



**Atheist Foundation  
of Australia Inc** Established  
1970

*Promoting scientifically credible & factually reliable evidence*

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Free for AFA Members

# The Australian Atheist



## Abbott

Because who needs separation of church and state?

ISSN 1035-1477



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# Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Established 1970

Promoting scientifically credible & factually reliable evidence

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## 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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Hello readers,

Welcome to the July to September issue. Where does the year go? It seems like I put one issue to bed and the next is due.

This issue we have a mix of regular contributors and some new faces who responded to the members survey that they were interested in contributing to the magazine. For anyone else out there with a desire to contribute stories, articles, graphics, poems etc please email me at [taa@atheistfoundation.org.au](mailto:taa@atheistfoundation.org.au)

I am also still looking for members who want to be part of the magazine and publications sub committee. Email me if you have an interest at all in this area.

A few weeks ago I received a call from a new member who has recently come out of a fundamentalist Christian group. His family still belong to the group and he is finding it difficult to maintain relationships. I was very concerned for the guy as it's a very emotional process with little or no support.

While I was raised in a catholic family, my deconversion was a simple one. I stopped believing at age 7 and at age 14 I dug my heels in and refused to even pretend any more. My family are of the 'hatch, match and despatch' catholic variety and so it wasn't really a decision that split me from the family forever. My mother still rolls her eyes and presumes it's a phase I am going through. I realise that others are not so lucky.

For some, leaving religion is fraught with obstacles. It can mean being shunned by people who had claimed unconditional love for you your entire life. Any members of the AFA who are facing these kinds of emotional issues are encouraged to contact professional support services. There is a list of resources available in Australia on the Cult Information and Family Support website at [www.cifs.org.au/links.php](http://www.cifs.org.au/links.php)

Also members are reminded that the AFA hosts forums on its website. For those who want to chat to fellow atheists and free-thinkers go to [atheistfoundation.org.au/forums/](http://atheistfoundation.org.au/forums/)

The forums are a great social place to chat and be free to talk to others through the internet. The other option is local meetup groups. If you have a state based or city based atheist group, contact me and I'm happy to advertise the contact details to members who may be interested.

It's important to remember when talking to theists, that many of us were believers at some point. Be forthright, by all means, but also remember that for many, leaving the warmth and safety of religion is not an easy process.

For those receiving the electronic version in PDF, I am currently researching options to establish the electronic version as an app available on Apple and Android devices. There are a few options available and I'll keep you updated of developments.

Until next issue, take care

Tracy

# President's Message

Hello AFA Members,

It's been a busy time again in the AFA offices. We took on board the comments from members in the survey and the indications of the number of you interested in volunteering and being more active in the work of the Foundation. Sub committees are being set up and invites are going out to interested members to focus on areas of interest. These include:

- Public Relations & Media
- Membership
- Education
- Events
- Affiliations
- Philanthropy
- Human Rights
- Rules & Governance
- Political Engagement & Lobbying
- Social Media & Technology
- Magazine & Publications

Any members with a burning desire to be more active, with an interest in any of the above groups, should contact the Membership Officer via email at [membership@atheistfoundation.org.au](mailto:membership@atheistfoundation.org.au)

Kudos goes out to Ron Williams and his legal team for the High Court Challenge win. The AFA has continued to be supportive of Ron and his legal challenge. In 2012, the Federal Government responded to the judgement of unconstitutional practice by introducing new legislation. The latest win indicates

that action was pointless and the funding of the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) by the Commonwealth Government is still unconstitutional. We await the response by the government to the latest judgement. It will no doubt end up being tied funding to the state governments for them to manage. This will just mean that we need to lobby the state governments. With elections coming in the next year for some of the states, this may well be a 'hot issue'.

In May, the AFA offered support to Aletha Blayse and her counter campaign against the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal. The White Shield Appeal is a public campaign to call the Salvation Army to account for its systemic behaviour, actions and unacceptable attitudes. The evidence from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse shone a very bright light on systemic abuse and cover up within that organisation. It is beyond time for religious bodies to be called to account for such things. The Salvation Army also have an atrocious record on their attitude to sexual preference, gender and other social issues.

In July, there is the Australian Fair for Freedom of Belief and Religion at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart, Tasmania. I will be attending with Tracy Burgess,

Michelle Newton-Greene and Kylie Sturgess from the Committee of Management. We will have an information stall and will also be participating in panel discussions. Anyone in the area on 26 and 27 July are invited to come along.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the members for their support. We have received a number of encouraging letters and emails from members so far this year. Suggestions are also always welcomed.

Until next issue,

Michael Boyd, *President*



ATHEIST  
ALLIANCE  
INTERNATIONAL



**FOR A SECULAR WORLD**

# The Bigot's Tale

- Peter Robinson

*Peter Robinson is the author of the comic thriller The Nun's Tale under the nom de plume Pae Robin.*

Bigotry can bite you when you least expect it. As a Catholic kid in the Sixties, I couldn't say exactly when I became aware of The Holocaust. Like most people, I had a healthy negative reaction, but, my response leant toward the superficial – the revulsion competed with morbid fascination. The confronting footage of a bulldozer pushing an immense mound of skeletal corpses at Belsen punched a considerable hole in my shallow response. Yet, I remained the same kid who cracked careless bigoted jokes with his mates. I sat at the soft end of the bigotry spectrum, and, in my ignorance, wouldn't have known the spectrum existed with horrors like Belsen at the hard end.

I jettisoned my Catholic faith before leaving school. This was no 'Road to Damascus' moment. I was a boarding school kid, and the tedium of repetitive religious ceremonies was no match for the wonders of the world. With little consideration of morality or truth, my apostasy was a case of desire trumping religious observance. Recently (much as I might like to deny it!) I have been re-acquainted with evidence of a continuing bigotry from my university days in the early Seventies: On the opposite side of a tacky Pope Paul VI postcard I'd sent from Rome, I'd included a joke about the authenticity of the Pope's blue eye colour given that he was a 'wog'.

Despite these sins, common amongst Anglo-Irish descendants at the time, I considered myself progressive. One night I was plied with earnest Holocaust Denial by a friend's boyfriend in the late Seventies. I recognized the Neo-Nazi signature, but my opposition was more like a smug ornithologist enjoying an interaction with a rare species rather than affront. Genuine affront hit me

in a crowded train a couple of years later. I was train bound to Heathrow with my wife and two young daughters in the early Eighties. As we rattled along in this benign setting, I looked at my little family and our luggage, and imagined we were a mere four in a Nazi transport heading east. I remembered the boyfriend and my reaction from a few years back, and in my distressed fantasy, I felt a strong blend of shame and anger. As far as bigotry goes, this was my Damascus moment.

One of the unfortunate aspects of ugly behaviour, like bigotry, is that although it can be carelessly delivered, it arrives like a bullet. As a mature adult, in years if not wisdom, and as someone who has long eschewed any metaphysical belief (and claims to have seriously chewed on reasons for doing so!) I never expected to be on the receiving end of a bigotry bullet. I was watching a religious ceremony on TV in 2008 – a performance of The Stations of the Cross as part of the World Youth Day visit of Pope Benedict XVI. A young bloke in a smock, with a big cross on his back and a crown of thorns on his head, left St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, and made his way through the CBD accompanied by jeering 'Romans'. He was 'scourged' at the Opera House, and 'nailed' to the cross at Barangaroo. A high-tech hydraulic system slowly spun his cross in circles while raising it from the horizontal to the vertical. The stagecraft was tremendous. While the mass audience contemplated the moaning actor aboard the now stilled cross, a prayer, transmitted live via SBS TV around the world, included this: "... that blind Atheism that would deprive us of the power of our own faith is itself perhaps the worst violence ..." I couldn't believe my ears, and I'm an ex-Catholic.

How could Atheism be construed as the worst violence in any context, let alone this charged and violent religious moment? Was the prayer suggesting that Atheism is worse than crucifixion and scourging and stabbing thorns into someone's scalp? It seemed to me, the traditional culprits, the Jews, were either off the hook, or joined by me and all Atheists – I was part of a scapegoat class!

Although I can still hackle when I remember that event, I comfort myself with the rosy notion that the bigotry was coming from a discredited quarter. Despite conservative plaudits for this heavily subsidized hoopla, World Youth Day was marred by the growing paedophile crisis. Bishop Anthony Fisher, the principal organizer, copped a media shellacking when he dismissed the parents of abused daughters as "cranky" when they were denied an audience with the Pope. Can you imagine him repeating that throwaway in today's climate? I'd contend that this nasty little prayer was small beer in the bigotry stakes compared to centuries of anti-Semitism.

Bigotry takes a quantum leap when the bigot has legislative power, and isn't careless. The Australian Defence Minister, David Johnston, sung an infamous aria (Thy Tiny Hand Is Blistered?) as he stood on the wharf beside a naval ship early this year. According to Johnston, it was impossible that the "good men and women of the navy" had forced refugee hands onto hot exhaust pipes because ... "my people have been spat on, abused, treated like servants" ... and ... "I'm sick to the stomach ... they are heroes laden with integrity ... I'm assured by senior command there is no substance to these allegations." And how did he

know senior command was telling the truth? His logic was peerless: "I've travelled for a week on board an armoured L-Class patrol boat!"

In normal circumstances, a Minister engaging in bald-faced humbug would be reeled in and counselled, if not demoted, by a Prime Minister. Unfortunately for our society, Johnston was piggy-backing on the Prime Minister's bigotry.

A few days earlier, Tony Abbott almost echoed the British Paints jingle with this negation of fundamental rules of justice: "Do you believe Australian naval personnel or do you believe people who are attempting to break Australian law? I trust Australia's naval personnel."

I've teased myself with a novel bigotry while recollecting these instances. Tony Abbott, Anthony Fisher, the Holocaust Denying boyfriend and I are all former students of St Ignatius

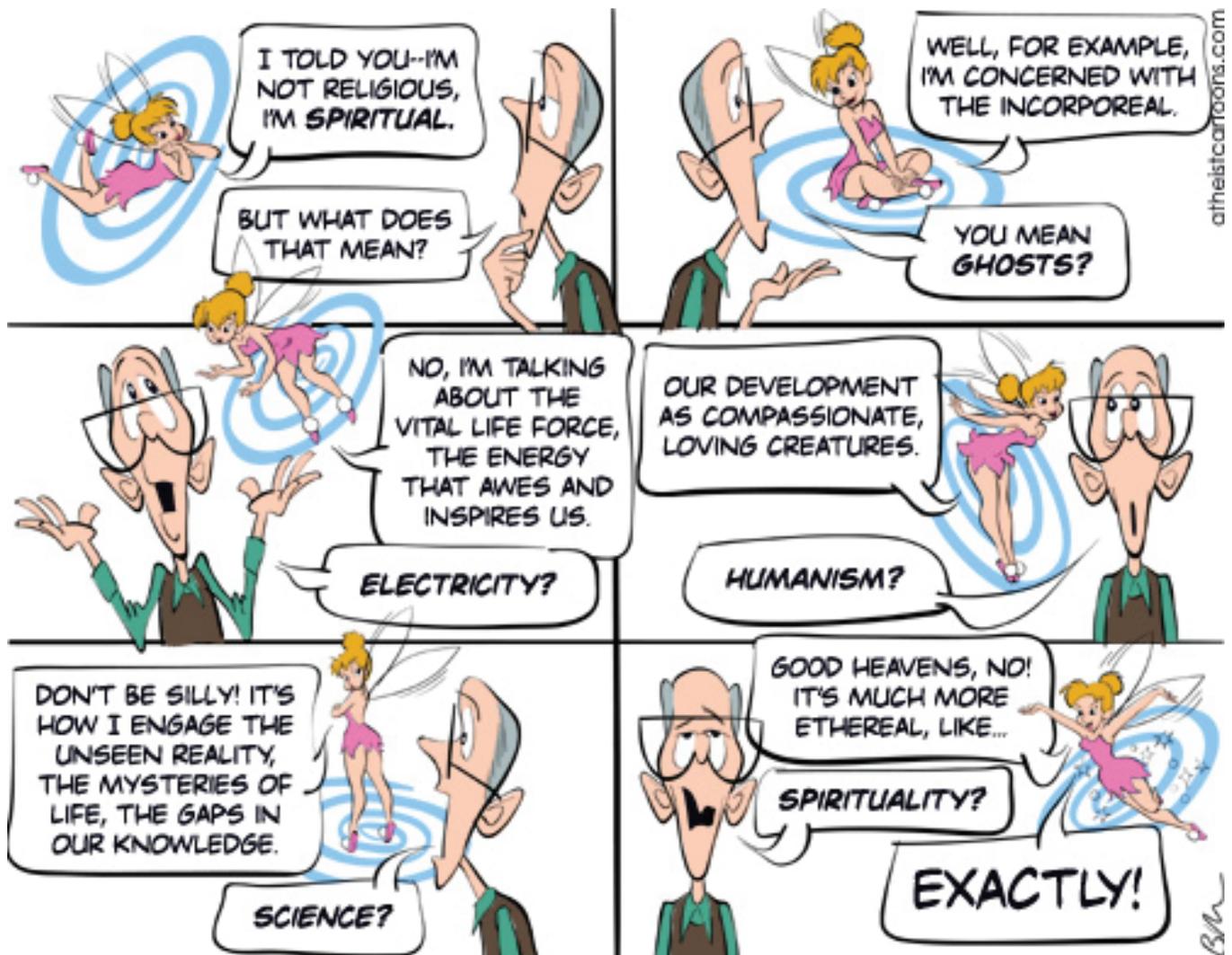
College Riverview, a well-heeled private school in Sydney ... therefore ... what? I would contend ... therefore ... nada! ... nothing! Yet how easy it was to mull things over, and consider a bigoted conclusion!

Most of us are prey to behaviour that contradicts our nominal ideological positions. I rejoice in this widespread inconsistency. Broad notions of human decency, common sense and desire transcend ideological barriers: the hypocrisy of Muslims who take Koranic literalism with a grain of salt; or Catholics who take contraceptives; the Brechtian compassion of an executioner who accepts a life-saving bribe from an accused's mother.

Opposed to these humane flaws, the bigot casts inflexibility as purity, and muffles internal flaws by amplifying or inventing those in others. On a Facebook page reporting on Irish children dumped in a septic tank by

Catholic nuns (later discredited), I saw a range of comments echoing the sentiment of this pearly: "Fucking Catholics!" I can only hope readers would agree that just as Jews and Atheists shouldn't be vilified (Attention: George Brandis!) or collectively blamed for any particular crime, nor should Catholics, refugees, children from privileged private schools or nuns.

We have commemorated the 100th anniversary of the mother of all bad triggers: The assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. A nationalist ethnic/religious stoush motivated that gunshot: an Orthodox Serbian separatist shot a Catholic Austrian. The parallels to today's Ukrainian crisis almost eclipse my fears for the Middle East. Here's hoping for the day when all political states are constituted blind to ethnicity, religion or any other source of bigotry.





a statement about the negative connotations of their religion which over the centuries have gained it notoriety, including: crusades; conquests; colonialism; empire; forced conversions; lengthy association with slavery; suppression of scientific, medical and other progress; racial and gender discrimination; clerical sexual abuse; institutionalised superstition; wealth accumulation by the Church; and massive and incalculable waste. Nothing worth being proud about or showing allegiance to here. Perhaps win-at-all-costs or attention-seeking Christian sportspersons are not even aware of these undesirable aspects of the Christian religion – or they just blank them out.

These super- and not-so-super-stars who pray to their God to help them achieve sporting success appear to be spurred on by their belief that there is actually a God wanting to favour them. Even though it's only a placebo-inspired kick-along, the imaginary effect can work to their benefit in a psychological way... sometimes aided by the self-fulfilling prophecy. However, an ongoing reliance on the divine risks severing the link between responsibility (duty) and accountability for performance. It could tempt the sportsperson to slacken off a bit, or not take their contribution seriously enough, or miss training, because they think they can always fall back on their heavenly helper if things are not going too well in the heat of sporting battle. If they truly believe that God can assist their performance, they might not be held to account for their win or loss, and hence not consolidate strengths or fix up any mistakes to improve for next time. But then accountability has never been a strength of the Christian establishment.

### **The 'Hand of God'**

Football's world governing body, FIFA (The Fédération Internationale de Football Association) made its position clear in July 2009 about overt displays of religious affiliation by warning the Brazilian team against such conduct. The brand of Christianity many of the Brazilians subscribed to was



Pentecostalism, and their behaviour was consistent with the demonstrative approach Pentecostals show to their religious beliefs, which focus on the Holy Spirit and a literal interpretation of the Bible. Once they've given their lives to Jesus, they want everyone to know about it and give themselves to Jesus too. It's part of their proselytising culture.

FIFA reiterated its warning to all teams competing in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, its rationale being that football's power to unite could be threatened if the world game does not remain secular. There were plenty of signs of the cross by players (which in many cases proved to be unsuccessful in securing wins), but thankfully for FIFA, no embarrassing or uninhibited demonstrations. However, the sinister 'Hand of God' was seen for a second time in World Cup competition. This hypocritical phrase was first used by Argentina's super-star Diego Maradona to try and justify the use of his hand which helped him score a goal in the 1986 World Cup. This time it was Uruguay's super-star Luis Suarez stopping a goal which changed the fortunes of a match.

Both these fabulously-talented players appeared to be trying to minimise their responsibility for unlawful play by invoking God, as if that meant no one would properly hold them to account: they touched

the ball but God made them do it... as if He'd touched it Himself; and He's untouchable! However, their 'Hand of God' was contrary to the laws of the sport and the spirit of the game.

Maradona resurrected the saying in 2013, claiming that the 'Hand of God' helped elect Buenos Aires Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio to become Pope Francis. However, the new pontiff may not have appreciated his elevation being linked to an unsportsman-like action by his controversial countryman. But Francis would have imagined that his God played a part.

At the time of writing, the 2014 World Cup was about to kick off in Brazil. Expressions of religious affiliation and thanks to God are likely to occur. FIFA's responses to its warnings will be worth watching. And we might even see another 'Hand of God'.

### **Follow the leader?**

Will other international sporting bodies follow FIFA's example? For example, the International Tennis Federation, given demonstrative Christian appeals to God and the wearing of Christian symbols during its tournaments. The International Olympic Committee appears willing to allow competitors to openly express religious affiliation. This was particularly evident during the 2012 London Games, which saw manifest expressions of faith such as pre -



event prayers, religious hand signs, looking skyward as if to God or His representatives, embracing the ground or sweat-soaked pictures of Mary and Jesus, and—most obviously for the successful competitors—post-event prayers and signs of thanks to their God.

Some golfers thank God for their winning achievements, though little or nothing is heard from the losers, or those who missed qualifying for the cut; or worse, for the tournament. The so-called luck that seems to permeate this great game makes it

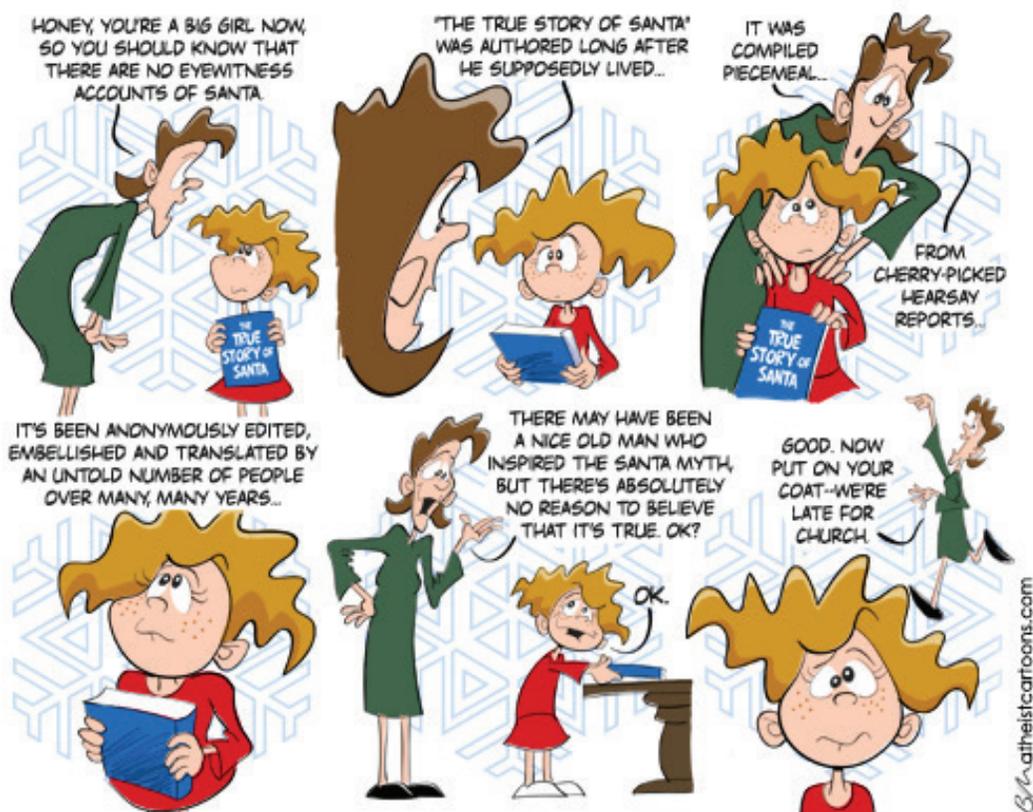
fair game for belief that God helped when good fortune is on one's side. (It seems to be primarily American players who express thanks for divine favour for their wins.)

One can only wonder at what sportspeople who seek God's favours might think when the opposition or competitors also seek the same, or another, God's support in a similar manner. In any event, it's a fair bet that God would not approve of competitors, or spectators, praying for the success of individuals or teams, particularly as punters gamble

fortunes on these sporting contests.

**The final say**

In the words of champion Australian middle-distance runner Herb Elliot speaking on athletes seeking God's help: 'I think they're having themselves on.' Elliot won the 1,500 metres final in Rome in 1960. He was one of the hardest training and dedicated athletes of all time – never beaten in a competitive race over 800 metres or 1,500 metres. Herb Elliot remains a well-respected senior statesman of Australian sport.



# Interview with Catherine Deveny

## -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).*

*If you attended one or both of the Global Atheist Conventions, you may remember the fiery comedic performances of Melbournian Catherine Deveny.*

*If you missed out, you'll be pleased to know that she continues to work, speak and write for the forces of rationalism, atheism and really creative choices when it comes to colourful language.*

*This year she successfully crowd-sourced a film version of her GAC 2012 presentation, An A to Z of Atheism, where she answers all the frequently asked questions of non-belief as she rides ride through the streets of Melbourne with her dog Archie in the basket. There's beautiful scenery, fantastic locations and it's spiced up with an informative journey through some commonly-held misconceptions about the faithless.*

*While you may not agree with all of her views or hold the same opinions about religious believers, she's a tireless creative force and you can find the evidence over at [www.catherinedeveny.com](http://www.catherinedeveny.com).*

**Kylie Sturgess:** When did you discover that you're an Atheist? When did you learn about Atheism?

**Catherine Deveny:** I was 38! I know it's pretty hard to believe, but I'm very smart in other ways! I was brought up a Catholic.

Firstly, I believe that religion is mental illness, and I also think that bringing children up in religion is child abuse. My parents knew no better. To their defense, we were the first children not to go to Catholic school. We went to church every week, but we didn't go to Catholic schools.

We said prayers and stuff but it was also like a superstition, but anyway, I realised I was an Atheist at a late age. The thing is that it was extraordinary because I was supposedly a Catholic, but I didn't go to church anymore. I had never married, and I had three children. I used contraception and all that kind of stuff.

But the moment I became an atheist was when I was explaining Jesus to my eldest son, Dom, who's just turned 16 and is now living in Japan. He said, "Mum, who's Jesus?" I said, "There was this woman called Mary and she was a virgin.... I'll explain that part later. She got pregnant. The

Holy Ghost came to her, and she got pregnant by the Holy Ghost who's also God and Jesus, and so the Holy Ghost made her pregnant with himself."

"He was born and he was the Son of God. He was really rad and he walked on water! He turned a piece of flake and a loaf into enough food to feed the MCG... He raised people from the dead. Then he died. He was crucified. They nailed him on a cross and he died. Then he came back to life.... Oh, sorry, Dom, this is a crock of shit."

It was all this stuff that I'd been told and just kind of not questioned. When I was raising my own children the way that I did, and when I was put on the spot and asked to explain, "Who was Jesus," and all this crazy shit was coming out of my mouth - I just said, "This is a total crock."

It was that moment. It was absolutely that moment.

**Kylie:** How do you feel about atheists who might have a different perspective to you? They might get along fine with religious people, or maintain links with family and friends who are religious. Do you still see that as problematic?

**Catherine:** In a way I do, and I know it's harsh, but the thing is I'm here to get to the best possible place with the least amount of damage. It's a big boat that's going to take a while to turn around.

There's a couple of people who I have real issues with, friends of mine who've sent their kids to single sex Catholic schools. I'm actually not sure if I can be friends with them anymore. The thing is the moderates enable the fundamentalists and the extremists.

I do have a bit of a problem, but I also know that they might have come as far as they possibly can being friends with an atheist, and living a fairly secular lifestyle. It's a bit hard. Why do you ask that, Kylie, it's an interesting question?

**Kylie:** Simply because I noticed in the "Atheist Alphabet," which you've done, you've come up with a variety of arguments. Some of them may come across as aggressive, but many of them are also very well reasoned and point out that there's some value in religion.

For example, the scene where you're lying on your back admiring stained glass windows. I looked at that and thought to myself, "Oh, man, I always wanted to do that!" The fact that a church must have thought, or an institution must have thought, "Yeah, sure, you can do your video, and film that here" interested me. To my mind, there's certain elements of religion that can be of interest to everyone, even in a cultural sense or an artistic...

**Catherine:** You're going to love this. That is not a church.

**Kylie:** Really? Wow!

**Catherine:** That is the great hall of the National Gallery that has a stained glass roof in the great hall. It's one of my favorite buildings in Melbourne, and it's actually where I want to have my funeral. I always said I wanted to have my funeral there, and I didn't think about the stained glass connotations.



I just loved the room, I worked there as a waiter, I went there as a child. It's free to get into the National Gallery. I've written there, sometimes I ride my bike in and sit there with my laptop. I haven't done it for ages, but you can just waltz in and sit there. You lay on your back and you looked through the stained glass room. So no, not a church!

**Kylie:** Okay, but do you think it could be argued that there is some value to religion...

**Catherine:** No, I think absolutely not. I just see the architecture, and the art, and the music as window dressing. The thing is, if atheists had been given access to all of the prominence and power that religion had at the time, they would have been able to put together amazing resources a lot of times. I'm sure, corruption, as well.

But it's just window dressing. God is another way of saying, "I don't know." The more we know, the less these religious institutions have power.

I'm a single mom. I have three sons and I pay taxes. The Catholic Church doesn't pay any. I had to take a hard line with this. I see that the negatives for it are far greater than the benefits are. I can't say that there's any benefit in religion in any way, shape, or form.

I'll say something about the plague. You know there's still a couple of people a year who die from similar diseases in the world.

During the plague, the churches got incredibly rich. People just threw money over the fences, just hoping. When you don't know what to do, you do anything: "We're just going to give you our money because you guys keep it safe." We're living in this horrible, dirty, decrepit, festering conditions with dying people around us and we're going into this beautiful, amazing, clean, building with incense and stained glass. It's mystical and shit, as my kids would say. "These guys must know what they're talking about. Let's give them money."

**Kylie:** Inequity is something that you cover in "The Atheist Alphabet," as well. Not just in terms of funding and in terms of helping people out there, but also sexism.

**Catherine:** That's what it's all about. It's only about discrimination and inequality. The whole thing, if you look

at religion, it's just an organization, which is the embodiment of narcissistic personality disorder. It's only about separating people. It's creating the haves and the have-nots. It's creating the entire trouble. It's creating the fortunate so there's the unfortunate.

That's what it's all about, for the people to feel better about themselves. How they can sit there and say, "Well, God found my car keys"? It's like, "OK, why didn't He save all those little kiddies in Afghanistan and soldiers?" The cognitive dissonance is amazing.

I think one of the interesting things is Alain De Botton's book, Religion for Atheists - which, of course, it's just a nonsense title. The idea is of course there is no God. There's no heaven. There's no big guy in the sky. It's pretty clear.

People may say, "Yeah, but look at all the great work that religion does." How much of it is not funded? Almost entirely it's funded by the government or it's propped up by the government in some way, shape, or form.

That's what it's always and only been about. What's that cynical quote? "Religion is seen as true by the common, as false by the rich, and as useful by the rulers."

**Kylie:** What inspired the video originally? "An Atheist Alphabet" could have been a children's book, for example. Why do it in the form that you did?

**Catherine:** You had quite a bit to do with it! In 2010 I did a one-woman show called "God is Bullshit" and I also opened the Global Atheist Convention. That was in 2010. In 2012 I was asked to be part of the after dinner entertainment at the Global Atheist Convention.

I really wanted to do a good job, and so I put together this idea of atheism. The gig was a nightmare, we were all held up because of tech issues. I was supposed to get on at half past nine. I got on at quarter past eleven and everyone was drunk and loud. I had tech issues, too. It was one of the most unsatisfying and disappointing gigs I've ever had. It meant so much to me.

I rode my bike up Paulson Street that night going, "Oh, my God, oh, my God. I know I've been an atheist. I don't want to be a comedian." That happens sometime in showbiz. You win some and you lose some. But the idea of the Atheist Alphabet had been knocking around in my head for quite some time. You know when you do something that doesn't work but you know it works and you want to nail it?

A lot of the things that have made the most sense to me, I have learned through really untraditional ways of teaching. Like standup, music, graffiti, conversation, protests and stuff like that. I had this idea that I really wanted to do the A to Z of atheism so it worked. I was kind of chewing it over, it was in the back of my head - and I like the idea of doing big format things. I have written seven books, and I'm doing my fourth one woman show.

I really wanted to do something good for a big format to leave behind, because it is all very well and good to fritter your life away on Facebook statuses! I have not done anything like a YouTube clip before, and friends have said to me, "I do not know why you write. You should get in front of a camera because your warmth anyone can write, but you are a real people person."

I then started to think I would like to do a film of The A to Z of Atheism. I would like to set it in Melbourne, as a love letter to Melbourne. I also then decided: I want to be riding around Melbourne with my dog in the back, and wearing gorgeous frocks.

I wanted to do it in late February, early March, because that is a great time.

The light is just fantastic and it's a celebration of chicks and frocks and dogs and bikes and Melbourne and truth and peace, taking in all of the things that I love. If you look at me, this fat Sheila on a bike with a dog in a basket, riding through Melbourne? It is a real up yours: I did not do it on purpose, but I realised that when I look at it now, it is actually quite a comment on feminism too, and just living your life exactly as you want to. I met a filmmaker about a year ago called Andrew Ferguson (I call him Ferg). He said, look, I just love your work. If you want to do anything, let me know. So, I kind of had this idea of riding through Melbourne, starting in my bed with A and ending there with Z, doing a whole day in my life. And apart from the fact that I have another couple of kids that I cook for who want to be in the video, that is not very dissimilar to my life. Just how that video looked!

The only breakout would probably be that it would be me at home when the kids come home from school, knocking up some dinner and saying, "I am going to do standup, I am going out."

Ferg said to me, "Yes, I am interested," and just a year later, I said to him, listen, can you send me a quote for what it would cost to make that video?

He sent me a really ridiculously low quote. One of the things I am really passionate about? I am a single mom, and I pay every single person who works for me. Every single one. I do not ask anybody to work for free, and although I do stuff for free all of the time, it's stuff that I choose to do for free. Not like, "we are not for profit, and we were just wondering if you could work for free". I say not for profit does not mean I'm not paid. Comedians get paid. Writers get paid. Photographers get paid.

**Kylie:** Art is important to support. Otherwise it just disappears.

**Catherine:** Absolutely. So, Ferg sent me this really ridiculously low quote, which I was not comfortable with. He said, "Dear, I just really want

to do it." I just think it would be great, fantastic. My partner Anthony, he is a sound engineer, and he was between contracts, so he was available.

It was one of those situations where you just go for it! I was so busy at the time; we were getting the show Troll Hunter together. I was sorting Dominick out to go on exchange to Japan. I was running Pushy Women North and Pushy Women South, which are my speaking events, where high profile women talk about their life on bikes. Writing master classes, you name it - and then Ferg said, "Dave, let's do the video now!"

I went "Oh, okay!" It was like I was juggling broken glasses and a chainsaw and they threw a baby in! I love supporting crowd funding. Love it. If you are doing Movember or or FebFast or Choctober or if you have got an album you want to put out, if I have got 20 bucks, 50 bucks, 100 bucks, I love it and I'll be in it. So, I thought, it would take me like an hour and a half to put this up on Pozzible. I felt the worst thing happens? I end up paying Ferg not what he should be getting - but the best thing that could happen is I raise the money, and I can pay him properly and I can get people as excited as I get about crowd funding.

We were delighted that so many people got on board. I am not paid at all, very happily. But I have been able to pay the sound engineer, editor, graphics, music, everything. This is the first YouTube clip I have ever done on purpose. Often when I do talks, they video them and I never look at them because I cannot bear to see myself. I really set out to see how my ideas would work in front of the camera.

I had a very clear idea about how I wanted to look. The three of us worked together, it was basically a team of three. We had a sound guy, a camera guy called Noel Jones for one day, too. And of course, my dog Archie. We were just totally guerilla! We did not ask anyone for permission - we just did it. People were just so receptive and so accommodating, and it was just a dream.

It is up now, and I have done a lot of things. I have had three children, had cancer, I have written seven books, I have written 1,000 columns, I have been to Afghanistan and I have run a master class - and I have got to say, Kylie, this is one of the proudest things, the thing I am most proud of. I'm so delighted the people like you who supported us are really thrilled about it, too. They say, "I supported this!" and yes, you did! It is a great feeling. How did you feel when you watched it?

**Kylie:** I really loved the beauty of it. I loved the alphabet, the work that had been done. Of course, I have seen some of that done on stage - I don't know why you thought the stage version I saw at the GAC was terrible, as I thought it was one of the highlights of the night! I must admit, however, as you were talking about things like Philosophy and Epicurus - my brain kept going, "...Where can I get that dress?"

**Catherine:** I have to say I am known for my frocks. I am a very proud, size 16, healthy, strong bird.

**Kylie:** How many cherry dresses are there in the film?! I kept going: "Oh, I like that, no - I like that one better!"

**Catherine:** Almost all of those dresses are bought on eBay. On my page, on my website, I've got an atheist outfit link and I've written where you can find all the dresses. I love frocks. I'm crazy for frocks. People always say, "I love your frocks." I go, "Great! I know the green one is a Charlie Brown dress that I picked up on eBay for 40 bucks."

Another one is, the bathing suit that I'm wearing which have got cherries on them, they are Esther Williams bathing suit and almost all of them you can get online. There's another thing - I'm dyslexic. I'm actually diagnosed dyslexic, and so are my kids. I don't sit there and put the elements together, I just go, "Yep, that works. That works."

One of the things that hopefully people will subliminally get from it, that the high profile atheists are

generally thought of as old white men. I wanted to put a spin on it: that there's these happy birds riding around on bikes, and that's the thing with atheism, it's liberating.

You don't have to go, "Oh, my arms are a bit fat, I better put a cardigan on." You don't have to say, "Oh, that's a bit dangerous having your bike on the bus." It's like, fuck you, I'll do whatever I want.

Hopefully, the feeling of it is - yes, there are women who are feminists, there are women who are atheists. Atheism and feminism to me are very bound together. Extremely bound together.

People got what I was doing too, they go, "God, my God, Melbourne looks so beautiful, I want to go there." I wanted this to look like a tourist pitch for Melbourne, because I love it. Melbourne, to me is one of the most progressive cities in the world.

When you walk around the corner into my street you can walk two blocks up and bump into people who come from a hundred different countries. People in wheelchairs, and old people, and young people, and people with piercings, and hipsters with rockabilly haircuts, and all this kind of stuff. I love it.

**Kylie:** You've managed to fund it - in fact, you've hit \$11,000, which is slightly over your tally...

**Catherine:** The truth is, Kylie, that what I have paid Ferg to work on it - Ferg who's the filmmaker, he's worked for a month. He probably should get twice as much as what I've paid him for. He's a filmmaker, he's got three little girls. He lives in the country, and any extra money that we get after we've paid for the music will go to Ferg. This is my baby, and it was my idea, I hope he gets other work from it. If you'd like to support us, please do!

The next project will be the "Asylum Seekers Myth Busting Alphabet," where each letter will have an asylum seeker from different countries of the world, and they are people who have

settled in Australia.

The first person I contacted was Karl Kruszelnicki, and he was an asylum seeker. I want to have people from all around the world, from all echelons of Australian society taking part.

We're going to sit and have a break, and work out exactly how we'll do it - and then the next one we'll start working on a year before the election, will be the "Abbot Government Alphabet." We'll need a bit of money for that, but I'm sure that people will pitch in!

Follow the further adventures of Catherine Devveny at [www.catherinedevveny.com](http://www.catherinedevveny.com).



# Is Faith Fascist?

- Jonathan Omnitheon Carter

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

Fascists are committed to unjustified false belief: in their case to the absolute superiority of their own nation, state or tribe.

1. People of Faith are committed to unjustified false belief: in their case to the absolute superiority of their own particular doctrines, stories or practices.
2. Fascists are therefore committed to the ultimate dominance of some City of Man: their own.
3. People of Faith are committed likewise to the ultimate dominance of some City of God: their own.
4. Though they are different in content—one sacred, the other secular—their basis and mode of belief is identical: basis false, mode absolute, mode absolute since basis false.
5. It follows then that People of Faith are Fascist.
6. While the reverse is also true: Fascists are People of Faith.

Now the standard definition of knowledge is currently justified true belief.

1. Whereas it appears we have no equivalent word for unjustified false belief. Aside that is from neutral, privative words like non-knowledge or nescience. But words like these mark only an absence of knowledge, one that does not, cannot insist on any particular claim or claims. Ignorance too claims nothing. Thus Fascists and People of Faith are more and worse than ignorant. Faith is not just manifest ignorance but ignorance made manifest.
2. I suggest we call this Fascism. Or Faith: belief in anything, anything at all, in the face of rational argument and empirical evidence alike.

Where the difference between incipient and flagrant Fascism is simply violence.

1. And this explains why People of Faith have almost all of them enforced their commitments through violence.
2. Since that is in fact the only way in which falsehood can be made universal.

Tolerance by contrast—apparent contrast—is a word whose most important root lies in the Counter/Reformation: tolerance for the religious views of others in circumstances where all participants are finally committed to some form or other of falsehood.

1. In other words, tolerance, as applied to religion and faith, is tolerance of falsehood: malign ignorance excused by others equally ignorant in order for ignorance to maintain its ignorant hold.
2. Why then should Faith be tolerated? Why should Fascism be tolerated? They should not be tolerated anymore than falsehood should be tolerated: not at all, in any place or time.

It will seem these claims appear themselves at the very least doctrinaire. Yet that is precisely the point and force of argument: to appeal to principles that are independent of any and all individuals as well as their actual claims: principles all of us must and finally do in the end accept: principles that actually compel conclusions without resort to violence.

1. On this point we regard it as noble to die for our beliefs however inordinate they are or seem to be. Yet this too often is no more than an alibi for killing

others who will not share those beliefs.

2. I am prepared to die for my beliefs. I am not prepared to kill for them. I will not. Among Christians, only the Quakers have made any such comparable commitment.
3. Until each and all Congregations of Faith, of every kind in every place, make that same commitment, no one can be certain that circumstances will not arise in which People of Faith will kill for their beliefs. No one can be sure that Fascism incipient will not become Fascism flagrant, in a moment. In the twinkling of an eye. For People of Faith are God's Reserve Army. They should not be trusted, not supported, not tolerated, still less encouraged, in any way unless and until they make the Pledge of Peace, individually and collectively, each and every single Cell of Faith from the smallest to the largest. Till that time comes, and even when it does, Faith should not be appeased.

*Where words prevail not, violence prevails.*



# Interview with Aletha Blayse

## - Tracy Burgess

*Aletha Blayse has established a campaign targeting the Salvation Army. She is calling them to account for the systematic child abuse identified in recent royal commissions of inquiry. I interviewed her about the campaign and how people can assist.*

**Tracy:** What is the White Shield Appeal and why did you initiate it?

**Aletha:** The White Shield Appeal 2014 was a call for Australians to withhold donations to the Salvation Army during its 2014 Annual Red Shield Appeal fundraising campaign and instead give generously to other organisations that help people.

The White Shield Appeal website ([www.whiteshieldappeal.org](http://www.whiteshieldappeal.org)) has a list of things the Salvation Army has been involved in that prompted me to initiate the campaign. All activities running counter to an image of the Salvation Army blindly accepted by the majority of society, who think a good Christian organisation can be trusted with vulnerable populations. Forced adoptions / baby trafficking, particularly sadistic child abuse, covering up for abusers, cruel treatment of victims, hollow apologies: it's all now on record, but it's taken decades for the truth to come out. A great deal more came out in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Sadly, I think there is even more to come.

**Tracy:** The Salvation Army has claimed that they have addressed these problems.

**Aletha:** Unfortunately, the answer is that, for the most part, it has not. A detailed answer to the question is different depending on the area in which there have been problems. It's a job for the near future to reorganise the White Shield Appeal website into a better structured site that clearly outlines what has happened in the past, what the Salvation Army has done wrong, and what still needs to happen. But here's one example of

a problem that hasn't been resolved: Salvation Army officer Colin Haggart admitted to the Salvation Army in 1990 to sexually abusing a child. Three years after his subsequent dismissal (during which time the Salvation Army provided him with accommodation and support), he was readmitted to the organisation.

Ten years on, and after a promotion, astonishingly, the Salvation Army had him running a crisis accommodation centre for women and children. He was in this role exactly the same time that Eastern Territorial Head, Commissioner, James Condon, and Royal Commission response coordinator, Major Peter Farthing (who both knew personally about Haggart's admission – Farthing himself "counselled" Haggart and it was to Condon that Haggart first admitted his actions) were writing in Pipeline magazine that the Salvation Army had "strong policies in place to protect children" and "zero tolerance" for sexual abuse! That really stunned me and told me that the organisation most certainly still does not understand the need to protect children. It has not yet provided a satisfactory explanation as to what it is doing to ensure that it really does put the protection of children above the protection of its own members.

**Tracy:** Why the focus on the Salvation Army? Aren't other institutions involved?

**Aletha:** The Salvation Army is by no means the only organisation with these kinds of problems. It is, however, the organisation with which I am most familiar, having grown up knowing of the atrocities committed by members of the organisation upon my father.

My father died midway through the Royal Commission's Case Study 5 hearings. He'd been trying to get society to understand / believe what had happened in the Salvation Army's Alkira / Indooroopilly Boys Home and other homes most of his life. Before he died, he was trying to deconstruct the myth of the Salvation Army being a caring, trustworthy organisation through his writing on his blog, [www.lewisblayse.net](http://www.lewisblayse.net). In particular, he still felt there was a lack of understanding about the difference between the image promulgated through the slogan "Thank God for the Salvos" and the reality of the experiences of so many people who'd had and still have the misfortune to suffer at its hands.

I felt the need to continue what he had started. Sadly, history shows that it has only been when enough public pressure has come to bear on the Salvation Army that it has ever instituted any positive changes, and even then, it has tended to do so grudgingly.

**Tracy:** What prompted the campaign?

**Aletha:** Since my father was terribly abused in the now infamous Alkira home, naturally, I paid great attention to the evidence that was still coming forward from other survivors and being presented to the Royal Commission in its Case Study 5 hearings.

When it was announced there was going to be another look at the Salvation Army at the Case Study 10 hearings, I decided to attend in person. What I heard shocked even me.

I knew of prior abuses, of abusers having been moved around historically, and of the callous way in which Salvation Army victims had been treated in the past, and that our family had been badly treated by the organisation, but not the full extent of the continued suffering of survivors to the present day. But what really got to me was when I found out that the organisation was still shielding an abuser (Colin Haggar) as late as the end of 2013 – right under the nose of the Royal Commission, as it were. I knew then that a strong message had to be sent that Australian society deplored those who fail to protect children, and felt the Red Shield Appeal was a good time to send that message.

**Tracy:** How successful was the campaign over the Red Shield Appeal weekend?

**Aletha:** I only conceived of the name for the campaign and got a website up shortly before the Red Shield Appeal weekend. Campaign supporters did a great job in getting the message out in the limited time available. The Salvation Army did experience a dramatic drop in

donations, but I do not think that was really an indication of the success of the campaign, but rather pre-existing disgust by the Australian community about what had come out in the media. The really critical part of the White Shield Appeal campaign will be next year, because sadly people have short memories, and it will be important to remind people of the issues, particularly if the Salvation Army still hasn't made necessary changes by then.

**Tracy:** What is the current campaign focus and why?

**Aletha:** Currently, I am trying to build up pressure on the Salvation Army to provide full responses to a series of questions posed by ABC Radio investigative journalist, Sarah Dingle. On the Sunday of the Red Shield Appeal weekend, the program 'Background Briefing' ("The Salvos: A Matter of Trust") was aired. Sarah asked a number of probing questions that, to date, the Salvation Army has refused to answer. There's a link to the petition I set up on the White Shield Appeal website. I hope that with enough signatures, the Salvation Army will

have to answer the questions. A vital step in the organisation showing it has changed its ways, is to show good faith in engaging with its critics and answering the media's questions fully.

I am very thankful to the many people and organisations who got behind the White Shield Appeal and I'd like to give special thanks to the Atheist Foundation of Australia for becoming a supporter and for running this article. If you'd like to receive updates about current progress on the petition and about future campaign steps, please use the contact form on the White Shield Appeal website to register your interest.

**Tracy:** Thank you for your time. AFA members may wish to support your campaign. Where can they find our further information?

**Aletha:** They can go to one of the following websites:

[www.lewisblayse.net](http://www.lewisblayse.net)  
[www.whiteshieldappeal.org](http://www.whiteshieldappeal.org)

"I was brought up an atheist and have always remained so. But at no time was I led to believe that morality was unimportant or that good and bad did not exist. I believe passionately in the need to distinguish between right and wrong and am somewhat confounded by being told I need god, Jesus or a clergyman to help me to do so."  
 Nigella Lawson.

www.facebook.com/WomenWithoutReligion  
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WOMEN  
 WR  
 WITHOUT RELIGION

# Jesus is Coming To Your Local Primary School

-Cathy Alexander

The following article is reproduced, with permission, from [crikey.com.au](http://crikey.com.au)

This article pre-dates the High Court decision. Watch this space as to the National School Chaplaincy Program.

Interested in a taxpayer-funded job in a state school? There are some going, and here are the prerequisites:

- Subscribe to one or both of the creeds of the Christian church (Apostles' Creed and/or Nicene Creed);
- Demonstrate a living and personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- Demonstrate strong Christian character evidenced by "servant leadership"; and
- Demonstrated ability to apply the teachings of the Bible to real-life situations.

Unfortunately, if you're not up with the Nicene Creed then you can't be a chaplain in a state school. At least not with the Scripture Union Queensland, one of the major chaplain providers (these are just some of its [prerequisites](#)).

But there's great news for Christians who want to get their message out to children. In a tough budget that stripped the dole from unemployed people, levied a tax on GP visits and cut funding to uni students, the federal government has spent \$244 million putting religious chaplains in schools.

So Crikey decided to dig around on how the scheme works, who these chaplains are, and what they're up to.

The scheme was brought in by the Howard government in 2007 and continued by Labor, which allowed secular welfare workers to be hired as well as chaplains. The Abbott government has banned secular workers from the scheme.

Any school can apply for a chaplain; none are forced to, and not all schools get one. Most chaplains work one to three days a week with a few full-time. Schools get about \$20,000 a year to hire one. The positions are usually paid.

Interestingly, the scheme's formal guidelines are quite prescriptive -- in theory. Only students with a signed consent form can be involved with the chaplain. The chaplain offers student welfare services and "spiritual guidance". Chaplains sign a [code of conduct](#), including that they must:

- respect, accept and be sensitive to other people's views, values and beliefs that may be different from his or her own, including respecting the rights of parents/guardians to ensure the moral and spiritual education of their children is in line with the family's own convictions;
- actively discourage any form of harassment or discrimination on the grounds of religious ideology, beliefs or sexuality; and
- a school chaplain/student welfare worker must not take advantage of his or her privileged position to proselytise, evangelise or advocate for a particular view or belief.

There is nothing in the program's guidelines specifying that chaplain must be Christian.

All that might sound open-minded in theory, but the reality is that this scheme is putting Christian chaplains into schools.

The government's list of chaplain providers is dominated by Christians. I couldn't see a single provider from another religion. Catholics, The Salvation Army, "Young Life Australia," Macquarie Life Church, Seventh Day Adventists, Anglicans, Lutherans, Scripture Unions, "Youth for Christ," Genr8 Schools Ministry, Fusion Australia ... it's a long list, and their websites are littered with crosses and references to Jesus and the Bible.

Scripture Union Queensland's website laments that "teenage abortion rates are too high". In terms of [prerequisites](#), "a chaplain will ... be a person whose beliefs and lifestyle reflect a Biblical understanding of and a commitment to the teachings, life and person of Jesus Christ".

As for Genr8, its [website](#) says it aims to help religious groups "strengthen their ministry in NSW schools so that many more young lives will be transformed through the Lord Jesus Christ".

Access Ministries is more specific. Its [statement of belief](#) affirms:

"... its faith in God, as One-in-Three-Persons, whose redemptive purpose for the world is revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. That the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed in word and deed the presence of the Kingdom of God through mission to the world ..."

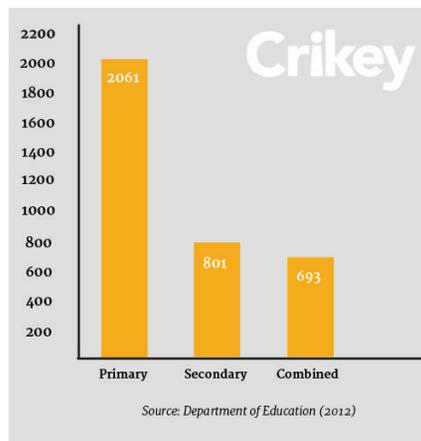
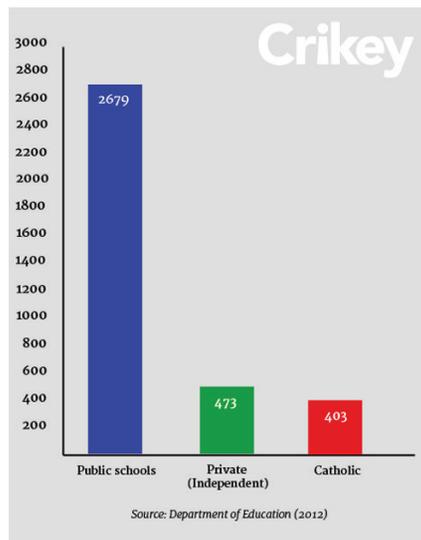
The Seventh Day Adventist (NSW Schools) [mission statement](#) states: "Empowered by the Holy Spirit our Church will be characterised by spirituality, teamwork, ministry, nurture and accountability."

[Southlands Christian Church](#) is keen to get out the message that “we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back again as He promised.” But watch out; “our eternal destination of either Heaven or hell is determined by our response to the Lord Jesus Christ”.

There is a certain parallel between some organisations on the chaplain provider list and the organisations being questioned by the royal commission into child abuse (the Catholic Church, Salvation Army etc).

So, who’s using these chaplains? A [FOI request](#) which came through last September revealed there were just over 3500 schools participating in the scheme, and 82% of workers are religious chaplains (the other 18% are secular welfare workers).

For a more detailed breakdown we’ve gone back to figures from the federal Education Department in mid-2012. Crikey has graphed the data, which shows most chaplains are placed in public schools, and mostly in primary schools. (This data includes some secular welfare workers hired under the scheme, but they were a minority – 15%. Soon there will be none.)



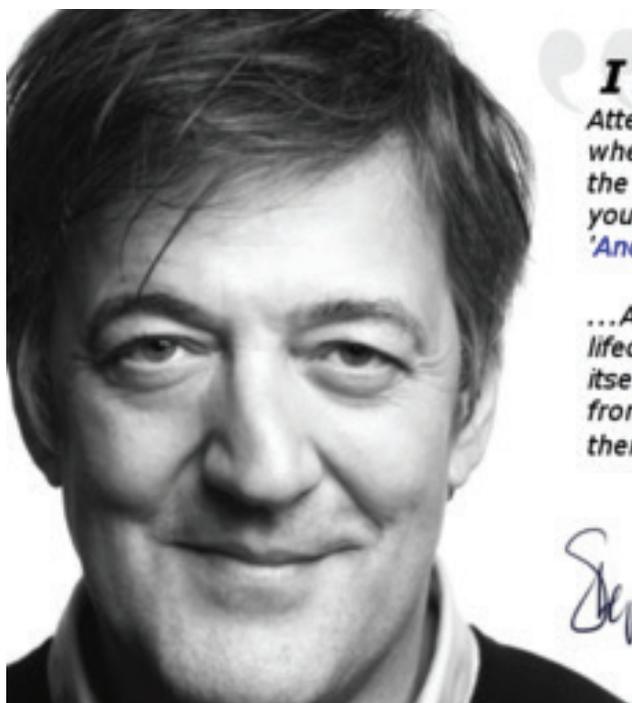
Queensland is the epicentre of the chaplain program; there are more than 1000 working there. Next comes Victoria with just under 750, and NSW is third with 670.

Queensland man Ron Williams successfully challenged the way the program was funded in the High Court back in 2012. The then-Labor government changed the laws to circumvent the decision. Williams is now back in court challenging the scheme again. Last month he told the ABC; “this is simply about seeing that the Commonwealth doesn’t keep funding such exercises. It got completely out of hand and has now cost nearly half a billion dollars.”

Amen to that.



*Note: The Ron Williams High Court Challenge was successful. Funding for the program is unconstitutional by the federal government. We are now waiting to see what this means.*



*I love how when people watch I don't know, David Attenborough or Discovery Planet type thing, you know where you see the absolute phenomenal majesty and the complexity and bewildering beauty of nature and you stare at it and then ... somebody next to you goes, 'And how can you say there is no God? Look at that!'*

*...And then five minutes later you're looking at the lifecycle of a parasitic worm whose job is to bury itself in the eyeball of a little lamb and eat the eyeball from inside while the lamb dies in horrible agony and then you turn to them and say,*

**'Yeah, where is your God now?'**

*Stephen Fry.*

# Jesus The Healer

- Mike Meyerson

*Mike Meyerson is a member with a lot of on his mind. He is a regular contributor. He seems to have a desire to understand why people believe illogical things.*

Jesus is described in the Gospels as curing people suffering from leprosy, blindness, deafness and paralysis. He also restored a withered hand and cured a woman who had been bleeding for ten years. Jesus relied on faith, the laying on of hands, and exorcism of demons as his methods of healing.

Let us accept that Jesus healed as described in the gospels. Let us also accept that Jesus is also God and that this was so from the beginning. Ministers of Christianity frequently quote John 1:1,2 as proof that, not only are Jesus and God the same entity, but that Jesus was indeed with, and at the same time was God, from the beginning. With this in mind it is now pertinent to analyse Jesus' work as a physician.

## **Infectious Diseases**

Jesus, being God, was responsible for creating the universe and every living thing. The creation of every living thing includes not only the creation of humans, animals, and insects but also the creation of all other living organisms including the bacteria, fungi, viruses and parasites responsible for infectious diseases.

Infectious diseases would have prematurely ended the lives of countless individuals at the time Jesus visited the earth. So if we accept that Jesus cured a few people of leprosy – a relatively innocuous infectious disease - we need also to accept that, as the creator, Jesus made the bacteria that cause the disease leprosy in the first instance. Jesus was therefore curing a few people of the disease that he had caused.

More disturbing is that Jesus showed no interest in, and made no mention of, the hundreds of other much more serious infectious diseases - diseases that have extinguished the lives of millions and are all caused by organisms that Jesus brought into existence at the time of creation.

## **Exorcism**

Jesus was at his most dramatic when practising exorcism. One of Jesus' best known displays of exorcism was the ridding of demons from two deranged men. Jesus arranged for the exorcised demons to enter into a herd of pigs. The pigs then ran headlong down a steep slope into the sea and drowned. Matt 8:28-32 (REB). We need ask whether these innocent animals deserved such a death.

On another occasion Jesus addressed a spirit ensconced in a boy's body thus: "Deaf and dumb spirit"...I command you, come out of him and never go back!" It shrieked aloud and threw the boy into repeated convulsions." Mark9:25-26 (REB).

Jesus' intercession raises some questions. How did the deaf spirit hear Jesus and how did the dumb spirit find its voice? Would it not have been preferable for Jesus to have arranged that the spirit vacate the child without causing him to suffer convulsions? It's well recognised that convulsions cause brain damage. If the spirit was ordered to vacate the boy's body without having to enter into animals then why couldn't the demons occupying the two deranged men also have been ordered to vacate those people without having to kill a herd of pigs?

The existence of demons has not been proven. Jesus' influence has nevertheless resulted in the continued practise of exorcism in some churches.

## **Medical Ethics**

Jesus had no scruples in curing two men of "demons" at the expense of the lives of multiple animals. Let's consider two further examples where Jesus displayed questionable medical ethics.

An official asked Jesus to bring his daughter back from the dead. "... My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she shall live." Matt 9:18 (REB). Jesus responded by claiming that the girl was not dead but asleep. "Go away! The girl is not dead: she is asleep", and they laughed at him....he went into the room and took the girl by the hand and she got up". The story became the talk of the whole district". Matt 9:24-25 (REB)

Before becoming too impressed by this event we need to ask a question. Was the girl dead or asleep? If she was not dead, but asleep, then Jesus did no miracle but deceived those present into thinking that he had done so. If the girl was dead, then Jesus lied when he said she was sleeping. Either way Jesus was being dishonest.

On another occasion a woman pleaded with Jesus to exorcise a devil from her daughter. He initially refused to respond to the distressed mother and his disciples begged him to get rid of the woman because she nagged excessively. Jesus then proclaimed that he was there only for those of the Jewish faith.

... I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and to them alone Matt 15:24 (REB)

When the distraught woman persisted in pleading for help, Jesus then argued that (on the basis of her Gentile status) she was no better than a dog.

...it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. Matt 15:26 (REB)

In desperation the women then compared herself to a dog begging for scraps.

....'True, sir', she answered, 'and yet the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their master's table'. REB (Matt 15:27)

Finally, swayed by the faith of the woman, Jesus healed her daughter. Medical boards unanimously agree that no-one should be denied medical help on the basis of their race, religion or lack of faith. Medical ethics was, however, not a priority for Jesus.

### **Harmful Medical Advice**

Jesus dispensed harmful medical advice on several occasions. The Pharisees asked Jesus why his disciples were eating without first washing their hands as required by the law. Instead of answering the question, Jesus castigated the Pharisees for being hypocrites and then lectured his followers thus:

"Do you not see that nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile him, because it does not go into the heart but into the stomach...?" By saying this he declared all foods clean. He went on, 'it is what comes out of a person that defiles him. Mark 7:18-20 (REB)

The Pharisees, however, made a valid point. There are a multitude of diseases that can be prevented by washing one's hands before preparing or eating food. Was Jesus unaware of the danger of eating contaminated food? He, after all, had

created the organisms that cause the contamination in the first place.

Furthermore, by declaring all foods clean, it appears that Jesus had now also given permission to eat pigs, despite earlier having instructed his followers to obey every letter of the Jewish law. (See Matt. 5:18,19,20)

It took many centuries before the ingestion of under-cooked pig was recognised as the cause of a harmful and sometimes lethal parasitic disease. The number of people who have become seriously ill or died due to this parasitic disease is inestimable. This disease remains a problem in third world countries and there would be many devout Christians in these countries who continue to contract tapeworm thanks to Jesus apparently repealing the ban on eating pig.

### **Self Mutilation Encouragement**

...If your right eye causes your downfall, tear it out and fling it away; it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to go to hell. (Matt 5:29) REB

If your right hand causes your downfall, cut it off and fling it away; it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to go to hell.(Matt 5:30) REB

Jesus later repeats the same exhortation making special mention of hands, feet and eyes (See Matt 18:8)

Jesus is saying that if you do something wrong, then dispense with the body part responsible for the deed. For example, Jesus maintains that if a man looks at a woman with a lustful eye he should rip out his eye. (Matt 5:28, 29). We need ask why not both eyes presuming that both were open at the time of the once over?

If we all followed Jesus' advice it is likely that almost all those with a Y chromosome would be blind. The effect on the economy would be devastating. No mention is made of the punishment that a female should

receive for looking lustfully at a male. Males are advised to dispense with their testes in order to gain entrance into heaven. ....there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake... (Matt 19:12) KJV. Is this advice sound? What if everyone took this advice? There hasn't been a rush to comply.

The advice to self mutilate cannot be regarded as good medical practice. Fortunately few people are likely to follow this advice.

### **Faith Healing**

Jesus said "Go to every part of the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Those who believe it and receive baptism will be saved; those who do not believe will be condemned. Faith will bring with it these miracles: believers will drive out demons in my name and speak in strange tongues; if they handle snakes or drink any poison they will come to no harm; and the sick on whom they lay their hands will recover" Mark 16:15-18 (REB).

Jesus maintained that through faith alone we could all cure the sick. There is no evidence that this claim is true, although there is convincing evidence that it is false. Jesus' assurance that faith alone is sufficient to cure disease has, however, spawned an industry of ministers and others who claim to cure disease through faith alone. Consequently there are those who, believing in Jesus, rely on faith healing in an attempt to cure their disease. This may have disastrous results, making their condition more difficult or impossible to cure, should they subsequently seek conventional medical advice.

Do the victims of this deception have any recourse? No, because as Jesus said, cure is dependent on your having faith. If after a session of faith healing you remain uncured, then the faith healer cannot be held responsible. The fault is yours for lacking faith.

Jesus, is therefore responsible for the creation of a faith based medical industry which not only does not work but lays the blame for failure on the victim. Christian Scientists, Pentecostals, the Church of The First Born and innumerable smaller groups follow Jesus' teaching with respect to faith healing.

One hundred and seventy two faith-healing related deaths were described by Seth Asser and Rita Swan over a twenty year period (Paediatrics-Child Fatalities from Religion-motivated Medical Neglect, 1998. The Skeptic, Vol.34, No 1. March 2014). These deaths involved 23 different sects in 34 states in America alone. The true figure would however be much higher because many such deaths go unreported and the cases involved in this study were collected informally.

Unsurprisingly Jesus' advice has resulted in the formation of a sub sect of Christians, the Serpent Handlers. The members of this sect handle venomous snakes and drink poison at their services, believing that their faith in Jesus will protect

them from the snake venom and poison. This sect does not have a huge following. Nevertheless more than 100 members of the sect have died from snake bites. Yet can we really blame them for their stupidity? They are simply taking Jesus at his word. This is after all what they were taught to do as little children.

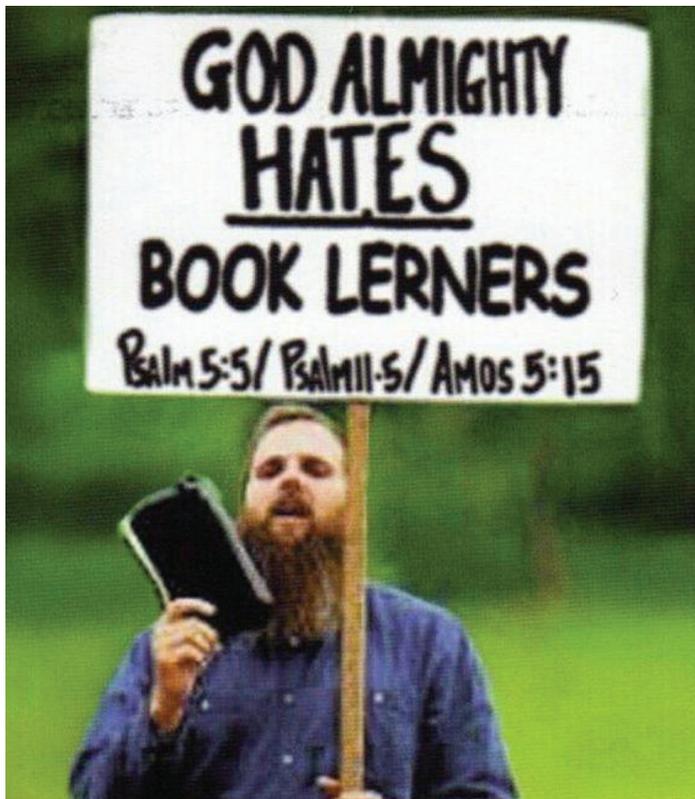
There is no record of Jesus attending to innumerable medical disorders such as high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, coronary artery disease, and emphysema. Besides not curing people of these diseases, Jesus made no mention of their existence. How convincing the credentials of Jesus would be if he had mentioned to those suffering from, say loss of vision, "Well, your problem is that you have cataracts or you have a detached retina" before restoring their sight. Of course, no-one then living would have understood what he meant, but who could doubt the veracity of the gospels should Jesus' words have been recorded and the same conditions subsequently described centuries later? Now that would have been a powerful sign.

### Conclusion

During his stay on earth Jesus is reported to have cured a few people suffering from selected disorders. He specialised in exorcism, a dubious practice, which along with faith healing has not been included in medical school curricula. Jesus, as God, brought into existence the thousands of different organisms that cause infectious disease. Jesus is therefore responsible for the huge numbers of people who have suffered and/or died from infectious disease.

Jesus undermined the importance of basic hygiene. He declared all foods clean, thus becoming responsible for millions of people contracting tapeworm and other infectious diseases. He exhibited a disregard for medical ethics and the rights of animals. Jesus spawned the false and dangerous belief that one can be cured through faith alone.

The reality is that if the Gospels are true, then Jesus has caused, and continues to cause, much more disease and suffering than he cured.



# Reindeers Don't Fly

- David Hammon

*David Hammon is a new member of the AFA. He has recently emerged from a fundamentalist christian background. Unfortunately he has learnt that sometimes unconditional love is not as unconditional as it seems for some in his family. He is feeling his way in a new world of logic, reason and self setetermination. He shares with us his thoughts.*

When I was a kid, my mum told me that Santa was real and that each year, if I was a good boy, anything I wrote down on a wish list would be answered. On the condition though of being good but most importantly I had to believe in him and never doubt. I had to have faith!!

Each year towards December, I got excited as most children do, making Christmas calendars at school, singing carols at church and playing the shepherd or a wise man in our school play. In the supermarkets I would see Santa chocolates everywhere, candy canes, tinsel and tree decorations on sale and the check out girls would be wearing Santa hats or reindeer ears. December was an exciting time for children around the world. My mother would take us to the local pageant, which was a big hit, especially for us poor kids. Excited, I would sit on the pavement with my special treat of fairy floss, awaiting the most important float that had the mysterious Santa riding on it. I remember this one year when I noticed for the first time some odd things, like the previous year, Santa had glasses but this year he didn't. Where are his reindeers? Shouldn't Prancer and dancer be there with Santa? And how come his sleigh has wheels? I never remembered seeing wheels on his sleigh in my Christmas colouring-in book.

The best thing about the holiday period was of course Christmas Eve. I would put milk and cookies out for this mystery man as I thought to myself his journey must be tiring considering that he is an old man who visits all the children of the world in one night. One Christmas though, I was just too excited to sleep. I think I tried everything, even counting sheep didn't work. I waited

till everyone was asleep and thought I would sneak out to get a glimpse of Santa coming down our chimney and maybe he would let me pat his reindeers or even sit for a moment in the driver's seat of his sleigh. So all was quiet and everyone was asleep, or so I thought.

I got out of bed, tiptoed to my bedroom door, slowly opened it so it wouldn't creak and by stealth, shaking with nervousness and excitement, I made my way down the hall. But to my surprise, I heard not just our Christmas tree rustling but two distinct voices coming from the lounge room. The voices were my mum and my uncle, who at that time was staying with us.

I wondered what they were doing awake? I didn't know they were friends with Santa, Mum never told me that. Santa sounded even more mysterious to me now though as my excitement to see him grew more and more. I didn't want to just see Santa but I wanted to be the first kid ever to see his reindeers. So I tiptoed to the back door and ventured outside. It was cold and wet, as it had just rained, but this wasn't going to stop me. I thought I need to see Santa and his magical reindeers. So I climbed up onto the roof of our chook shed to see if Santa had parked his reindeers on the roof of our house. But all I saw was the smoke billowing out of the chimney and no reindeer.

We had a big back yard so I thought maybe he parked somewhere else so I climbed down from the chook shed and searched our yard but to no avail. How did Santa get here I thought? Did his sleigh break down and Mum and my Uncle Tony had to pick him up and bring him here?

But if so, how is he going to visit all the other children with a broken sleigh? Maybe Mum and Uncle Tony are going to help, I thought. With this rationalisation, doubt began to creep in and my excitement was lessening and turning more into anxiety than anything else.

Cold, wet, shivering in my moist pyjamas and soggy ugg boots, I made it back inside the house still unnoticed and Mum and my uncle were still in the lounge room, perhaps with Santa. I felt upset because I really wanted to see the reindeers but I thought maybe next year or maybe I haven't been as good as I thought I had been. I was just outside the entry of the lounge room and I looked through the crack in the door and saw a horrible sight. My mother and uncle were taking presents out of a garbage bag and placing them under our tree. This was a bit weird because Santa had a red and white sack and why wasn't Santa placing the presents under the tree?

Through the crack in the door I couldn't see the lounge room completely, so I thought maybe Santa was there and I just couldn't see him. But then wondered, if he is there how come he's not talking with mum and Uncle Tony, why is he silent? I started to feel confused because my colouring in book told a different story.

I continued to peer through the door crevice. Then I saw my uncle eating Santa's cookies. This made me angry, because those cookies were for Santa. My excitement was non existent now. Instead, it had been replaced with confusion and anger.



I accidentally made a noise and my mother heard me at the door. She looked up at the lounge room door and I froze in fear. It seems a little blurry to me now at age 35, but I remember that I quickly ran back to my bedroom, ducked under the covers and pretended I was asleep. I remember crying and thinking that maybe I wasn't faithful enough and that's why Santa didn't come because I doubted him. I didn't have any trouble going to sleep after that ordeal. Actually, I wished it wasn't Christmas. Back then it never registered to me that Santa was a lie. Instead, I believed simply that I wasn't faithful enough. It was the worst Christmas ever for me and the next morning when I opened my presents, it wasn't with joy or laughter. I opened them with heartache and pain. This is what led me to Christianity later in life and adopting Jesus as a surrogate Santa Clause, one that I had to please in order to receive.

Most fundamental Christians who believe in God and believe that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ 'by faith' I liken to children who lay in bed excited, waiting for Santa to come, because they know in their heart they have been a good boy or girl and deserve their rewards. Feeling good and excited or holy, Santa endowed and they peacefully drift off to sleep. Seldom do they venture out as I did as a child to see if Santa is really there. I, myself, for many years had the 'Santa doubt' always with me even when I was confessing, professing and preaching the Christian faith. When I look at the Santa myth and practically any fairy tale construct, it's clear that they all share common themes. When analysed and cross referenced to Christianity, the similarities are impossible to deny.

Let's look at some of these for a moment.

1. Fairy tales begin with once upon a time.
2. Fairy tales happen in the 'long ago'.
3. Fairy tales have fantasy and

make believe.

4. Fairy tales have clearly defined good characters and evil characters.
5. Royalty is usually present in a fairytale, a beautiful princess and handsome prince.
6. There are usually magical animals who talk and with characters like unicorns, witches or fairies.
7. Fairy tales have a problem that needs to be solved.
8. It often takes many tries to solve the problem or riddle.
9. Fairy tales have happy endings and they all lived happily ever after.
10. Fairy tales have a central theme, message and lesson.

Now let's look at the Santa fairy tale. Santa lives in the North pole with his concubine Mrs. Clause. His elves have worked day and night throughout the year making the presents for all of the good and faithful children world wide. Then on the eve of 24 December, Santa awakes from his slumber, boards his magic sleigh and sets off into the moonlight. No satellite yet has detected a heat bloom in this area. It should, considering the enormous manufacturing effort required making all of these presents. There has been no media coverage, both mainstream and alternative, of Santa being sighted anywhere ever on the night of 24 December. No research team or explorer has found or recorded any evidence of Santa dwellings, let alone any signs of large scale industrial operations at the North Pole.

Now let's look at the Christian fairy tale. Isn't Jesus really a metaphor for Santa and vice versa. Isn't Christianity itself just a different version of the Santa epic? Doesn't this mythical character, Jesus, who it seems was never reported by the Romans and that of antiquity, promise both material reward for his followers (good children) here and for all eternity on the condition of not just being good but most importantly, for believing in him? Doesn't Jesus

promise to deliver presents to good and obedient little children?

What makes this so epic in the eyes of a child is that just like Santa, Jesus has magical powers too and that these powers are given to the chosen children who believe in him. These similarities between Jesus and Santa are even recorded in the Christian scriptures. Below is a comparison by the Good news letter by former Catholics for Christ 1997, displaying some of the similarities between both mythical characters God (Jesus) and Father Christmas (Santa Clause)

He has white hair like wool (Rev 1:14). He has a beard (Isaiah 50:6). He comes in red apparel (Isaiah 63:1-2). Hour of his coming is a mystery (Luke 12:40) (Mark 13:33). Comes from the north where he lives (Ezekiel 1:4 Psalm 48:2). Is a carpenter making all sorts of wooden things perhaps even toys. (Mark 6:3). Comes as a thief in the night (Matthew 24:43-44). Omnipotent all powerful Santa visits all good children in one night (Rev 19:6). Omniscient, all knowing Santa knows who's been naughty or nice (Heb 4:13) (1 John 3:20). Omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-10). Ageless and eternal (Rev 1:8) Santa lives forever. Lives in men (1 Cor 3:16) (2 Cor 6:16-17). Giver of gifts (Eph 4:8). Absolute truth (John 14:6). Sits on a throne (Rev 5:1) (Heb 1:8) Santa sits on a throne. We are told to go boldly to the throne of grace for our needs. (Heb 4:16) Children are welcome of all ages to approach Santa's throne and ask for anything. Bids children to come unto him (Mark 10:14). Santa wants little children to come to him and are encouraged by parents. Judges others (Rom 14:10) (Rev 20:2). Santa judges whether children are good or bad. Everlasting father (Isa 9:6) (Heb 12:2). Santa is called Father Christmas.

The comparisons go on and on but I'm sure you get the point here.

Many Christians claim that the secular community has deliberately created a counterfeit lie with the above comparison. But this is simply untrue because Christians filter all secular information through their fairy tale book, the holy bible. Which really equates through their eyes that the secular community is misinformed, lost or simply influenced by the devil. This is an arrogant viewpoint considering that their so called 'inspired by god' document is literally riddled with contradiction after contradiction.

Only a vulnerable person like a child or those crying out for love and acceptance, a psychopath, a drama queen or someone suffering from cognitive dysfunction would believe the ridiculous statements wholeheartedly 'by faith' (blind faith) to be an actual voice of an all powerful, all knowing, magical spaghetti monster in the sky. If Santa was indeed real, evidence would have surfaced by now, one would logically think as is the case for Jesus and his 'Abba' Daddy. As an agnostic atheist, I'm not saying that I wouldn't believe what the Christian wholeheartedly believes or even the 5 year old for that matter who adamantly believes 'by faith' that Santa will visit this year. All I require, as many of us do is evidence to support the claim(s) and compelling evidence at that, considering the quite bold claims made by Christians, coupled with the damning statements written in their holy book, its many translations and commentaries.

### **Jesus is Scarier than Santa**

But is Jesus more terrifying than Santa? Lets take a look in the Christian Gospels and ask The Lord

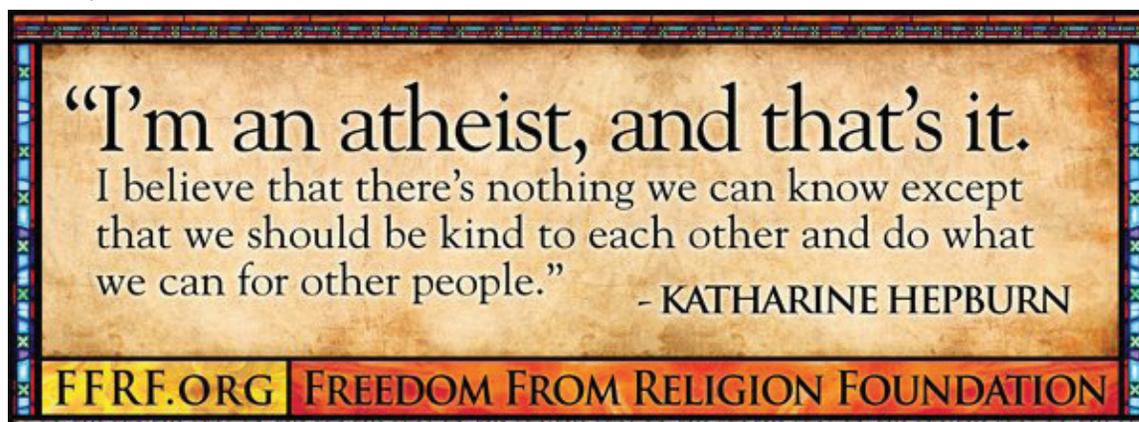
Almighty's little elves. Matthew 10:33 "Whosoever shall deny me (Jesus) before men, him will I also deny before my Father (old and new testament Father) which is in heaven." "He that is not with me (Jesus) is against me." 12:30 "Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost (God's wisdom), it shall not be forgiven him." 12:31-32 Jesus judges the nations. 25:31-46 Jesus tells us what he has planned for those that he dislikes. They will be cast into an "everlasting fire." (God's hell) 25:41. Luke continues the charade with the idea that those who fail to bear "good fruit" will be "hewn down, and cast into the fire." 3:9 Mark adds his two cents with Jesus saying that those that believe and are baptised will be saved, while those who don't will be damned. 16:16 And here comes John to put some nails in the coffin, with people being damned or saved depending only on what they believe. 3:18, 36. The "wrath of God" is on all unbelievers. 3:36 Jesus is the only way to heaven. All other religions lead to hell. 14:6.

### **Religion**

Fundamental and traditional religion, like a virus, has simply mutated into other spiritual pathogens. Its not God or Allah, it's the Jedi force or the electromagnetic field. But imagine for a second reciting a prayer like this: Please heavenly 'magnetic force' could you make world hunger stop and while I have you on the line, could you make my left leg grow back, thank you heavenly magnetic force in Jesus name for your love and grace. Did it work? How's your new leg? It seems you would have a better chance relying on Santa to come through on his promise of a prosthetic. Often when the excuses don't work for fundamentalists

and spiritualists, they will pull the trump card of 'faith'. They actually believe that is an answer to a logical question. I feel perhaps that this shows more a sign of cognitive impairment. Perhaps this is also the reason why there is discussion that belief can be a sign of mental illness. Not to the Christian though, to them it's the coming days of persecution. It's the beginning of the end, where they are entering into the tribulation period to be tested and people like you and me, based on our alleged loss of morality, are the little devils who work for the anti Christ.

Christianity is by far the most 'sophisticated control program ever invented' where its peoples are more like robots with an operating system of directives and commandments. Where rationale and logic are deemed as invading viruses to their motherboard, something that perhaps neuroscience and other related scientific fields need to endeavour to solve. Fairy tales when understood that they are exactly that, tales of magical make belief, are not dangerous as they appeal to the wonder of a child. But a religious fairy tale is not only dangerous, but highly abusive if it's presented with the flavour of absolutism. It's simple, as a child when I caught my parents in their lie I was hurt and my fantasy imploded all in one night. The loss to me was presents. But Jesus is quite different, in not believing in him, you don't just lose materialistic rewards, you burn in a lake of sulphur for all eternity. So what's more terrifying to a child, loss of a new bike? Or their skin boiling and bubbling in a lake of sulphur for ever and ever.



# Open Letter to Parliament

- Janine Gebert

*There is currently a voluntary euthanasia bill before the Senate. Janine Gebert from the Committee of Management of the Atheist Foundation of Australia has penned an open letter to Parliament on the bill.*

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

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

Since Kevin Andrews fought to overturn the *Right of the Terminally Ill Act* in the Northern Territory in 1965, after nine months of life (a world first), some politicians continue to block attempts to pass the voluntary euthanasia legislation that the huge majority of Australians want, a majority that will steadily increase as the population ages. Most of the opposition is religiously driven, to the point of obsession. Since 2006, the *Suicide Related Materials Act* makes it a crime in Australia to talk about end of life issues by phone, fax, email or internet. There is no parallel anywhere in the world.

Whenever a voluntary euthanasia Bill is introduced into Parliament, it

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

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

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

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

I regularly see the pain of people who feel compelled, in the lack of any compassionate legislation, to take their lives BEFORE they are ready.

The people with Motor Neurone Disease, who must act while they still have physical mobility, for to ask a loved one to help them when they ARE ready, would currently put that loved one at risk of 12 – 25 years gaol. The shame of knowing that in Australia most elderly people who want to end their lives hang themselves. Alone.

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

No-one of faith should attempt to interpret a god for me, or worse, impose one. That is theological and spiritual arrogance of the highest order. You are not MY conscience, and you do not own my body. As believers, are you telling me God would not have expected me to use the brains he gave me, to make reasoned and rational decisions. That seems blasphemous. Most people, even terminally ill people have an incredible will to live. With Dignify. The definition of dignity is a demonstration of respect. Please could you show me some.

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

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

And for those who believe that Jesus is God, remember that Jesus had the power to end his suffering. Maybe he chose not to. Some have suggested that when he stated 'I thirst' that was the cue to be administered a

medicinal drug with the power to bring about unconsciousness or death. So for those that believe he did exist, perhaps he was also in favour of the right to say 'enough'. Either way he had control of his suffering. And that is all we ask. We are also not necessarily asking to end our lives. We are asking to stop the protracted, technologically induced, dying process. Medical advances mean we are living way beyond the biblical three score years and ten, as a result of human intervention. How is one form of intervention okay but not another?

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

A conscience vote does not give you the right to be my conscience. I don't believe this should even be a conscience vote. No christian is being forced to end their life prematurely on the outcome of legislation. As no-one has to act against their conscience no matter the outcome, how is it this is a Conscience vote? Whatever the vote, you are able to end your life as

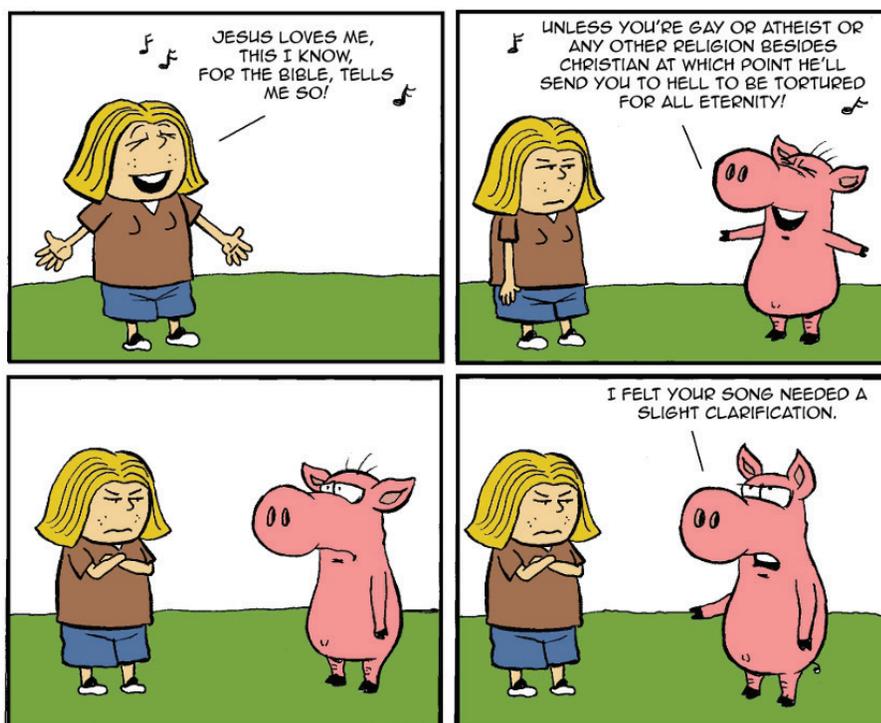
you wish. But how you vote, affects my quality of life now, and how it finishes. That takes it out of the realm of the personal, and into the domain of control.

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

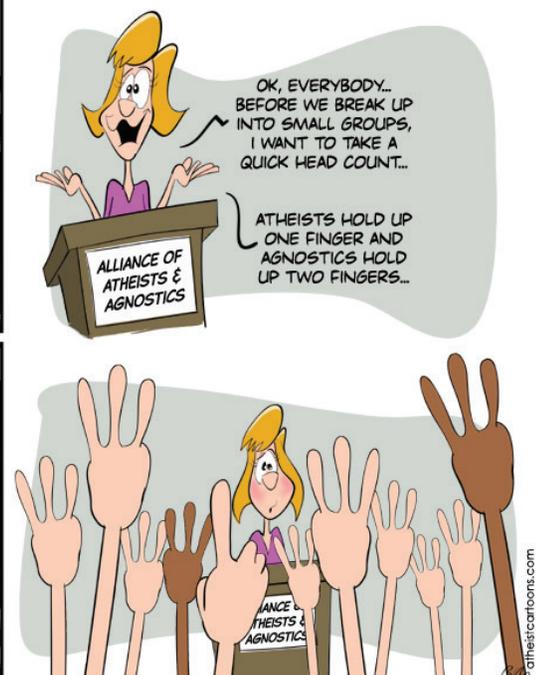
I ask all politicians of all faiths and no faiths in all states and territories to vote for this legislation in the public domain and for the public good. We all have a say in how we live. EVERYONE is entitled to have a say in how they wish to die.

This vote is not about YOUR conscience. It is about the right for everyone to exercise THEIRS. Equally.

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# Egypt

## Physician to Stand Trial for FGM

A doctor is to stand trial in Egypt in relation to female genital mutilation, the first case of its kind in a country where FGM is illegal but widely accepted.

Activists warned this week that the landmark case was just one modest stage in the direction of eradicating the practice, as villagers openly promised to uphold the tradition and a neighborhood police chief stated it was near-unattainable to stamp out.

Raslan Fadl, a physician in a Nile delta village, is accused of killing 13-year-old schoolgirl Sohair al-Bata'a in a botched FGM operation last June. Sohair's father, Mohamed al-Bata'a, will also be charged with complicity in her death.

Fadl denies the charges, and claims Sohair died due to an allergic reaction to penicillin she took for the duration of a process to eliminate genital warts.

"What circumcision? There was no circumcision," Fadl shouted on Tuesday evening, sitting outside his residence and the place Sohair died. "It is all manufactured up by these dogs' rights individuals [human rights activists]."

In the subsequent village along, Sohair's parents had gone into hiding, according to their loved ones. Her grandmother – after whom Sohair was named – admitted an FGM operation had occurred, but disapproved of the court case.

"This is her destiny," stated the elder Sohair. "What can we do? It really is what God ordered. Nothing will assist now."

According to Unicef, 91% of married Egyptian women aged between

15 and 49 have been subjected to FGM. 72% of them by doctors, even although the practice was made illegal in 2008. Unicef's research suggests that support for the practice is steadily falling: 63% of girls in the same age bracket as Sohair were subject to FGM in 2008, compared with 82% in 1995.

But in rural locations, where there is a reduced standard of education – like Sohair's village of Diyarb Bektaris – FGM has support from the neighborhood population, who believe it decreases women's appetite for adultery.

"We circumcise all our youngsters – they say it is very good for our ladies," Naga Shawky, a 40 year old housewife said, as she walked along streets close to Sohair's property. "The law will not stop anything at all – the villagers will carry on. Our grandparents did it and so shall we."

Nearby, Mostafa, a 65 year old farmer, did not realise that genital mutilation had been banned. "All the women get circumcised. Is that not what's supposed to occur?" explained Mostafa. "Our two daughters are circumcised. They are married and when they have daughters we will have them circumcised as nicely."

Nearby, help for Fadl, who is also a sheikh [elder] in his village mosque, remains high. "Most people will inform you he is a quite excellent man," explained Reda el-Danbouki, the founder of the Women's Centre for Advice and Legal Awareness, a local rights group that was the first to get up Sohair's case. "If you asked folks about who is the greatest person to do this operation, they would even now say: Dr Raslan [Fadl]."

Campaigners hope Sohair's case will discourage other doctors from continuing the practice. But villagers in Diyarb Bektaris stated they could nonetheless easily find doctors prepared to do it in the nearby town of Agga, in which practitioners could earn up to 200 Egyptian lbs (roughly AU\$35) an operation.

In Agga, no physician would publicly admit to carrying out FGM operations, and mentioned the law acted as a deterrent. But one claimed FGM could be morally justified even if it brought women bodily or psychological discomfort.

"It provides the woman far more dignity to get rid of [her clitoris]," mentioned Dr Ahmed al-Mashady, who stressed that he had by no means carried out the operation but claimed it was necessary to cleanse females of a "dirty physical part".

A hundred metres away, sitting in his heavily fortified barracks, the local police chief agreed the practice needed to finish. But Colonel Ahmed el-Dahaby claimed police could not operate proactively on the problem because FGM happened in secret.

In Sohair's situation, her family members did initially testify that she died following an FGM operation, but then changed their testimony a few days later, and the case was closed. It was only reopened following a campaign led by Reda el-Danbouki, Equality Now and Egypt's state-run Nationwide Population Council.

# 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 fourth segment*

*He hobnobs with his Deity in Christ,  
And tells of His great love for all the Triced  
And Tortured of Mankind ... while at his Whim  
The helpless Millions still are Sacrificed..*

Saul is king of the Hebrews and in a tough spot when David arrives at the scene.

The Hebrew and Philistine armies are facing each other prior to battle when a Philistine called Goliath steps from the ranks challenging anyone from the Hebrew side to fight him in single combat, to determine the outcome of the war. Goliath is described as giant of a man standing six cubits and a span tall. (1 Samuel 17: 4)

A span is the length between the end of the thumb and the end of the little finger of a splayed hand and coincidentally very close to half a cubit. Assuming again that a cubit is half a metre then Goliath at six and a half cubits was a massive 3.25 m or 10.66 ft! ("Christian Answers Network" suggests a cubit of 21 inches but then get the math wrong calculating Goliath's height as 10.5 ft instead of 11.37 ft.)

Other Christian apologists, in their dogged persistence to try and enhance the credibility of biblical texts, play down the length and number of cubits. However. Goliath's brass coat of mail alone, we are told, weighed 5,000 shekels – a shekel being approximately 0.5 oz. the coat weighed 70 kg or 154 lb.! (1 Samuel 17: 5-6)

David is not in the army because he is just a boy. He comes to the battle ground to deliver food to his brothers, who are soldiers, just as Goliath steps out and issues his challenge. David has a heated exchange with his brothers and then goes to Saul

to ask permission to take the Giant on. Reluctant at first, Saul is won over when David tells him he has killed a lion and a bear already and the uncircumcised Philistine should present no problem because he, David, has God in his corner.

David confronts the giant and gets off a great shot with his slingshot, hitting him in the head. Goliath drops to the ground and David, grabbing the giant's sword, cuts his head off. The Hebrew army is exulted with the outcome and David gains a hero's status. Saul is happy about it too, but his pleasure is short lived when he finds that his subjects think more of David than of himself. (1 Samuel 17:49-51)

God seems to shift his support from one character to another with ease and the one that has fallen out of favour is not treated well. So Saul is out and David is in, not long after this. Saul doesn't give in without a fight though and tries to kill David a number of times. In one of the attempts David is sent on an errand to collect 100 Philistine foreskins for a dowry, as David wanted to marry one of Saul's daughters. Saul was hoping David would be killed in the attempt. (Samuel 18:25)

David prevails however, and to show he is not stingy collects 200 foreskins. He kills the Philistines before performing the surgery. Saul is not happy with this outcome but has to honour the deal so he gives David his daughter in exchange for the bag of Philistine prepuces. (Samuel 18:27)

Saul commits suicide by falling on his sword not long after this. He is engaged in a war with uncircumcised Philistines who gain the upper hand and rather than run the risk of being abused by them Saul takes his own life. With Saul dead, David becomes king, builds a great kingdom and being a merciless warrior, kills Philistines and others by the thousands. Men, women, and children are slaughtered.

David has many wives and concubines which doesn't seem to bother God. God even encourages polygamy because he gives David Saul's wives. It is just as well that God is flexible on this issue because when David's son, Solomon, eventually takes over, he manages to accumulate 700 wives, as well as 300 concubines. (Samuel 12:8)

Although Solomon had been promised the throne after David, his progress is a bit rocky. He has a number of half brothers and one called Adonijah thinks he should have the top job. Adonijah manages to assemble a large following and declares himself king. David is very old at this time and being preoccupied with his latest virgin bed mate, was not aware of these developments. (Kings 1:3-4)

The extremely callous nature of God is once again illustrated in the above stories as is his lack of consistency. Why does God insist that women, children, and animals have to be killed and why would God condone and even encourage polygamy, when he condemns adultery?

# Film Review

## 'Noah' – from bunnies to butterflies to humping heffalumps

- Bob Irwin

### **In the beginning**

'A great flood is coming. The waters of the Heavens will meet the waters of the Earth. We'll build a vessel to survive the storm.' So spoke Noah, setting the scene in the latest Hollywood blockbuster purporting to depict the biblical story of God's flood.

Noah, as advertised... 'Academy Award® winner Russell Crowe stars as Noah, a man chosen by God, who suffers visions of an apocalyptic deluge, and takes measures to protect his family from the coming flood.' The animals didn't rate for this blurb.

This review is as much about what was omitted from the Bible's account as what was included in the movie.

### **Double trouble**

Christian spokespersons are not happy. Noah is blasphemous, they state, and it diverges from the true story of the Ark. For example, these two:

Ray Comfort, prominent Christian minister and evangelist in California says Noah is 'disrespectful and not biblically accurate.' Comfort believes the Bible is an 'historical text'; 'literal stories of fact.' While 'atheists don't understand scripture.' (Actually Ray, we do, and that's why we don't believe there is a God.)

And Queensland-born Ken Ham, now a prominent American Christian fundamentalist who says: It is a 'Hollywood con' designed to lure unsuspecting Jews and Christians to witness 'an unbiblical production.' 'It is not at all faithful to the biblical account in Genesis.'

Mr Ham went on, 'It appears if every species was crammed onto the Ark instead of just the kinds of animals, thus mocking the Ark account the

same way secularists do today.' Ham is smart... he knew that all species could not have fitted on the ark. So, he plays the 'kind' card, meaning one type of elephant, monkey, dog, cat, bird, snake, insect, and so on, from which would come the many variations of dogs, cats, birds, and thousands of varieties of other species currently alive around the world. Yes, Ham just gets wackier. He appeared in Edition 31, under Ham on a Roll... or just a lot of old porkies?

Comfort and Ham were right, Noah is not consistent with the biblical record... making for a double phoney: the Noah's ark story is mere fable; and the movie provides an additional layer of fantasy.

The film's producers didn't give a whit... they know that entertainment is required for box-office success. Damn what the Bible says! And damn the findings of modern science!

### **Experience counts**

It is easy to understand why Russell Crowe secured the role. As a former movie gladiator his super-hero credentials are strong. Additionally, he has real-life experience saving animals – specifically a brand of rabbit which was on the verge of extinction: the Rabbithohs, the famous South Sydney rugby league football team based in Sydney's Redfern. Souths was excluded from the competition at the end of the 1999 season amidst a flood of supporters' tears; then re-installed in 2002 after legal battles, only to struggle at the bottom of the competition until in 2006 Crowe, like a latter-day Noah, became a driving force in rescuing the ailing 'Bunnies'. Souths is again one of the powerhouse teams in the National Rugby League. The link between Crowe and Souths and the bunny marketed at Eastertide only enhanced his CV.



### **Floating an idea**

To summarise the tale of Noah's ark... God got the idea of causing a major flood to teach His people a lesson by killing all but a few of them. It was a sort of drowning-for-survival approach by The Almighty; a judgement sent by God over a world that had become filled with much sin and wicked unbelievers. God opened the windows of heaven and a downpour was upon Earth for 40 days and 40 nights.

The flood covered even the highest mountains to a depth of 15 cubits (a cubit being the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger: about half a metre) or 7.8 metres or 25.5 feet. Fifteen cubits was hardly a drop in the flooded ocean compared with the 17,085 cubits (8,850 metres or 29,035 feet) of Mt Everest, but no one was to escape, other than those few identified by God: Noah, Mrs Noah - Naameh, their three sons Shem, Ham and Japeth, and their three wives, or at least future wives. The movie has only one daughter-in-law, which allowed for additional room on the ark and less parts for the movie.

God, in all His benevolence, did not want any of His personally-created animal species to die, so He commanded Noah to build a gigantic floating zoo and take a breeding pair of each animal on board so they would survive the deadly waters. It's a horrible thought that the millions of creatures not specially selected

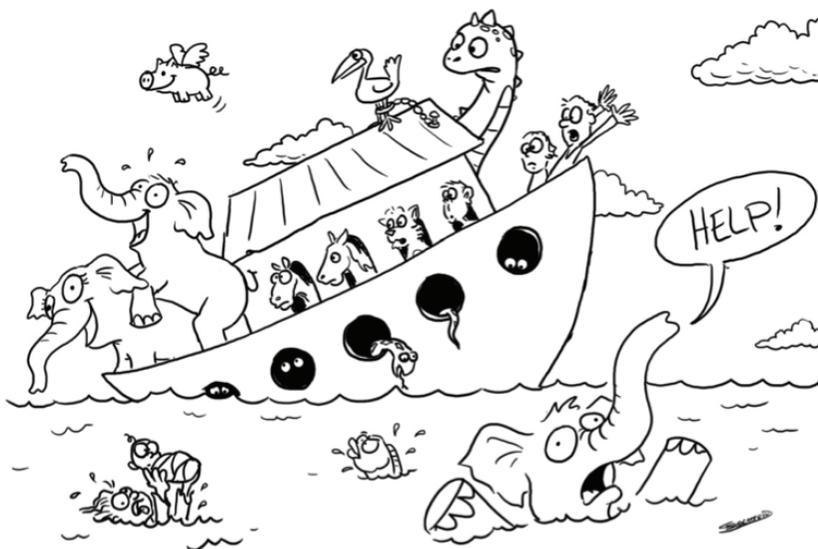
by Noah simply drowned. These days, God and Noah would be receiving a knock on the door from the animal welfare agency and the police, and a charge of cruelty to innocent animals.

Given the limited space, Noah was concerned about the potential for ark-based breeding of those critters whose gestation or hatching periods were less than 40 days. Captain Noah would have been pretty busy keeping these quick-breeding creatures apart for fear of unwanted births adding to numbers on his vessel. He would not have been concerned about dinosaurs (at around 36 months gestation) and elephants (at 22 months). They were exempt from any ark-based breeding ban. You can just imagine the rocking and rolling of the ark as these massive cooped-up couples idled their time away. The Bible and the movie avoid such sexual expression.

On top of the thousands of pairs of animals on board the ark, Noah had to accommodate a multitude of beetles, spiders, butterflies and other insects in danger of being consumed by God's deluge. And to think Noah wouldn't have had fly-screens in those days to keep the little blighters safely confined. Both the Bible and the movie sidestep these difficulties.

The logistics and statistics for animal survival on the ark make incredible reading. For example, an elephant eats around 50-200 kilograms of food per day and poops around 15-60 kilograms. So, for two African and two Asian elephants, multiply these figures by four, and then 40 (days) and you need a lot of storage space, and shovels. For the woolly mammoths, multiply by about one-and-a-half. The movie avoids such compelling statistics. As does the Bible.

Noah's ark was reputedly 300 cubits long by 50 cubits wide by 30 cubits high (155 metres by 26 metres by 16 metres; or 510 feet by 85 feet by 51 feet) and accommodated around 16,000 animals – on an area of 1.2 hectares (3.0 acres) for the three decks... less than the playing area of the Sydney Cricket Ground at 1.6 ha or the Melbourne Cricket Ground at 2.0 ha. And without the grass. That



sounds pretty squashie, however in the case of dinosaurs, most were quite small, while for as many large ones as possible Noah took juvenile dinosaurs or eggs. When the breeding pairs matured, dinosaurs could multiply and roam planet Earth as in pre-flood times – until they became extinct.

Noah also loaded on board other large animals such as hippopotamuses, crocodiles, giraffes, lions, tigers, grizzly bears, gorillas, bison, water buffalo, and boa constrictors. As well, there were llamas and lemmings (they would have been hard to contain), mountain lions from North America, macaws from South America, pandas from China, snow leopards from Russia, kangaroos from Australia and kiwis from New Zealand, even though these countries hadn't been 'discovered'. But God would have known about them. Given their scarcity or the danger threatened by many of the beasts the movie did not fully depict this animal diversity. The Bible just gives a blanket 'all' animals.

### A story of survival

Many questions have baffled historians and zoologists for ages regarding Noah's ark. Here are three.

First... Was His flood confined to the known world at the time, or did it extend worldwide?

Given the laws of gravity and hydrology, His flood's extent was not just the known world – the Middle East and surrounds – but spread beyond those minimal geographical limits to cover the whole world. (And even if the world had been flat, as it was said to be by early religious leaders, the floodwaters would still have run far and wide, until they eventually spilled over the edge.)

Second... How many animals survived their ark adventure?

Biblical history says the ark drifted around the submerged Mount Ararat (in modern-day Turkey), the intended point of disembarkation for the animals when the land was no longer under water. Daring to be different, the movie has the ark landing on a beach. With such a high flood, the ark was in cold rarefied air, so the equatorial animals and cold-blooded creatures, such as butterflies, would have struggled in the chill; while all would have suffered because of insufficient oxygen. The Bible and movie make no mention of these deadly specifics.

It's sad to realise that so many of the animals which were on board the ark have become extinct since Noah launched his craft around 4,500 years ago... especially the dinosaurs and woolly mammoths. Perhaps the now-extinct animals died while they ran, walked, galloped, swam, wriggled, burrowed or hopped from the

beached ark back to their territories near and far. God might have thought this was a small price to pay for the surviving animals, and for the lesson He taught to the humans He drowned: the descendants of the sinful Adam and Eve through 1,500 years of human breeding since His creation.

Third.. Where did the floodwater go?

To cover the world's highest mountains, God's flood would have added to the volume of water surrounding the world by a factor of four: the floodwaters amounting to around 5.5 billion cubic kilometres of fresh rainwater, compared with the existing 1.41 billion cubic kilometres of Earth's water – comprised mainly of 1.3 billion cubic kilometres of salty seawater. That really is a mighty lot of additional water to just evaporate or seep away for the oceans, lakes and rivers to return to their former constitution.

No biblical explanations of this scenario can be found. Nor of the fate of aquatic creatures which can only survive in salt or fresh water, and the waterlogged plants and the sodden soil contaminated by one-part salt to four-parts fresh water. The movie makes no attempt to address these issues. But movie-goers can thrill to the ark bobbing around like a tiny cork in stormy waters. (Ironically, filming was delayed by an act of God in October 2012: the devastating hurricane Sandy.)

Historians and zoologists may have pondered the above three questions, but theologians over the centuries, and now movie makers, have virtually ignored them.

#### **Animal and human relation-ship**

God's creation was the first case of minimal genetic mixes. Noah's ark provided the second – again for animals as well as humans. Given Noah had only one female and male of each type of animal on his vessel, from a biological aspect that was the smallest possible gene pool from which to breed. As it was with the first-ever animals, restricted genetic diversity risked physical and mental deficiencies in the offspring. In such circumstances animals can pass on weak genes, while in severe cases they stop breeding successfully and in time die out.

After God's watery genocide, His trustworthy God-fearing people were able to kick-start a second human breeding program – in a similar way to the initial one begun by Adam and Eve. God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.' (Genesis 9:1). The movie's Noah concurred: 'Our family has been chosen for a great task... to save the innocent ... the animals ... enough of them to start again ... we get to start again too; in a new and better world.' But God couldn't rely just on Mr and Mrs Noah. God's ark-angel was getting on a bit while his wife was probably past the age for conceiving

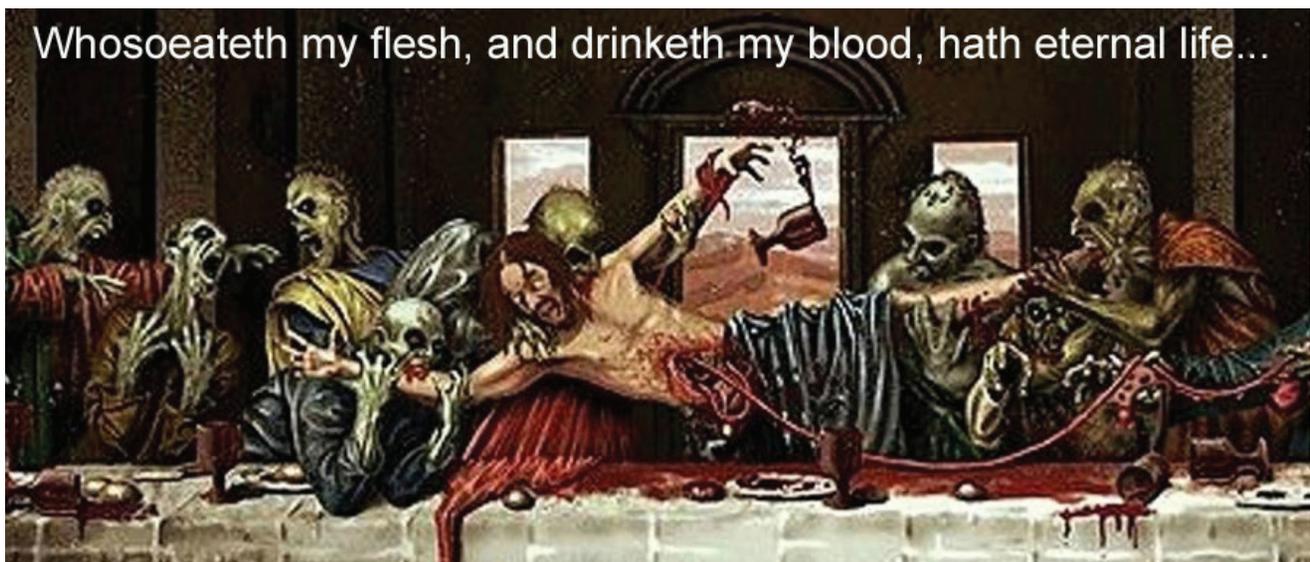
children – the youthful appearance of Naameh in the movie defies the biblical tale. Their sons and wife/wives had the biblical responsibility of tackling the God-endorsed task – whereby all human ancestry can be traced back to Mr and Mrs Noah and their family. These days God would be thrown in the slammer for encouraging near-relation incest and the risk of genetic abnormalities. And Noah too for his participation.

Based on the biblical account there were only Noah's close relations on the ark. Rumours about some others clinging to the flood's flotsam and jetsam until the waters dropped are wrong, because a eugenic God wanted the lineage to be a pure-bred (although in-bred) family-tree of chosen sinless humans without any hangers-on to contaminate offspring.

The Bible and the movie avoid the contentious topics of genetics and biological evolution. The biblical scribes can be excused as they knew nothing about these modern sciences.

#### **Two out of three**

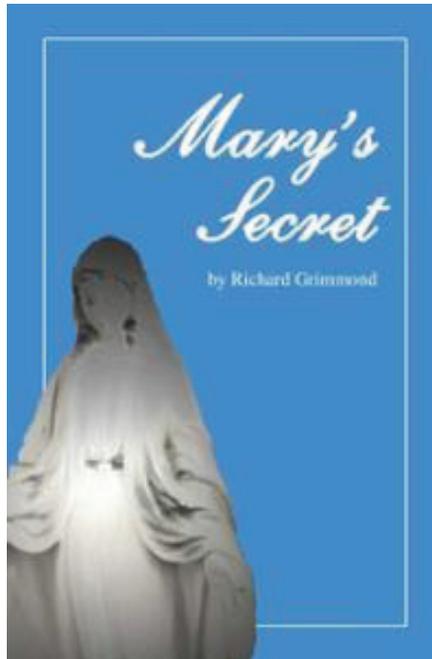
Russell Crowe helped save Souths' Bunnies, and his strong leading performance as Noah helps save the movie. But nothing can save the biblical fantasies about Noah's ark and God's flood.



# Book Review

- Ness

Mary's Secret is an examination of the life of Jesus Christ – if Jesus' father were a Roman Soldier and not the god of the Christian faith. After many years of unanswered questions and examinations of the many schools of thought within the Christian faith, author Richard Grimmond believes he has the answers to the truth behind the parentage of Jesus himself. Retold in this fictional tale, the story offers another perspective on Jesus myth.



who was not content with the stories he was told to believe in Sunday School.

Unlike the Bible, Mary's Secret was an easy to read and entertaining story – what the reviewer feels the Bible could be if it wasn't regarded as a non-fiction rulebook for the lives of millions.

Mary's Secret by Richard Grimmond is published by RoseDog books and can be purchased from Amazon.com.

While the story was fascinating as a fictional story, one does not need to have working knowledge of the Bible in order to read it. All in all, it can be read as fictional story based on the individual interpretation of one man



# God's Spawn

~ a devilish dose of hard hitting fiction

From author **Julian Bourke**

## Sinopsis

Hey this is Zao your protagonist giving you a friendly heads up, my life isn't exactly your average teen love story. This isn't your usual garbage about some shallow, arrogant girl with the personality of a doorknob groping for the attention of supernatural boys.

Oh no, this is far more exciting.

Through the magical monotony of life, pompous principals, bludging kids and incompetent teachers ruled the nonsensical world of high school and everything was soooo boring. Then she floats into my life. Shimmering green eyes, blazing red hair and a fiery sweet attitude to match, I'm totally done for.

Trouble is I've already made a psycho gang of Christians my mortal enemies.

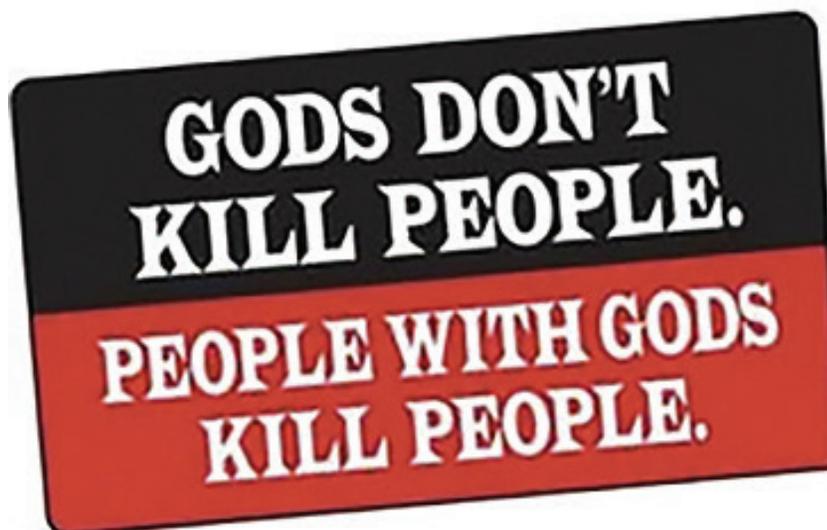
Being atheist, I only went to scripture class because I forgot my note.

You crack a few jokes about Adam and Eve's grandchildren being inbred, then they're beating the sin out of you. A switchblade kissed to your neck they call you "demon."

I never believed in Hell, but compared to my life Hell's looking like prime real estate.

This bubbling champagne spa bath of a world has failed to kill me and so now we'll all just have to suffer my continued narration...

*This new hilarious novel is available from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [godsspawn.com](http://godsspawn.com)*



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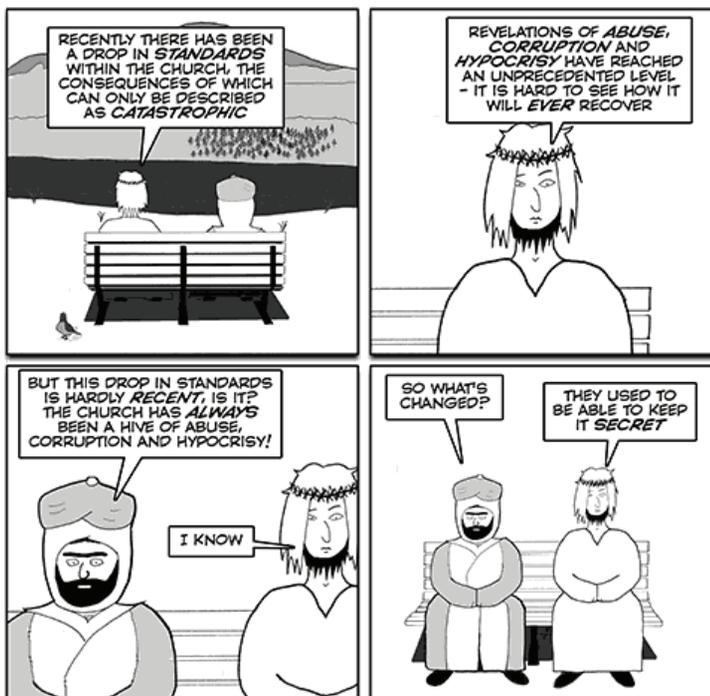
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## HOW TO DE-STEREOTYPE A MUSLIM WOMAN



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\*\*\*\*\*  
*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 ~*

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