtue. No one owns being good.

...My reward is here and now. It's knowing that I try to do the right thing. That I lived a good life. And that's where spirituality really lost its way. When it became a stick to beat people with. "Do this or you'll burn in hell."

*You won't burn in hell.*

**But be nice anyway.**

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**Atheist Foundation of Australia**

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# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

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

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

Full Name	<input type="text"/>		
Address	<input type="text"/>		
Suburb/ Town	<input type="text"/>	State	<input type="text"/>
		Post Code	<input type="text"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>	Phone	<input type="text"/>
Forum Name	<input type="text"/>	(if you are a member of the AFA Forums at <a href="http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au/forums">www.atheistfoundation.org.au/forums</a> )	

**Membership** (per year) includes 6 issues of *The Australian Atheist* magazine

Single (Inc. GST)	\$25.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Couple (Inc. GST)	\$30.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Donation		<input type="text"/>
Total		<input type="text"/>
Is this a renewal of your membership?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Would you prefer to download a PDF of the magazine, rather than receive a hardcopy?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Signature.....

**Cheques/Money Order to:** Atheist Foundation of Australia | PO Box 4284 | Shellharbour Village NSW 2529

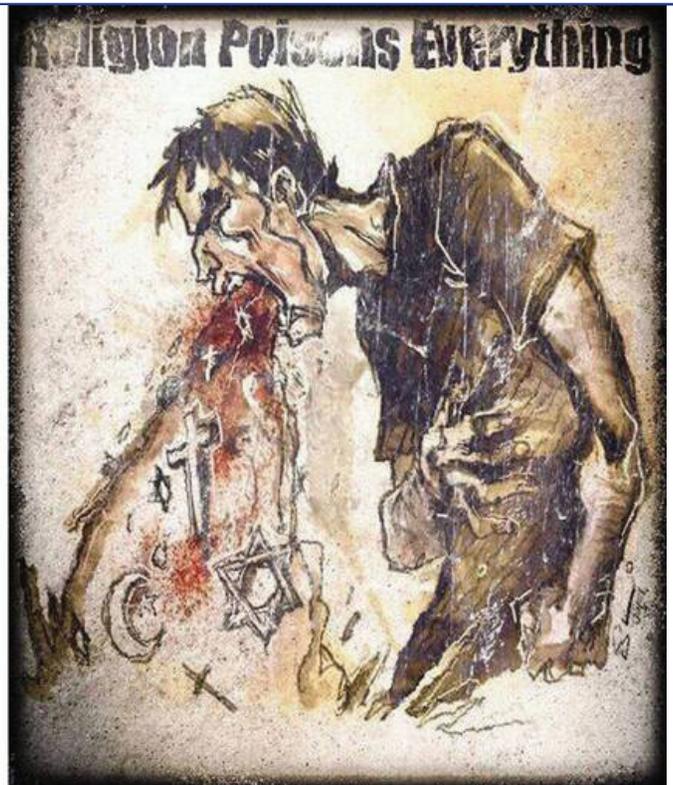
**Direct Deposit:**      **Bank:** Commonwealth Bank  
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**IMPORTANT - PLEASE enter your NAME into the reference section.**

RELIGION DOES POISON EVERYTHING. TO PROVE THIS, WE NEED ONLY GLANCE UPON THE BEAUTIFUL PHILOSOPHIES OF PLATO, ARISTOTLE, ZENO AND OTHER PRE-CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHERS, WHICH WERE STOLEN BY THE CHRISTIAN MYTHOGRAPHERS, BLENDED WITH BOLLOCKS, SET INTO RIGID DOCTRINES AND VIOLENTLY CAST AT ALL THOSE WHO BEGGED TO DIFFER WITH CREDULITY. WE MAY SEE HOW MUHAMMAD, AN ARMED ROBBER FROM THE QURAYSH TRIBE, TOOK EQUALLY BEAUTIFUL TEACHINGS AND BLENDED THEM WITH PERNICIOUS PAEDOPHILIA, MALIGN MISOGYNY AND SILLY SUPERSTITIOUS DOGMA. FURTHER, WE SEE THAT RELIGION POISONS EVERYTHING BY EXAMINING THE WAY IN WHICH THE JEWS OF THE EXILIC PERIOD, STOLE THE BABYLONIAN 'EYE FOR AN EYE OR REX TALONS,' ORIGINALLY DESIGNED TO PLACE A CAP ON RESTITUTION CLAIMS, AND TURNED IT INTO A VICIOUS AND DESTRUCTIVE DOCTRINE FOR REVENGE. FINALLY, IF WE ARE TO READ ABOUT ALL THE RELIGIOUS WARS AND CRIMES, SINCE THE BIRTH OF THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL VIRUS, WE DISCOVER THAT "RELIGION POISONS EVERYTHING" IS NOT A STATEMENT OF OPINION, BUT A MATTER OF FACT.



~MICHAEL SHERLOCK



\*\*\*\*\*  
*However long Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians struggle to find multiple meanings in this text, the dominant seems to be this: Abraham's unquestioning willingness to heed gods command to sacrifice the thing he loved most is what qualified him to become the father of what are called still the Abrahamic faiths*

*~ Susan Neiman ~*



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*Imagine a puddle waking up one morning and thinking,  
"This is an interesting world I find myself in — an interesting hole I find myself in — fits me rather neatly, doesn't it?  
In fact it fits me staggeringly well, must have been made to have me in it!"*

*~ Douglas Adams ~*



*Does anyone truly believe that our ancestors lacked rules of right and wrong before they had religion? Did they never assist others in need or complain about an unfair share? Human morality must be quite a bit older than religion and civilization. It may, in fact, be older than humanity itself*

*~ Frans de Waal, The Bonobo and The Atheist ~*

\*\*\*\*\*