



**Atheist Foundation
of Australia Inc**

Established
1970

Promoting scientifically credible & factually reliable evidence

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Free for AFA Members

The Australian Atheist



Religion

Because a narrow view of reality is a good thing?

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Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Established
1970

Promoting scientifically credible & factually reliable evidence

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,

Well we have a new design being trialled. I hope you like it. I'd like to send out a huge thank you to Dean Taylor, who helped with this new layout.

We have a lot in this issue. There are articles from new contributors and many from the old faithful. As always, I invite all members to contribute articles, artwork, stories, poems etc. You can submit your work to me at:

taa@atheistfoundation.org.au

There is a lot happening globally in relation to atheism / theism. As you are reading this the Irish Dail are planning to hold a referendum to get rid of that country's blasphemy laws. The Catholic Church's public influence has been on the wane in Ireland since the 1980s, particularly after a string of child sex abuse scandals.

"Blasphemous matter" is deemed an offense under Ireland's 1937 constitution, written at a time when the Church still held a dominant role in society. Blasphemy could have led to a jail term of seven years before a change to the law five years ago that provided for fines instead.

In further signs of the Church's declining influence in Ireland, limited access to abortion was allowed for the first time last year, while a referendum on same-sex marriage will be held in 2015.

Globally, we also have the increased terrorism threat from fundamentalist groups. In particular, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Included in this issue is a review of a social media phenomenon linked to this group. They seem to be very capable at manipulating the public using social media.

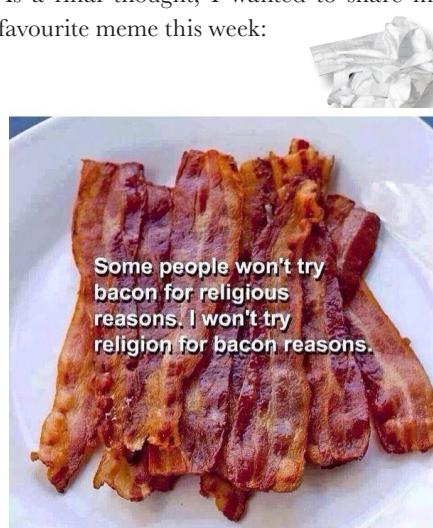
Closer to home, we have a number of tours and events that the AFA is involved with and / or organising. Two of those are focused in this issue. James Randi is touring (See back cover and the interview by Kylie Sturgess on page 14). The Incomplete Map of the Cosmic Genome is a video magazine that's very popular. The AFA is supporting the tour of this production to Australia.

I've included a *letters to the editor* section of the magazine. I get regular letters and until now I have just responded personally. I thought others may like to understand how their fellow atheists think. It's also interesting to see some of the questions I get from theists.

The Committee of Management have advised that there will be an increase in fees in 2015. An outline of the fee structure is provided on page 32. The main structural difference is that the magazine has been decoupled from membership to some extent. Until now, those receiving the digital copy have subsidised those receiving the printed copy. That's unfair and the new framework has been designed to address that. We don't want to lose any members though. If you have hardship reasons, please contact the Membership Officer at:

membership@atheistfoundation.org.au

I love memes (as you may have noticed with them scattered throughout the magazine. As a final thought, I wanted to share my favourite meme this week:



Until next issue, take care.

Tracy





President's Message

Hello AFA Members,

The world news continues to depress and horrify us all. The Islamic State with beheadings and continued threats of violence show us once again how dangerous religious belief actually is.

Christianity shares the same bloodthirsty genes that Islam does. Christianity is literally not a religion of peace. History is full of evidence of the evil consequences of a literal interpretation of the bible – the crusades, the inquisition, witch burning in Europe and America, judicial execution in Europe for apostasy. These events are now largely confined to the past thanks to the growth of secular governments that have curbed the power of Christian Churches. But we must never forget that when the Churches had power in Europe they wielded it as mercilessly as ISIS does today. Murder and mayhem followed Christianity all over Europe during the middle ages and renaissance as eager followers of Christianity driven by a zealous urge to impose their particular interpretation of the bible on unbelievers, beheaded, executed, burnt and murdered innocents.

How is ISIS any different? The only difference is that now Christian churches are mostly constrained by secular governments and laws and they cannot continue with a literalist interpretation

of the bible. ISIS is not so constrained and that is the only difference.

The wild and violent excesses of Christianity were tamed only after centuries of effort by more liberal and enlightened men and women who bravely stood up to the evil perpetrated in the name of God. Most Christians now ignore large parts of the old testament (except the bits about homosexuality and the inferiority of women) in favour of a sort of “lovey dovey happy clappy” “god is love” sort of thing.

Religion is not harmless. It's also important to note that so called “moderates” of the different religions provide legitimacy and a framework of belief for the fundamentalists. The only true way to escape the terror of religion is to remove it all together.

Depressingly, it may take hundreds of years before Islam reaches a similar state. The key ingredient in the process is a strong secular government committed to equality before the law. This is exactly the sort of institution that ISIS seeks to destroy and many other Muslim countries either positively reject as in the case of Iran and the Middle Eastern monarchies or struggle to articulate as in Indonesia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. There are a few brave men and women

in Islam who are attempting to make such changes, but their efforts are often rebuffed and in many cases met with violence not discourse.

The AFA has a number of events coming up over the next six months. I encourage all members to keep an eye on the web-based information which will be updated regularly. This includes the AFA website, Forums, FaceBook and Twitter. There will be an announcement of another famous atheist sometime in November.

The next issue will be in January 2015. So we have another year gone by in a blur. Keep an eye out for that issue. We will be including details on how to get involved in the AGM in March.

Finally, I wanted to say thank you to all the members that regularly contact me with things happening in their areas, news stories or key issues they want to bring to the attention of the AFA. This organisation is a member's organisation. It's for you and about you. Be involved!

Michael Boyd
President





To the Editor



I receive a lot of mail through the post and via email. The majority is to tell me how much you enjoy the magazine or offering suggestions for stories to include. I'm always pleased to hear from members. This is your magazine. Let me know how you are feeling. Let me know if there are issues in your community that perhaps other members might have suggestions for.

If you would like to contact me, you can post mail to PO Box 1062 Lane Cove 1595 or email me at taa@atheistfoundation.org.au

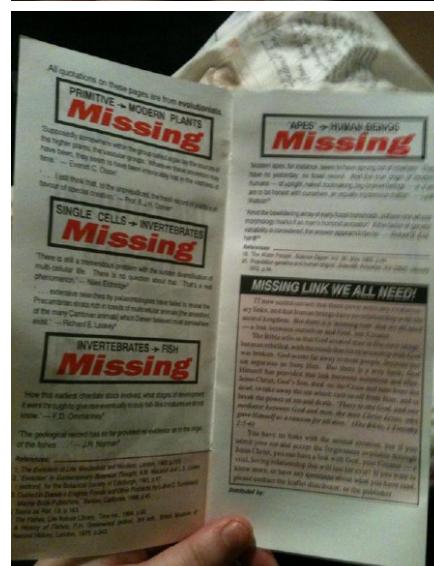
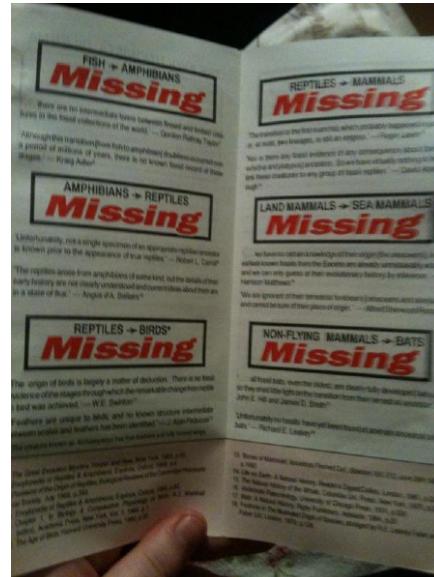
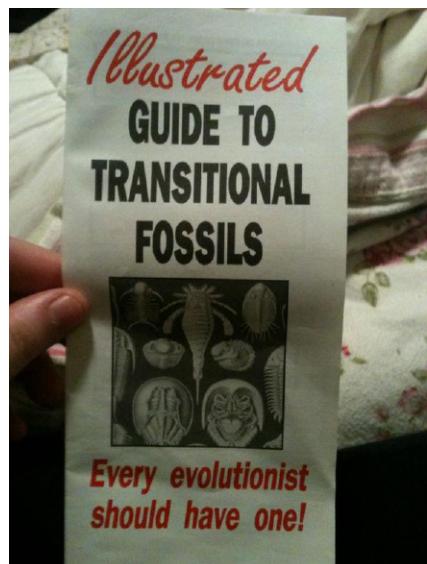
To the Editor,

A creationist leaflet has been put in every letter box in the Victorian town of Morwell. I posted pictures of the leaflet on twitter https://twitter.com/stef_bathory/status/490139193452945408 The leaflet does not say who or what church is responsible.

I am inquiring whether the AFA or members of the Foundation would be interested in creating a countering leaflet that would discuss the “missing links” and encourage people to visit the evolution exhibit at the Melbourne Museum.

Thank-you, Stephanie McCarthy

(Editor) Thanks Stephanie. There are a lot of woeful flyers of misinformation that are put out by various religious groups. I've not actually seen this one. (photos provided below for readers)



If any readers want to be involved in a project to develop some counter-argument flyers that can be used, please contact me.

To the Editor,

Tony Abbott and his NSCP is a big concern to me. He is the embodiment of my two pet hates; religion and royalty! Funny how they often seem to go together, isn't it - something to do with deep seated primitive longing for the perfect parent figure? But seriously, childhood indoctrination is the key to religious power!

Even when raised in a secular home, children are susceptible to what other adults tell them. At the age of 9, my son was informed by a Religious Education teacher that he couldn't go to heaven because he wasn't baptised. His young mind couldn't grasp this idea and he was quite upset. I explained to him that we didn't believe in heaven or any religion, but when he was older, if he wanted to be baptised, or become a Muslim, or whatever, that was his decision. He seemed ok with that. I was livid however, and complained to the Headmistress. She supposedly admonished the RE teacher (an unqualified volunteer).

I also retaliated by ‘implanting’ some simple questions for the next class, i.e. How did they get all the dinosaurs on the ark?

Looking back now, and strengthened in my atheism by Dawkins, Hitchens and many others, I sincerely regret that my child had to go through that. There really should be other options available for parents who don't want their children to waste precious school time listening to religious drivel.

Ross Fraser



(Editor) Thanks Ross. I think we can all agree that freedom of religion should not allow for the indoctrination of children. Children are sponges and are very easily influenced. There is a reason the Jesuits have the saying “Give me the child til the age of seven and I’ll give you the man”. If you can influence a child to believe in religion then it is likely they will grow up to be believing adults.

If parents had to wait until a child turned 18 before they were allowed to discuss religion with them, we could eradicate religion in about two generations. Children raised to think logically, uninfluenced by beliefs with no basis in fact or logic, are more likely to be thinking adults that do not accept beliefs without question.

Religious education (indoctrination) and the National School Chaplaincy Program are two areas that the AFA is committed to removing from our public school systems. They are not appropriate and they are not conducive to developing young minds to be effective, questioning and rational adults. Children belong to society. We all have a responsibility to make sure they become the best adults they can be. They will be our politicians, our teachers, our doctors etc as time goes on.

To the AFA,

I’m a high school student working on a project about the roles of women in an oppressive, male dominated society. I just came upon your article claiming that Islam and Christianity are both suppressive toward women. I am a professing and practicing Christian. You’ve probably received hundreds of emails railing on you and hating on you for denying the existence of a deity. Anyone can write an angry email. I don’t want to do that. I just want to understand why you would claim Christianity as oppressive to women. A pillar of Christianity is that in the beginning God not only made the world, but He made both men and women in his own image, equally beautiful in His sight. So what do you mean by your claim that Christianity is sexist? What basis is there for that in the principles of the Bible?

I’m interested in your response. I hope you know this isn’t hateful in the least. I just want to ask questions. There are enough hateful Christians to make us

all look bad for the rest of time. And I sincerely apologize on our behalf for that. I’d love to have an intelligent conversation about this without any animosity. Thank you for your time.

Thanks, Aslee A

(Editor) Hi Ashlee. Your email question was forwarded to me. Thanks so much for contacting us. We are always open to discussion with believers with no malice on either side.

As a woman I am deeply concerned by some of the concepts in the christian bible relating to women. It’s possibly easier to break it down into themes:

Women as unequal human beings

The bible is quite clear that women are not the equal of men. For example, to give birth to children of different genders means that a woman is “unclean” for different periods of time. We are told:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.” (Leviticus 12:2)

“But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days.” (Leviticus 12:5)

Additionally, we have the following quotes that indicate women are lesser beings than men and were only created for men:

“For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.” (I Corinthians 11:8-9)

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:22-24)

We also have the most obvious quotation that women should always listen to men and it’s not a woman’s place to speak or teach:

“Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach,

nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” (I Timothy 2:11-14)

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” (I Corinthians 14:34-35)

Women sold into slavery don’t get freedom after six years like men do:

When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she will not be freed at the end of six years as the men are. If she does not please the man who bought her, he may allow her to be bought back again. But he is not allowed to sell her to foreigners, since he is the one who broke the contract with her. And if the slave girl’s owner arranges for her to marry his son, he may no longer treat her as a slave girl, but he must treat her as his daughter. If he himself marries her and then takes another wife, he may not reduce her food or clothing or fail to sleep with her as his wife. If he fails in any of these three ways, she may leave as a free woman without making any payment. (Exodus 21:7-11)

Rape

The various passages on rape in the bible are particularly disturbing.

We have this instance where a drunken mob are out to rape a man. However, because the belief is that it is wrong “unto this do not so vile a thing” (it’s awful to rape a man), instead we see he him offer up his daughter and his concubine. There is no hint of compassion or concern for the treatment of the women.

“Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing. But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go.” (Judges 19:24-25)



The same thing happens with Lot and his daughters. The angels sent by god into Sodom were set upon by the men of the town who wanted to have sex with them. Lot intervenes:

“Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.” (Genesis 19:1-8)

Or the instance of rape in the city. Because the girl wasn't heard to cry out she therefore deserves to die for allowing herself to be raped and the male is put to death for violating another man's property:

“If within the city a man comes upon a maiden who is betrothed, and has relations with her, you shall bring them both out of the gate of the city and there stone them to death: the girl because she did not cry out for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbour’s wife.” (Deuteronomy 22:23-24)

Women as property

Throughout the bible we see women portrayed as nothing more than chattels that can be bought and sold. If a man rapes a virgin girl, all he is required to do is pay a price to purchase her from her father:

“If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel’s father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.” (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)

Also don't forget the tenth commandment that lists the neighbour's wife among all his other possessions that you must not covet:

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you

shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour’s.” (Exodus 20:2-17)

Women as evil

Women are consistently shown throughout the bible as being evil and the cause of all the problems in the world:

“Give me any plague, but the plague of the heart: and any wickedness, but the wickedness of a woman.” (Eccles. 25:13)

“Of the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die.” (Eccles. 25:22)

“If she go not as thou wouldest have her, cut her off from thy flesh, and give her a bill of divorce, and let her go.” (Eccles. 25: 26)

“The whoredom of a woman may be known in her haughty looks and eyelids. If thy daughter be shameless, keep her in straitly, lest she abuse herself through overmuch liberty.” (Eccles. 26:9-10)

“A silent and loving woman is a gift of the Lord: and there is nothing so much worth as a mind well instructed. A shamefaced and faithful woman is a double grace, and her continent mind cannot be valued.” (Eccles. 26:14-15)

“A shameless woman shall be counted as a dog; but she that is shamefaced will fear the Lord.” (Eccles. 26:25)

“For from garments cometh a moth, and from women, wickedness. Better is the churlishness of a man than a courteous woman, a woman, I say, which bringeth shame and reproach.” (Eccles. 42:13-14)

I could go on and on. The bible was written at a time when women were nothing but property, to be used and tossed aside as men saw fit. They had no rights. They had nothing. It was an ignorant time and viewed from 2014, they were ignorant

people. To use a book written at that time as a guide to morality in 2014, is destructive and not at all appropriate.

To the Editor,

I am an AFA member living in Canberra.

You may already be aware of the content of an ABC Radio National program, 'The Religion and Ethics Report', broadcast on Wednesday 27 August 2014.

The program dealt with remarks made by Attorney General George Brandis in a recent lecture he delivered to the Notre Dame University. The speech contains some extraordinary assertions including that the ABC and Fairfax media are undermining religious freedom by openly deriding the Catholic clergy, among others. Presumably this is a reference to their coverage of the current Royal Commission into child sexual abuse by the Catholic clergy.

The lecture also offers some interesting philosophical insights into his fundamentalist Catholic thinking which would benefit from a detailed analysis.

The speech can be accessed via this link: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionandethicsreport/george-brandis-and-david-marr-on-religious-freedom-in-australia/5701222>

Let me know what you think

Peter Ellett

(Editor) Thanks Peter. I agree. Brandis and his assertions of christianity are truly disturbing. There seems to be more and more politicians espousing religiosity. It's not how Australian politics has generally played out in my lifetime. It needs to be addressed by us all. When politicians publicly advocate for fairy tales, they cease to be representative of the people. It's not acceptable!

“The only position that leaves me with no cognitive dissonance is atheism. It is not a creed. Death is certain, replacing both the siren-song of Paradise and the dread of Hell. Life on this earth, with all its mystery and beauty and pain, is then to be lived far more intensely: we stumble and get up, we are sad, confident, insecure, feel loneliness and joy and love. There is nothing more; but I want nothing more.”
Ayaan Hirsi Ali



UNSW Debate

by Michael Boyd

Michael Boyd, President of the AFA, attended a debate at the University of NSW. The topic was "That the resurrection of Jesus Christ was an historical event". Matt Solomon who is a catholic priest spoke for the affirmative. Raphael Lataster a member of the AFA spoke for the negative. Matt is the Catholic Chaplain at UNSW, a Cambridge scholar and debater. Raphael is a PHD student at University of Sydney and author of "There was no Jesus and there is no God". The debate was organised by the UNSW Catholics as part of Christ Week. Michael provides his experience of the event.

Matt Solomon, for the affirmative spoke first. The argument put was that the evidence for the resurrection being an historical event was the continuation of the Christian faith in the modern world. Apparently, the fact that Christianity still exists despite the flaws and weakness of the apostles is clear evidence that it actually occurred. I was not convinced. I immediately thought that this argument could equally be applied to Islam or any other present day "old" religion. Matt's speech sounded rather like a sermon being preached to the converted, rather than a serious argument.

The negative argument put by Raphael Lataster looked at the role of the historian in identifying sources and weighing the reliability of those sources in determining the likelihood of the occurrence of an event. Raphael pointed out that the sources for the resurrection were not contemporaneous, contained no eyewitness accounts and were potentially biased. He described the role of the historian as one of deciding on the most probable of competing explanations for

an event, not that of determining truth. In other words, concluding that this or that was what is most likely to have occurred not that something definitely occurred. So, he conceded that he could not prove that the resurrection did not happen, just that it was the least likely of a number of competing conclusions based on the evidence available.

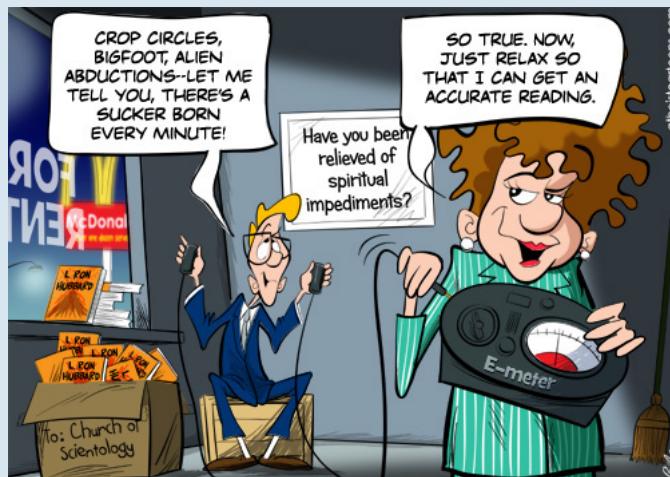
Both speakers then spoke in reply to each other's arguments. A lively series of questions and answers followed.

After the debate the audience and speakers were treated to tasty tacos by UNSW Catholics and more discussion ensued. A very pleasant interlude, but like most debates, leaving none the wiser and no firm believers persuaded to the other's point of view.

Over lunch I spoke with a few of the student members of UNSW Catholics. I pointed out that there were many passages in the bible that encouraged extreme (even deadly) violence against non believers, homophobia, oppression of women,

endorsement of slavery. I suggested that these passages were evidence that the bible was written by men firmly rooted in a pre-enlightenment mindset and not inspired by the all loving god worshipped by most Christians today. They responded that no, I was merely not seeing things in the proper context - slavery was a stepping stone to citizenship in Roman times. (let's not mention the horrors of slavery in pre Roman times when the bible was written or the insidious nature of the institution in post colonial America). I also mentioned the obviously wrong and unscientific genesis story of creation. Wrong again, that was allegory. I was still mystified as to why an all knowing god couldn't have mentioned the Big Bang or inflation or perhaps evolution in his allegorical description of the beginnings of life.

I still remain mystified, not just about the glaring errors in the bible, but more about the utter conviction of these intelligent and well educated young people that somehow this obviously flawed document provides any guidance to life in the 21st century.





Ain't Love Grand

by Tracy Burgess

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a group with a strong social media presence. They have been known to recruit across the globe through various social media channels. They also coordinate activities and spread propaganda using the same channels.

I have no desire to minimise the threat this group poses to non muslims. We are all apostates and deserving of death. We will no doubt have further stories in coming issues on this group as they deserve special attention and I know members are wanting to know what level of threat they actually pose. For this issue though, I have gone with (what I consider) an amusing story.

One of the most active ISIL members on social media is a woman named "Shams," who calls herself "Bird of Jannah" and runs a blog called Diary of a Muahajrah.

She has been with ISIL since the age of 26 and she arrived in Syria from Malaysia via Turkey. ISIL members refer to this process of immigrating to the "Islamic state" as hijrah, which means

Ukht Huff @ukhtuff - Aug 11
@birdofjannah Where are you from, sis? :)
Details

Dr.Who? Dr.Mel @BirdOfJannah - Aug 11
@ashrafemp @ghazishami Im a muahajrah, who speaks urdu & hindi and that's how some sisters welcome me here... With movie/song title.
Details

Dr.Who? Dr.Mel @BirdOfJannah - Aug 11
@ukhtH Malaysia
Details

Abdullah Bee Tee Sister why did you make hijrah and to which place?
And where are our parents
Like · Reply · September 13 at 6:54am

Diary Of A Muahajrah To serve the people because im a doctor. I made hijrah to Syria and my parents are not with me, but they are ok with my decision.
Like · Rep 12 · September 13 at 6:54am

"pilgrimage."

After two months in Syria, she started thinking about marriage, since she said that living as woman without a spouse or any male family members was proving difficult.

Her best friend's husband suggested that Shams marry one of his friends, an insurgent who was looking for a wife. According to her account of the process, they both agreed to be married without having met each other.

In accordance with a practice called "Nadra-Shar'eeah," Shams' future husband met her and saw her face before



their wedding, or nikah.

As per Islamic law, Shams had to obtain permission from her wali, or guardian, before the marriage could take place. In her case, her father needed to give his consent to the match.

On the same day, after Asr prayer, my friend, her husband, an English speaking brother and I went to the nearest internet cafe and made call to my father. Again, I spoke about this issue to him and I can hear my mother was shouting in joy at the back. Later, I passed the phone to the English-speaking brother for him to take the consent from my father, as my father is my Wali.

Shams and her future husband didn't share a common language on their wedding day, which, according to her tweets, is common among ISIL arranged marriages.



شمس

@BirdOfJannah

Follow

Marriages that took place in Shaam between the Muahajirah and the Mujahideen is truly beautiful. Some don't even speak the same language.

Reply Retweet Favorite More

RETWEETS 7 FAVORITES 9

2:25 PM - 10 Jul 2014

The new bride was overcome with emotion when the newlyweds prayed together the morning after their wedding. "He turned back and smiled at me. And I can feel something. Yes, I guess I just fell in love with someone — my husband!"



A week and a half after their wedding, Abu al Baraa left for a militant operation, knowing that he might not return. "Jihad is my first wife, and you're my second," he told Shams. "I hope you understand."

"Being married to an ISIL fighter means accepting that you could be widowed every time your husband leaves", she said.

"Every time they release the names of the martyrs and their photos, I will start to imagine my husband's name or photo to be on the list. It's just too painful and sometimes unbearable."





diary-of-a-mujahirah

"Nothing beats the palpitation that a Mujahid's wife has whilst checking list names of the Martyrs"

— Bird Of Jannah

8 notes

Follow



To cope with her husband's departures, Shams would sometimes post poetry on her Facebook page.



Diary Of A Mujahirah

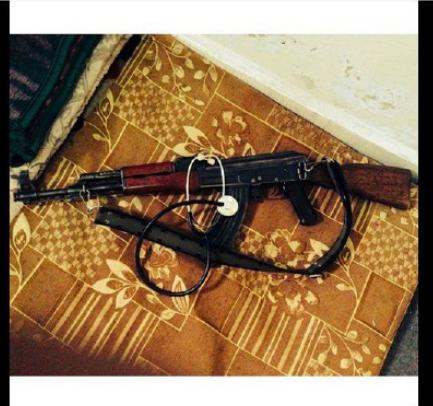
August 31 at 8:02pm ·

I came here as a stranger,
Lived as a lone-ranger,
I came here all alone,
No company, no bond.
Months passed and I met you,
You completed my Deen and I thank you,
For choosing me to be part of you,
For honoring me to love you.
As days goes by I became attached,
It has caused my heart to compressed,
And I know you are my biggest test,
Now my heart is bleeding and I couldn't rest.
You're gone for long and I can't be anymore strong,
My heart began to sing the sad song,
How are you doing, is there anything wrong?
Come home faster I can't wait anymore long.

My dear husband,
I'm waiting for your return..
Your wife, Bird Of Jannah - Syria.

Like · Comment · Share

Many of Shams's posts "from the land of jihad" use language typical of any young woman on social media, such as this "selfie."



Diary Of A Mujahirah

Personal Website · 6,947 Likes · August 21 at 2:00pm ·

Like Page

I'm getting few messages people asking some personal question regarding my husband and I. So I have decided to post our selfie!

446 83 15

In August 2014, Shams posted that she was pregnant with her first child. She recently blogged about suffering from violent morning sickness and her prenatal care in ISIL-run hospitals.

Shams has redoubled her efforts to spread "the truth" about ISIL. This includes defending the executions of Western journalists and aid workers.

also be an effective propaganda tool for believers. It needs to be monitored and when you see bullshit, call it.

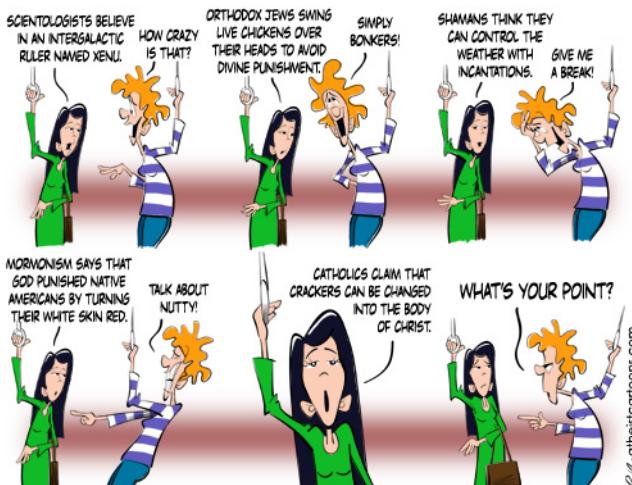
This young woman is delusional. She has placed herself in danger, married a man she'd never met, gave up a career as a medical professional. All for a lie. All for nothing.



And tweeting about the newest ISIL propaganda videos. She continues to tweet and post on FaceBook. She continues to do this despite the fact that her pages are constantly being taken down, as FaceBook standards "don't permit terrorist groups to use the site."

It's hard for me to know whether to be horrified or insidiously drawn in to this soap opera online. I can see how it could be used as a very effective means of recruitment. To overlay violence and terrorism with the banality of young people in love normalises the abnormal.

The internet and social media have created the mechanism to educate people and to attack the inanity of religious belief. It has been a force for good. There are many ex-theists who became "ex" because of access to information and social media. However, social media can



Bible Revisionism

by Mike Meyerson

Mike Meyerson is a regular contributor to the magazine. He advises that over the years he has read several books written by great minds such as C.D.McKinsey, Richard Dawkins, Carl Sagan, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett. He would therefore like to stress that everything he writes on this subject is inspired directly or indirectly by these and other great minds. He wants to acknowledge them all.

Revisionism is best understood by having some knowledge of the history of the Bible and recognising that religious fundamentalists believe that the scriptures are the word of God and are therefore without error (inerrant). I have therefore set out, in question and answer format, some important historical details about the book we call the Bible before describing Revisionism and discussing examples.

IS THERE AN ORIGINAL BIBLE?

No. Many people are under the impression that there is somewhere a single book, the “original Bible”, stored in a safe place such as a vault in the Vatican. They also believe that it is this book that is the authoritative text to which scholars refer when translating the Bible into English or when settling theological differences. There is, however, no original Bible, not in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin or any other language. Nor has there ever been such a book, because the Bible was never written as a single book.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

In the first few centuries of the Christian era, there were in existence several manuscripts that were collected together and compiled into a book by people about whom little is known other than that they were called Church fathers. The Church fathers disagreed amongst themselves with respect to the authenticity of the writings under consideration. (C.D McKinsey, The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy). In 325 AD, Emperor Constantine, an unbaptized pagan, convened a council in Nicea in order to settle the disputes. The attendees decided by vote as to which of the writings were the word of God! The writings that were voted to

be God-inspired were collated into a book, thereafter called the Bible. Many writings were discarded and have been lost to history, while disagreement persists about others, called the “Apocrypha”. These texts have been recognised by the Catholic Church as God-inspired but are not so acknowledged by the Protestant Church. It appears that God didn’t make clear enough which works were and were not inspired by him.

It was therefore men rather than a god who decided which writings should be used. The same men also voted to change Jesus from a man into God and to change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday and Passover to Easter. (C.D McKinsey, The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy)

ARE THEY ORIGINAL WORKS?

No. In deciding which texts to include in the Bible the Church fathers were not able to access the original writings because these were written on parchment and would almost certainly have perished within a few years of being written. None of the original texts were therefore in existence at the time the council was called (C. D.McKinsey p23, 26). The only texts available to the Church fathers were copies of copies - all differing from each other but all supposedly copies of the originals. For more than 14 centuries the New Testament was copied by hand. There are now more than 5,338 Greek manuscripts, in excess of 8000 copies of the Latin Vulgate as well as hundreds of copies of ancient translations according to the book Biblical Criticism (C. D. McKinsey p26). Furthermore, as all the copies of copies differ from each other. Even if one of these copies is identical to the original manuscript, we would have

no way of knowing which of the thousands of copies is this accurate copy.

WHO WROTE THE BIBLE?

The New Testament was not written by Jesus, his disciples or anyone who lived at the time of Jesus. The Gospels were written by unknown people, who never knew Jesus, in a country foreign to Jesus, 50-70 years after Jesus died. The writings that make up the New Testament were written in Greek. Jesus spoke Aramaic/ Hebrew. Some of the writings attributed to Paul are believed to have been written by Paul. It is not known who wrote the remainder of the New Testament. The authors of the Old Testament are unknown.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

That there has never been an original Bible and that the authors of the books in the collection of writings known as the Bible are almost entirely unknown are important points because ministers of religion are not forthcoming about these details. They would like us to believe that the New Testament consists of accurate historical texts written by known authors who had first-hand knowledge of Jesus. Likewise, they would have us believe that the words in the family bible are accurate translations of the “original Greek Bible”. Nothing could be further from the truth.

IS IT THE WORD OF GOD?

Fundamentalists maintain that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God. The Bible does, however, contain innumerable errors as well as contradictions, absurdities and false prophecies. Fundamentalists are therefore open to ridicule when they insist that the Bible is inerrant. Fundamentalists



should note that even St. Jerome, who was commissioned to revise an Old Latin Bible in the 4th century AD and gave us the enduring Latin Vulgate, admitted that the Bible was not inerrant. He said “If I correct errors in the Sacred Text, I am denounced as a falsifier; if I do not correct them, I am pilloried as a disseminator of error”. (The Making of the English Bible, Benson Bobrick p6)

The more liberal strains of Christianity recognise that the Bible contains errors. This admission makes for an equally vexing dilemma. The problem being, that once you concede that parts of the Bible are false, then how do you know which parts are true? Both fundamentalists and more liberal-minded Christians are therefore in a no-win situation with respect to the matter of Biblical inerrancy.

WHAT IS REVISIONISM?

Bible revisionism is “reinterpreting” the scriptures and making changes to the texts of previous versions of the Bible in order to produce a new and supposedly more accurate “translation”. Revisionists often claim that their changes have been made by translating from the original Greek Bible in the case of the New Testament and original Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts in the case of the Old Testament.

For example, in the Oxford World’s Classics edition of the King James Version (KJV), on the cover page of the New Testament you can read the following: “Translated out of the original Greek and with the former translations diligently compared and revised by his majesty’s special command”. Note that the “academics” who did this task have given us no reference to this “original Greek text”. This is unsurprising because as mentioned there is no such text.

Those who revised The New English Bible to produce the Revised English Bible (REB) make similar but more extravagant claims than those who gave us the Oxford World’s Classics KJV Bible. In the Preface of the REB it is claimed that the revisers went about their job so as not to “misrepresent the original texts”. Again, there are no original texts to misrepresent! In their Introduction to the New Testament the authors admit that “the transmission of the text has not

been altogether straightforward” and that “there is no scholarly Greek text of the new Testament which commands universal acceptance”. The revisionists claim that the translators “considered variant readings on their merits and, having weighed the evidence, selected for translation in each passage the reading which, to the best of their judgement, seemed most likely to represent what the author wrote”. But how can anyone know what most likely represents what the author wrote, when no-one knows what the author wrote, since there is no original Bible in existence and all purported copies of the original differ from each other?

It is more likely that the revisionists “translated” passages from the KJV to reflect what they would have liked the author to have written. This supposition is even more probable when one considers that the effect of many of the alterations has been to eliminate, or lessen the impact of the absurd, wrong, offensive, contradictory or inconsistent verses found in the “respected” KJV. False prophecies have been altered so that they no longer appear false. New sentences have been interpolated when thought necessary. These new sentences appear to have more to do with supporting the beliefs of the revisionists rather than accurate translation. Furthermore, as there is no perfect text, one would expect that a new revision of a copy of a copy would introduce approximately as many new absurdities, contradictions, errors and offensive passages as it removes. Yet I came across no new errors, contradictions or absurdities in my readings of the Revised English Bible! Is this possible if one was genuinely translating from a copy of one of thousands of copies all of which contain errors, absurdities, contradictions and offensive passages? The answer must be “No”.

The revisers gave themselves away most spectacularly in the Introduction to The New Testament. They wrote: “Only those who have long meditated on the Greek original are aware of the richness and subtlety of meaning that may lie within what appears to be the most simple of sentences, or know the despair that can attend efforts to bring it out through the medium of a different language”. Every reader must have got the point by now: these revisionists/translators could not

have meditated on the Greek original, not for a long time, not for a short time, not at all. There is no original Greek Bible.

Furthermore, contrary to standard academic procedure these “academics” have failed to supply an acceptable reference for the source they used for their revision. No-one, of course, can reference a non-existent source but when academics claim to have referred to a specific source it is necessary to supply the reference of this source for the claim to be academically sound. The intellectual integrity of these “academics” is therefore in question.

One needs therefore only some knowledge of the history of the Bible in order to deduce that revising the Bible cannot yield a more accurate representation of the original Bible when there has never been an original Bible.

The purpose must therefore rather be to alter the text of the best known and most revered Bible, the KJV, so that many of the passages in this Bible that are an embarrassment to theologians and ministers of religion are rendered acceptable. In the process the revisers discredit themselves by claiming to have based their revision on the original Greek Bible.

It follows that the more translations and revisions we have of the Bible the more complicated the matter becomes. There are now thousands of copies of “the Bible”, all varying from each other, all copies of copies, but all claiming to be an accurate copy of the “original”. It is not possible to know which Bible, if any, one should choose in order to read the inspired and inerrant word of the Lord. Moreover it follows that the more recent the Bible the less resemblance it is likely to have to the earliest copies.

Following is a selection of just some of the alterations that I have chanced upon in verses in the Revised English Bible when compared to the King James Bible. Apologists would have us believe that the changes made during the process of revision are minor and in no way influence religious thinking. You, the reader, need make up your own mind in this regard.



And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham...Genesis 22:1 KJV. It's an embarrassment for theologians to have god tempting Abraham because elsewhere in the Bible we read that God tempts no man. ...God cannot be tempted with evil, and does not himself tempt anyone. James 1:13 REB.

The revisionists solved the problem by changing "tempt" to "test". In the REB God no longer tempts Abraham but puts him to the test. Some time later God put Abraham to the test...Genesis 22:1 REB

One of the Ten Commandments is... you shall not covet...Rom 13:9 REB. Yet Paul tells us in 1 Cor 12:31 KJV...covet earnestly the best gifts... It's unacceptable for Paul to be instructing us to break the tenth commandment. The word "covet" has been done away with in the REB. The sentence now reads The higher gifts are those you should prize 1 Cor 12:31 REB.

Jesus strongly advises against calling others "fools". Whoever calls him "fool" deserves hell-fire. Matt.5:22. Paul, however, calls others "fool(s)". Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened...1 Cor.15:36 KJV. The revisionists have saved Paul from hell-fire by ensuring he does not use the word 'fool'. In the REB Paul now says, What stupid questions! The seed you sow does not come to life...1 Cor.15:36 REB

Jesus instructs us to pray in secret in a cupboard. When thou prayest enter into thy closet...Matt. 6:6 KJV. Few people would like to spend time praying in a cupboard. The revisionists have rescued the situation by having Jesus now tell us to pray in a room with the door shut. But when you pray go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray... Matt.6:6 REB.

In the KJV we are told that admission to heaven is easier for those who are castrated. ...there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven's sake...Matt 19:12 KJV. The revisers thankfully have remedied the situation. There is no mention of castration being an asset in the selection process in the REB. Instead we are told to renounce marriage in order to more easily gain access to heaven.

... there are others who have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom

of Heaven. Matt 19:12...REB. Most would agree that renouncing marriage is preferable to castration but can we trust the authority of those who make these changes to the Bible? How could the Greek word "eunuch" be translated into a phrase meaning "renounce marriage"?

And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, And shall inherit everlasting life. Matt 10:29 KJV. Jesus' promise is that should we give away our home, friends, family, wife and possessions to follow him, then in return we will receive 100 times whatever has been given up. The authors of the REB have modified this promise. And anyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father or mother, or children, or land, for the sake of my name, will be repaid many times over and gain eternal life. (Matt 19:29) REB

It's no longer necessary to abandon our wife! This is comforting but, better still, we are excused from taking on 100 more wives! While the Revisionists have been thoughtful in making this change, we need again ask if we can rely on the alterations made by the Revisers when we don't know how they came to their revision!

Jesus deplored cursing. He encouraged us to love our enemies and bless those that curse us, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you Matt 5:44 KJV. Yet Jesus himself indulged in much cursing. For example he called the Pharisees blind guides! Blind fools, hypocrites, snakes, vipers' brood. Matt 23: 16,17,23,33. Unsurprisingly therefore the verse, Matt.5:44 in the KJV, has been rewritten with the word "curse" expunged and replaced with the word "persecutors" in the REB. Matt 5:44 now reads But what I tell you is this: love your enemies and pray for your persecutors." It would have been better still had the revisers revised the Bible so that Jesus no longer cursed the Pharisees.

Jesus is also known as "the son of man". In Job 25:6 in the KJV "the son of man" is described as a worm "How much less man, that is a worm? And the son of man, which is a worm? In the REB this has been modified so that it is now 'man', and

not 'the son of man', who is described as a worm. Much more so man, who is but a maggot, mortal man, who is a worm Job 25:6 REB. By eliminating the phrase 'the son of man' the revisionists do away with the problem of having Jesus described as a worm.

Psalms 146:3 KJV says, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help". In the KJV besides being told not to trust the son of man we are also told that the son of man is of no help. Unsurprisingly, this verse has been modified in the REB. There is now no mention of the "son of man". We are told instead that it is "mortals" we should not trust because they do not have the power to save. Put no trust in princes or in any mortal, for they have no power to save. Psalms 146:3 REB

Jesus claimed that only after Peter had denied him three times would the cock crow. In very truth I tell you, before the cock crows you will have denied me three times John 13:38. The cock, however, crowed after only one denial according to the KJV.

And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. Mark 14:67-68 KJV

Jesus' prediction that the cock would crow after three denials was therefore false. It's not surprising then that in the Revised Bible there is now no mention of the cock crowing. The verse now reads: She looked closely at him and said, "You were with this man from Nazareth, this Jesus". But he denied it: I know nothing", he said; I have no idea what you are talking about", and he went out into the forecourt Mark 14:67-68 REB.

This "translation" eliminates Jesus' false prophecy with respect to the crowing of the cock. Do the revisionists maintain that in the "original" Bible the words "and the cock crew" were not there in the first instance?

Of Jeduthun: The sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshaiyah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the



hands of their father Jeduthun... 1 Chron.25:3 KJV. The KJV states that Jeduthun had six sons. Count for yourself and you will see that in fact Jeduthun had only five sons. This error has been corrected in the REB by the addition of another son to the list. The names of others have been changed. Of the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Izri, Isaiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, Mattithiah, these six.1Chron.25:3 REB

Thirty and two years old was he (Jehoram) when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed (died) without being desired...2 Chron.21:20 KJV And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made his youngest son king in his stead...2 Chron.22:1. KJV Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign...2 Chron.22:2 KJV.

Jehoram therefore reigned until he died at forty. (He began his reign at 32 and died at 40 having reigned for eight years). His son who replaced him was forty two. Can a son be older than the father? This embarrassing verse was corrected by the revisers so that in the REB the son is no longer older than his father. The son Ahaziah now begins his reign at 22 years of age instead of 42. So Ahaziah ...became king of Judah. He was twenty-two years old when he came to the throne. 2 Chron.22:2 in the REB

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things ISA. 45:7 KJV. One would not expect a good god to create evil. The authors of the REB must think likewise. They replaced the word "evil" with the more acceptable "woe". I make the light, I create the darkness; author alike of wellbeing and woe.
ISA. 45:7 REB.

The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth the transgressors Prov. 26:10 KJV. It is unacceptable that God would reward transgressors. The revisers have dealt with this problem by excising the sentence and replacing it with an entirely different sentence which bears no resemblance to the same verse in the KJV; Like an archer who shoots at any passer-by is one who hires a fool and a drunkard Prov. 26:10 REB. We need to see that Original Greek Bible!

God spoke to Adam saying:
But of the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in that day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Gen.2:17 KJV Adam did eat the apple, but instead of dying on that day he carried on living until the age of 930 (Gen 5:3-5). God had not been truthful. The revisers rectified this problem by modifying God's threat to Adam, so that instead of Adam having to die on the same day that he ate the apple he would now only be doomed to die as with the rest of us. "...the day you eat from that, you are surely doomed to die". Gen 2:17 REB

In the KJV we are instructed to befriend mammon. Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness... Luke 16:9 KJV. We are then told that we cannot serve both God and mammon. ...ye cannot serve God and mammon Luke 16:13 LKV. So should we serve mammon as instructed then we cannot also serve God. The situation had to be corrected. The revisionists did this by altering Luke 16:9 in the REB to read, So I say to you, use your worldly wealth to win friends for yourselves, so that when money is a thing of the past you may be received into an eternal home. There is now no mention of mammon! The problem of serving mammon with the consequence of then being unable to serve God has been eliminated. The revisionists have, however, again erased one problem only to introduce another. Did they forget that encouragement to use our worldly wealth flies in the face of Jesus' advice to live a life of poverty?

In Matt. 6:31 we are told not to seek food, drink and clothing. The reason given in Matt. 6:32 is that "For after all these things do the Gentiles seek". The word Gentiles means all those who are not Jewish. Christians are therefore gentiles. It is clearly not ideal to have Christians disparaged by Jesus in the Christian Bible. The verse has been altered in the REB by substituting the word 'gentiles' with the word 'heathen'. 'Heathen' according to the Oxford Dictionary means people who are not believers in widely held religions i.e. they are neither Jew, Christian or Muslim. Problem solved!

And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" John 2:3-4 KJV. This is not the way to speak to one's mother especially

in view of the commandment to honour parents. The situation has been modified in the REB so that Jesus is less insulting to his mother, Mary. The wine gave out, so Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine left". He answered, "That is no concern of mine" John 2:3-4 REB.

Jesus instructs us to do good deeds openly. Like the lamp, you must shed light among your fellows, so that, when they see the good deed you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven Matt. 5:16 REB Not much later Jesus insists that we do our good deeds in secret. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven Matt 6:1 KJV.

So are we to do our good deeds openly or in secret? No one knows, but the revisers took care of the situation. They eliminated this contradiction by altering Jesus' advice so that instead of telling us to do our good deeds in secret we are now advised to practice our religion less openly. Be careful not to parade your religion before others; if you do, no reward awaits you with your Father in heaven Matt 6:1REB.

Jesus claims that it is not what a person eats that defiles them but what they say. ...Do ye not perceive that whatever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him. Because it entereth not into his heart but into the belly and goeth out into the draught purging all meats? Mark 7:18-19 KJV.

The followers of Jesus claim that these verses are proof that they may eat foods, such as pig, that are forbidden according to Mosaic (Jewish) law. This is, however, a weak argument because Jesus was adamant that the Mosaic law should be obeyed in every detail. It makes sense therefore for the Bible revisionists to insert the new sentence "By saying this he declared all foods clean" into the REB and attribute these words, to Jesus. Hence in the REB Mark 7:18-19 now reads:

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, and so goes out into the drain?" By saying this he declared all foods clean. Mark 7:19 REB



The words “By saying this he declared all foods clean” unambiguously give the followers of Jesus permission to disobey the dietary prohibitions found in the Mosaic law. Although one could argue that the new sentence further highlights the contradictory advice given by Jesus when he commanded us to obey the Mosaic law in every detail in Matt 5:17,18 Do not suppose I have come to abolish the law.....so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter not a dot, will disappear from the law...Anyone therefore who sets aside even the least of the law's demands, and teaches others to do the same, will have the lowest place in the kingdom of heaven. I tell you, unless you show yourselves far better than the scribes and Pharisees, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The revisionists have bolstered the right of Christians to disobey the Mosaic law but in the process have markedly diminished their chances of accessing the afterlife!

Ministers teach that faith in Jesus is all that is necessary in order to secure one's place in the hereafter. Jesus, however, stipulates that we also need to do good deeds. For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works Matt 16:27 KJV.

In other words, Jesus maintains that the way we live our lives is also important in determining whether we get to heaven. This complicates matters - many of us would rather not have our deeds taken into account! The revisionists resolve the situation in the REB by omitting to mention

that our due reward depends on good works. For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will give everyone his due reward Matt 16:27 REB.

The KJV asserts that because women are unclean nothing clean can come from a woman “...how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” Job 25:4 KJV and Who can bring a clean thing out of unclean? None Job 14:4 KJV. The latter verse (Job 14:4) has been excised from the main text of the REB to be relegated to a footnote. Is this because Jesus, himself, was born of a woman? ...thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen Ex 33:23 KJV. This verse has been sanitized and in the REB now reads.you will see my back, but my face must not be seen. Ex.33:23 REB

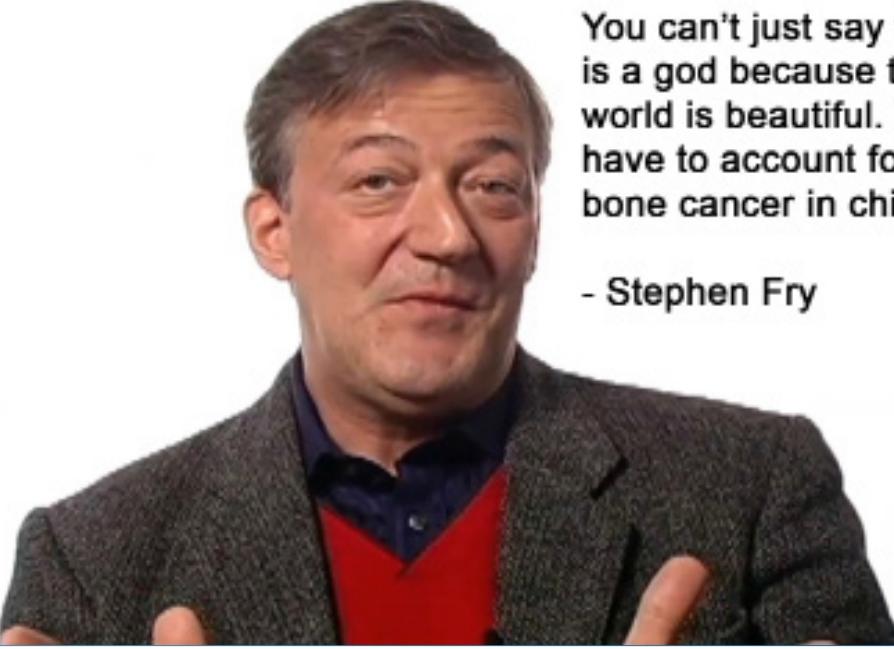
Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil against thee 2 Chron 18:22 KJV. It is problematic for a God to deliver evil. The authors of the REB toned down the situation so that God decrees disaster instead of evil. “You see, then, how the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours, because he has decreed disaster for you” 2 Chron. 18:22 REB.

In Num. 23:19 KJV we are told God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent:... In Christianity “the son of man” refers to Jesus. In other words we are told that God is not Jesus and that God does not repent. Yet in Ex.32:14 KJV we read that God does repent. And the lord repented of the

evil which he thought to do unto his people. The revisionists have two problems in one sentence. Firstly, does God repent or not? And secondly God claims that the reason he does not repent is because he is not the son of man. This of course means that Jesus who is the son of man does repent! Yet Christian theologians teach that Jesus is God, leaving us with the situation whereby God does not repent but Jesus does repent, while at the same time they are both the identical entity! The revisionists dealt with the problem with God repenting by eliminating the word “repent” and rewriting the sentence so that God no longer repents but now thinks better of the situation! So the Lord thought better of the evil with which he had threatened his people Ex. 32:14 REB.

The revisionists dealt with the second problem by deleting the words the son of man so that God no longer refers to Jesus in this verse. The verse now reads. God is not a mortal that he should lie, not a man that he should change his mind...Correlation with Jesus is no longer an issue!

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus orders us to write off debts owed to us. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors Matt 6:12 KJV. The revisers have done away with the likely situation whereby a debtor could accuse a Christian of being unchristian for not cancelling their debt. Matt. 6:12 in the REB now reads, Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us. As McKinsey says it is not objective scholarship but political expediency that is the dominant force behind Bible revisionism. Well said! More simply put, we're being duped!



You can't just say there
is a god because the
world is beautiful. You
have to account for
bone cancer in children.

- Stephen Fry

Interview with James Randi

by 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.

James Randi is the founder of the James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF). Formerly a professional stage magician, he began to use his considerable experience in illusions and deceptions when studying the techniques, strategies and tricks used by charlatans who pretend to have real supernatural powers.

An eighty-six year old secular humanist, atheist and skeptic, James Randi has investigated paranormal, occult, and supernatural claims for much of his career, including The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson and the television program Penn & Teller: Bullshit!

In 2012, documentary filmmakers Justin Weinstein and Tyler Measom began work on "An Honest Liar", a profile of the life of "The Amazing" Randi, as he embarks on a series of public crusades to expose America's beloved psychics, mentalists, preachers, and faith healers with religious fervor. Along the way, the film shows how easily our perceptions can be fooled by magicians, con artists – and even documentaries.

With many thanks to Think Inc, the film is touring Australia in December, with James Randi himself doing a Q&A – details are available at <http://thinkinc.org.au/JamesRandi>.

Kylie Sturgess: You've led a very fascinating life one that has resulted in a new documentary, called "An Honest Liar." For those unfamiliar with your career, when did you first start as a magician?

James Randi: I started as a liar as a very, very tiny child, I can tell you that! It's hard to say...it's hard to say. I was one of those child prodigy things, and I didn't go to, much of what we call in this country, "grade school," the lower grades of school, because I was falling asleep all the time.

I was ahead of the class, and there's no great distinction in that. It's just that the

educational system in Toronto, Canada where I was born and almost raised didn't have any limitations on whether or not I really had to go to school, because they figured I was getting a better education going to the museums and libraries that I inhabited as a small child.

I have a peculiar character, I'm different from most folks, and I rather treasure that fact, as well. Being a skeptic yourself, I guess you're looked upon that way by your peers as well?

Kylie Sturgess: Well, we get all sorts of fascinating people in skepticism! What led you to start an entire foundation for skeptics?

James Randi: I am a magician, you see, that's my profession. I have made my living up until a few years ago as a magician, and did very well at it and got a bit of a reputation. I traveled to Australia even, if you can imagine that! I found that I was being asked questions by my audiences after a show; I would hope they would be more or less impressed with what I did as an entertainer! But they would come to me with questions like, "This gentleman was on television the other day, and he did this, that and the other thing. But he said that that it was real, what he did."

It showed me that people were actually falling for fakers out there; people who were lying to them and telling them that they had supernatural powers. They were giving a lot of money to these people. That does happen of course - as you know, all over the world people were giving lots of money to people who'd say that they have psychic or magical or prophetic or whatever powers. They can tell the future, or they can heal the sick by just looking at them or touching them, or whatever.

I found that there was a major racket going on there, a swindle. I determined that when I retired and I did retire at the age of 60 I decided that it would be time for me to go into the business - of not debunking, I don't go do it as a debunker, I don't like that term. If I were a debunker that would mean that I'd go into it an investigation, that I would be putting it into an investigation with the idea, this is not true and I'm going to prove that it's not true.

I can't always prove that it's not true, but I challenge them and offer a \$1 million prize as well, to any of them who can prove that they are the real thing. You'd be surprised though - I'm looking out of my window here in Plantation, Florida in the USA, and the street is right out there. I don't see any line up of people who are trying to collect the \$1 million prize.

Wouldn't you think that's strange, because there are thousands of them all across the world who say they have these mystical powers. Where are they? They should be lined up outside with a number in their hand, like a lottery of some kind, just waiting to get in and show me what they've got! But there's no lineup outside!

Kylie Sturgess: What have been some highlights of your career?

James Randi: Every day! My life is all highlights, I think!

One of the most recent delights is the film, "An Honest Liar", which you mentioned, the film that you mentioned, that is to be shown in Australia along with my appearances. It's being met with critical and popular acclaim all across the world. I am very, very pleased to know that and to witness it, and have people come to me saying, "Maybe it has



changed my mind." That's always a good point when you see somebody saying, "Maybe I have changed my mind."

It doesn't happen every time, not by any means. But there are enough people out there who'd say that what I've shown them has changed their mind in some way, or made them think a little more about some aspect of their lives and how they run it. Maybe it saves them a lot of money in the long run, too.

Kylie Sturgess: That's always a good thing! What was your response when you were first approached by the producers, Tyler Measom and Justin Weinstein, to do the documentary?

James Randi: First of all, I said I might be interested. I'd have to know more. They came to visit me here in Plantation, Florida. They sat down and they made a very good case for their bona fides. After all, both had produced films that were very highly successful documentary films.

When I saw the product that they had turned out, I thought to myself, "These are the guys. These are the guys that I think I can trust with my life story," and I said, "So, let's go."

Kylie Sturgess: It's a fascinating movie with lots of footage from the past. Were you surprised even by your own history and what was uncovered for the film?

James Randi: In some cases yes, but for a long time now I've had a small collection of some stuff that was made. There were some 8mm black and white films made of me when I was only 18 years of age, doing silly things in the streets of Toronto as a magician. Oh yes, that film comes back to haunt you eventually!

As a matter of fact, with a thing like YouTube, YouTube is in some cases pretty scary, because I don't think I really do anything in my life that it doesn't appear on YouTube within 20 minutes and circulated around the world.

If you go to my site, that's the James Randi Educational Foundation site on YouTube, you'll find all kinds of wonderful old films that I could hardly believe that somebody still had. My history is there. If you live long enough, your history will be there too!

Kylie Sturgess: Me and my cat on YouTube! I'm not sure if that's as historically important as you performing on fantastic TV shows and helping people understand what's going on in the world of skepticism. It's a bit different...!

The documentary delves into your personal life, and of course there's many challenging that anyone would face if their own personal life was investigated. Did it make it challenging to go on with the documentary?

James Randi: Yeah, there was a moment there when the security of my partner Devi (José Alvarez) was in some question or such, and you'll see a confrontation there with the producers of the film. But that didn't last more than a day.

I had to just sleep on it, and the next day I called him and said, "Go right ahead, warts and all." You know the expression, "warts and all?" Oliver Cromwell I believe, was supposed to have said that. I didn't know, I'm not that old!

Kylie Sturgess: Finally, there's been lots of changes and developments and conflict in atheism and skepticism over the years. What do you hope for the future of organised skepticism?

James Randi: I would hope that it's going to continue to go the way that it has. The movement is very active within Australia, as I'm sure you know, and around the world. As I say, I've been to China and Japan and various other places like that. I find that it's really active all the way around the world. The mail I get every day - I think I mentioned via Skype and other means of course - is always very encouraging.

It's very encouraging that skepticism has found its place in the world, and it's having a very active effect I think, on most people. Particularly young people, it's very important to get people as we all know, and always have known, get them while they're young, and if you can talk some sense into them at that point and get them scared correctly, then they will start to think skeptically, they will think rationally, and they will be happier for it, I believe.

Kylie Sturgess: What do you think is an important overall message that you hope people will get from the documentary "An Honest Liar"?

James Randi: Before you accept it, if it sounds as if it's too good... remember that saying, "Maybe it's too good to be true." Think about it carefully, and look up research. You've got the Internet in front of you, what a wonderful weapon to have. I mean, this is something you can flourish anywhere at all that you can find an electric plug to fire up your computer with.

You can find information about things that at one time was very difficult to lay your hands on easily unless you went to a huge library and spent a lot of time clambering up and down ladders in the book stacks. Now it's so easily available to you but you've got to be careful at the same time some of that information is not information that you should be using, or that you could use, usefully.

It can be incorrect; there are people out there who are trying to take advantage of your ignorance and your lack of perception. Be very, very careful of that, you're living in a jungle. There are no tigers around that I know of, but Australia used to have Tasmanian Tigers, but you got rid of those somewhere along the line!

Kylie Sturgess: Do you think even skepticism and skeptics themselves should be questioned?

James Randi: Oh, yes, of course. We need to know their bona fides as well. You have to check on them... but, when you've got people like Dick Smith and Phil Adams as good friends in another country or around the other side of the world, you could be very, very proud that you know these folks. When I was asked if I would go to Australia to cross the country and drag that film along with me, I accepted with great enthusiasm.

Kylie Sturgess: For your own future, after this fantastic travel across Australia, what do you hope to do next?

James Randi: Oh, I've got an awful lot ahead of me. I'm just finishing up my 11th book. It's going to turn into two volumes, because it would probably be my swan song, as they say. But at the same time, I've got another one that's hanging on my consciousness here that I may do, as well. But I'll let you know.

Visit <http://thinkinc.org.au/JamesRandi> for further details about the tour.



New Sydney Archbishop

by Bob Irwin

Bob is a regular contributor to the magazine. He is a writer who also loves cartoons. We all love the cartoons and articles he provides for inclusion in The Australian Atheist.

Happy times

Pope Francis has appointed the Most Rev Anthony Fisher as the new Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. He will succeed Cardinal Pell who was appointed by Francis earlier in the year to a new senior finance role in the Vatican.

There was no hiding Bishop Fisher's joy at his promotion and he praised the "strong foundations" laid by his mentor Cardinal Pell. So important does Fisher believe his elevation to be that he asked "all Catholics and other people of good will to pray for me that I might be a good shepherd after the heart of Jesus Christ". It would not be unreasonable for him to imagine that "all Catholics" might pray for him, but to reason that all "other people of good will" would pray for him seems rather presumptuous. Perhaps he just got caught up in the excitement of it all.

Welcoming Bishop Fisher's appointment Prime Minister Tony Abbott called him a "decent, patriotic" person. Archbishop-elect Fisher said the Catholic Church in Australia is going through a period of public scrutiny and self-examination, and he hopes "it will emerge from this purified, humbler, more compassionate and spiritually regenerated".

Pope John Paul II appointed Fisher as an auxiliary bishop of Sydney in 2003. He served as Episcopal Vicar for Life and Health and chair of the Catholic Schools Board, and was co-ordinator of the 2008 World Youth Day week of extravagant Catholic celebrations in Sydney. From 2010 Bishop Fisher headed the Diocese of Parramatta.

Anthony Fisher worked as a lawyer in Sydney before entering the Dominicans in 1985. He undertook doctrinal studies at the University of Oxford and he has published extensively in moral theology

and bioethics. Fisher has worked extensively in the field of education and is Chairman of the Catholic Education Commission of New South Wales.

Not so happy times

Upon the announcement of his promotion, Bishop Fisher said "Victims of abuse and all young people must come first – no excuses, no cover-ups. The Church must do better in this area and I am committed to playing a leading role in regaining the confidence of the community and of our own members". This smacks of more of the same. Merely doing "better" is not enough for the victims of Catholic clerical sexual abuse. Regaining "confidence" is about the image of his religious institution – something which has provided a barrier to the perpetrators being brought to justice and for the victims to receive compensation, and apologies. Bishop Fisher's gestures over the failings of his Church's handling of clerical sexual abuse fall short of what is required of the Church in the wake of the scandals.

An incident in 2008, in particular, stands in stark contrast to his impressive Catholic credentials and his convivial sentiments as the Archbishop-elect. At the time of the 2008 World Youth Day week Bishop Fisher displayed a disrespectful attitude to victims of Catholic clerical sexual abuse of children, and their families and friends; indeed to all of society. Caught up in the eager anticipation of the event, Fisher, and Cardinal Pell, spoke in an insolent manner when they put their institution ahead of the human rights of victims. Given how the Catholic Church promotes itself as such a beacon of what's right and good, there can be no justification for their shameful conduct.

Just prior to Pope Benedict XVI's arrival in Sydney in 2008 Cardinal Pell had been defending his manner of handling a sexual-abuse case by a one of his priests.

Pell had admitted to misjudgement, making mistakes and mishandling the matter, in effect acknowledging his and his organisation's responsibilities; and failings. When asked how the impending World Youth Day might be affected by revelations he had misled a sex-abuse victim over the Church's knowledge of his alleged abuser's activities, Pell said he quietly prayed to God in the hope that "we'll be over this before the World Youth Day". It was easy to see where his priorities lay.

Around the same time, Bishop Fisher expressed the (morally indefensible) view that people should be "enjoying and delighting in the beauty and goodness" of World Youth Day youth, rather than "dwelling crankily, as a few people are doing, on old wounds". The "few people" he meant were the family members of victims who'd been sexually abused by clerics of Fisher's all-powerful Church; while the "old wounds" were the physical and psychological scars of the victims and their families and friends.

Cardinal Pell and Bishop Fisher spoke as though the victims' complaints were spoiling their party – their moment in the sun with their Holy Father.

If the Catholic Church was serious about their priests' sexual misdemeanours, Pell and Fisher should have been fired, or at least demoted. Pell when he blundered and for allowing Fisher to get away with showing such disrespect; and Fisher immediately upon his hurtful, and seemingly un-Christian, statement. Neither were held to account. Both have been promoted, Fisher twice. Cardinal Pell's move to Rome has distanced him from the scandal, and soon we will see if the attitude of the new Catholic Archbishop of Sydney is any different to that of his predecessor.



Sin from Within

by Bob Irwin

Lack of any real accountability is a major underlying cause of clerical sexual abuse of minors by representatives of religious bodies – in particular Catholic priests, the major perpetrators. The Catholic Church has seen itself embroiled in numerous cases of clerical sexual abuse, and the manner of handling many of them has been appalling – from the schools, youth institutions and churches involved, all the way up to senior levels in the Vatican.

Don't blame me!

Caring for Catholic youths' spirituality is the responsibility of Catholic priests; it's one of their most important duties for their Church and their God. The management or supervision of priests is, or should be, the responsibility of those more senior in the Catholic hierarchy: bishops, cardinals, ultimately the pope.

In a normal model of responsibility and accountability – those with certain responsibilities are held to account for their actions – it would follow that when priests dishonour their responsibilities, destroy trust or break the law by carrying out indecent and criminal acts, they and those in charge of them are called to account. But it's not necessarily so in the Catholic kingdom.

The Vatican's initial response to allegations of child sexual abuse by its clergy in various countries around the world was to block them out to the extent it could. The Catholic Church hierarchy tried to distance itself from what was its responsibility by hiding the problem (and often the offending priests) rather than tackling it openly and honestly. They knew that accountability would mean exposure of their priests' crimes, which would severely damage the reputation of their institution and themselves – it would all be just too uncomfortable and embarrassing.

In smashing the responsibility-accountability nexus, the Roman Church

worsened the pain and mental anguish inflicted on the many victims – who were made to feel uncomfortable and embarrassed, as if they were in the wrong.

No telling

The Church's failure to report early cases of sexual abuse of minors to law enforcement authorities meant that further abuses occurred – many of which would not have been inflicted on the victims had timely reporting occurred. This appalling attitude not only added to the numbers of victims but to the duration of their suffering; and in some cases their deaths.

See claims sovereign state-hood, and in some ways behaves like an independent, self-governing nation but does not adhere to sexual-abuse laws commensurate with the standing of a legitimate country.)

Canon law goes against 'legal equality', a basic principle of an open and honest judicial system whereby all people are subject to the same laws – for example, a paedophile is a paedophile whether they are a Catholic priest, or any other perpetrator in the wider community. To 'threaten', as the Vatican does, a potentially offending priest with the possibility of being "defrocked" (laicised) in "grievous cases" is in contravention of normal or acceptable legal practice.



When confronted by accusations of clerical sexual abuse over the past half-century or so, the wrongdoers were shielded behind the Church's canon law – its in-house alternative to civil law. When numerous cases of clerical sexual abuse of minors were being exposed, the Vatican's priority was for the allegedly guilty priests not to be subject to normal criminal laws but be given special and secretive 'legal' treatment by the Church's canon 'lawyers' appointed from the priesthood.

Canon law also extends to the priests' superiors and shelters them from the civil crime of withholding information, and perpetrators, from state law authorities, rather than promptly admitting to and accepting responsibility for their action, or non-action. (Paradoxically, the Holy

None other than Sydney's former Catholic Archbishop Cardinal Dr George Pell conceded it was "almost impossible" to dismiss a priest under canon law... the incomprehensible defence that a priest "cannot be dismissed for paedophilia, because he is a paedophile". While bishops are required to try to "cure" an offending priest: penance, prayer, and so on. Only if these fail might there be a dismissal. So what happened? Priests in many countries were moved around and their abuses continued, including in Australia. While Cardinal Pell's "Melbourne Response" (1996), touted by its initiator as the means to look after victims proved to be patently inadequate.

Right in the thick of the national Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Cardinal Pell was transferred to Rome as Pope Francis' chosen money man.

Pell's move left the responsibility of handling clerical sexual abuse matters – committed under his watch as Australia's most senior Catholic – to others. In the Vatican City State he will be virtually untouchable; unaccountable.

There should be no getting away from the fact that the offenders, being employees of the Church, meant that the chain of command was ultimately and fully responsible for the abuses and the secrecy. The Vatican might dispute that priests are ‘employees’, but this is just terminology – one way or the other they are operatives of or work for the Roman Catholic Church; and the Vatican is in charge. Who will ever tell how many fewer victims there would have been and much more appropriate the compensation to the victims, if those responsible had been held to account, right from the beginning.

It's in the culture

The Church's culture developed over centuries wherein their self-declared relationship with God enables the Church to cede responsibility to Him. So when an occasion arises, such as clerical sexual abuse, for which the Church should be out there accepting its rightful responsibility, and being held to public account for its errors, getting to the root cause of the problems, making early apologies, providing commensurate compensation, and conducting unqualified healing... its leaders do not have the experience, capacity or courage to do so. They took the line of least resistance – a common trait for people under more pressure than they can handle – and called on their God. Simply put, the Vatican does not have the ability to properly acknowledge and handle incidents of clerical sexual abuse.

The sexual-abuse scandal is like a cancer inside the Catholic Church. By not approaching the grave illness in an open, timely and mature manner, indeed by suppressing the symptoms, it did not address its responsibilities and the original disorder was not halted or removed in a timely or hygienic manner, and spread (as untreated or wrongly treated illnesses do) elsewhere through the body of the Church – the outcome being, inevitably, the treatment of symptoms of outbreaks much too late to allow proper healing.

Given the pre-eminent role it assumed in the world, the Catholic Church should never have got itself into so bad a shape that recuperation would be required... but, it's in the culture.

No truck with that

The Catholic Church in Australia has an appalling record in handling cases of clerical sexual abuse on children. Its attitudes and responses have been extensively reported. Obfuscation. Threats (veiled or real). Insensitivity. Reputation first. Humbug. Carelessness with the truth. Apologies (of a sort). Turnarounds (when forced to). Compensation (hard fought for and inadequate). Massive legal expenses. Suicides (victims and perpetrators).



Readers would no doubt be familiar with Cardinal Pell's use of a trucking company analogy when trying to explain his Church's attitude over compensation to victims – when on a video interview with the royal commission, while he sat in Rome.

It went something like this: Cardinal Pell insisted that the Australian Catholic Church should be treated like every other organisation in our society. On that basis, he said it should not be held responsible

for the crimes of its priests in the same way as the “ownership or leadership” of a trucking company is not responsible if one of its drivers picks up a hitchhiker and molests her. Pell's argument was inappropriate and illogical. It was cruel and insensitive. His Church is not like every other organisation (tax breaks, special privileges, based in fantasy, and so on), while the trucking company would be liable for any injury to a molested victim. In any case, the priests weren't picking up hitchhikers, but cunningly grooming vulnerable minors supposedly in their care.

All decent-thinking people (religious or not) saw through Pell's spurious position, while commentators described it as out-of-touch and yet another example of disrespect to the victims.

Is recovery possible?

With the sexual abuse scandal continuing to rock his Church worldwide, Pope Francis, in August 2014, outlined a “zero tolerance policy” on sexual abuse by his priests; despite one supposedly already being in place.

Four years ago, in strongly denying criticisms of any cover-up over sexual abuse, papal press secretary Father Federico Lombardi said Pope Benedict's response to the abuse crisis had been “effective” and that he had always followed a policy of “zero tolerance”. Cardinal Ratzinger's successor as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal William Levada, when asked in April 2010 about the new standard for bishops to meet when handling cases of clerical sexual abuse, said “the standard is not new but it's being applied more rigorously than in the past”.

Despite Francis' recent words of contrition, he seems out of touch with the reality of the problems his priests have caused. It is not a matter of the “weeping” and “forgiveness” he talks about – it is too late for these. But not too late for the “reparations” (he mentioned) and criminal justice. As well, it is inappropriate to deflect, as Francis has, a measure of accountability to God and

Jesus, or to involve Them in trying to deflect or camouflage the shame of it all. These are serious criminal offences committed on minors by his priests, not a namby-pamby fantasy issue.

Criminal procedure is the only way to obtain justice and resolution for the victims – and to properly and belatedly hold the Catholic hierarchy and its offending priests to account; for the sake of the victims, and for society. And in time for the Church itself, so it can make the internal changes necessary for the measure of credibility it so badly needs to restore.

Until Francis addresses the prevailing organisational culture of his behemoth, any change is likely to be superficial at best. The problem is, however, that to look into its own patterns of thinking, beliefs and behaviour, the Church would need to look into the very foundations of its internally-developed belief system and the layers of mystery and prescriptive, process-driven rules it has set down for its priests and its 1.3 billion followers. Based on past performance, the prospects of it even discussing effective organisational change look dim.

The Church never deserved the acclaim and reverence it received over the centuries – as an organisation it had never built the natural level of respect and approval for it to be adored and admired, excused and pandered to in the way it has been. Instead, to gain and maintain power, and adherents, it relied on fear, mystery, awe, wishful guesswork, vacuous promises and unsubstantiated claims about its chosen history and the supernatural. Its institutional model, built substantially on separation of accountability from responsibility, is showing signs of failure.



atheistcartoons.com

Self Helpless

by Dan Palmer

I want to try an experiment: Pick up a pen with your right hand; now transfer all of your negative thoughts and emotions into the pen. See how good that feels! Now throw the pen in the bin. You're cured!

Ok, so that didn't work, how about smashing a wooden board with your hand, or walking on fire, or glass – that will fix your deepest concerns, surely. Oh, and by the way, that will be \$500 – Thankyou very much!

Breaking boards with your bare hands, would only be slightly more impressive, if we did not know that snapping a soft wooden board, with the grain in your favour, is a task that is almost impossible to fail - for a functioning human being, without a degenerative bone disease that is. Similarly, walking on hot coals only seems impossible if you don't understand that wood is a poor conductor of heat, and all one needs to do to avoid a scalding, is continue walking.

These explanations seem somewhat less impressive than that which is commonly marketed with statements like 'overcoming impossibilities with the power of thought' and 'harness the power of the mind'. I mean, if all it takes to significantly improve your personal life is the exhibition of a few rubbishy tricks – one need only ask why the average 'carnie' has any personal problems at all?

This type of trickery is sold to the gullible, at a significant cost I might add, claiming to be a 'metaphor for life', and alleging to use the 'power of mind' to strengthen the soul. These are the kind of scams that started the million dollar careers of people like, Anthony Mohorovic – or Tony Robbins as he is better known (I guess his birth name didn't have that 'showbiz' ring to it).

Increase your confidence, health, personal and professional relationships, wealth, success and peace of mind – sounds like a good deal, doesn't it? Well having recently been sent this 'self help' clip promising this kind of frog shit, I decided to dig a little deeper.

Preying on the inherently credulous, ignorant and lazy people looking for a 'quick fix', comes with much more ease when you claim to be selling exactly what every person on Earth is looking for. Mix buzzwords - like confidence and success - with superstitious, pseudoscientific catch phrases and it seems to me that you are well on your way to a profitable future at the expense of the unassuming citizens you will exploit.

The video clip I was sent was, in fact, very convincing - if of course, the use of important sounding, scientific terms fashioned in the form of an incoherent sentence is appealing to you.

These types of grandiose tactics are readily used in almost every description of the 'con-job' that comes to mind – and is of course the lifeblood of the self-help industry.

After watching a few of these Robbins clips I couldn't help but draw comparisons between his talks and those of the evangelical preacher. Lively, energetic and engaging – the perfect mask for poor content.

When taking time to decipher his utterances, they expose themselves as being little more than logical fallacies iced with layers of faecal matter. So, this is why I come to you today – I sniff a business opportunity. We now have the tools we need to make ourselves rich, just like Tony did. Talking to large groups of vulnerable people in a vague and confusing way – how hard can it be?

First we need some moderately interesting anecdotes – that should engage the crowd and allow us to build a friendly rapport. Our stories should be funny, but should also highlight our own success; we don't want them to forget how good we are.

We almost certainly need words that most people in attendance wont know the meaning of - but sound intellectual. On top of this we will need some buzzwords and catchphrases to continually scatter throughout our talk – they should be annoying and slightly confusing phrases like 'think the impossible, possible'; this should give them enough unanswered questions to persuade them to come back for more.

At this point our very first bullshit production is only missing two things. One, a challenge of some sort; fuck it, lets do firewalking – it worked for everyone else. And two, we need to write an mediocre book, full of slogans and pseudoscientific woo-woo to help give us false credibility, and to give us something to sell after the show(strikethrough 'show') lecture – I mean, lets not miss an opportunity.

Oh, I almost forgot, we really should claim some kind of religious or spiritual alliance – this will help to shut down arguments brought to us by actual intellectuals. After all, our hero, Tony Robbins said that 'the complexity of life is evidence of an intelligent designer' – obviously, we know that the complexity of life is only evidence that life is complex – not that sky daddy made us - but they don't need to know that, this should allow an easy escape from any critical questioner.

I will warn you at this point that it is important not to lose sight of why we are here – to help people (yeah right!) fame and money.



I can't have you getting emotionally tied up with the audience members – some of these people have genuine problems, and I don't want you stressing out too much – that will do our image no good at all.

Come to think of it, there is actually much more to this 'self help' world than I thought – maybe it will just be easier not to lie to them? Why don't we just tell them what we think will change their life?

We could simply tell people to listen to everything they are being told with

a critical mind, to question ideas and remember to view so-called 'experts' or people with power as the mere mammals that they are, and not the unquestionable authorities we make them out to be.

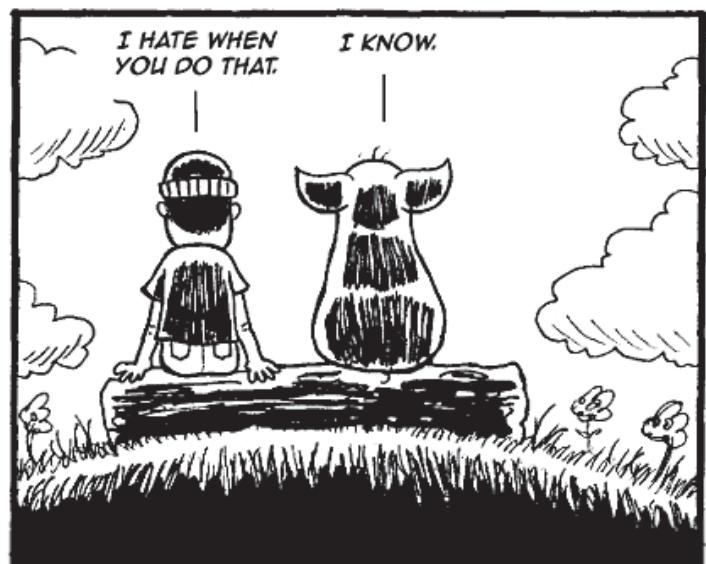
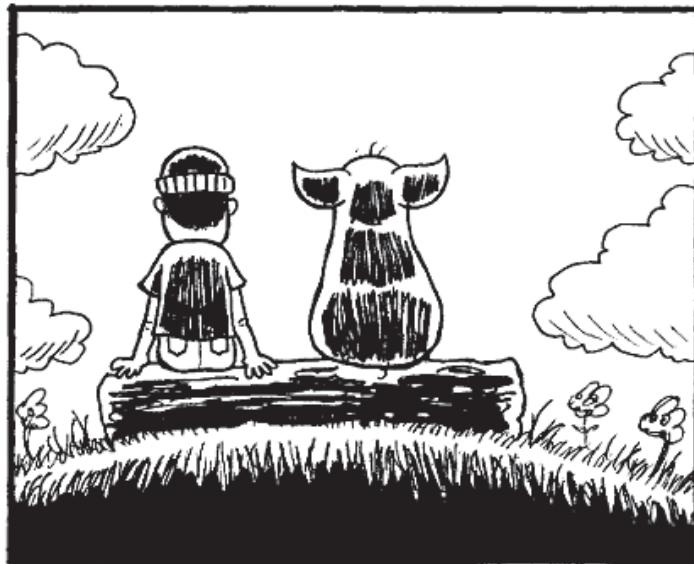
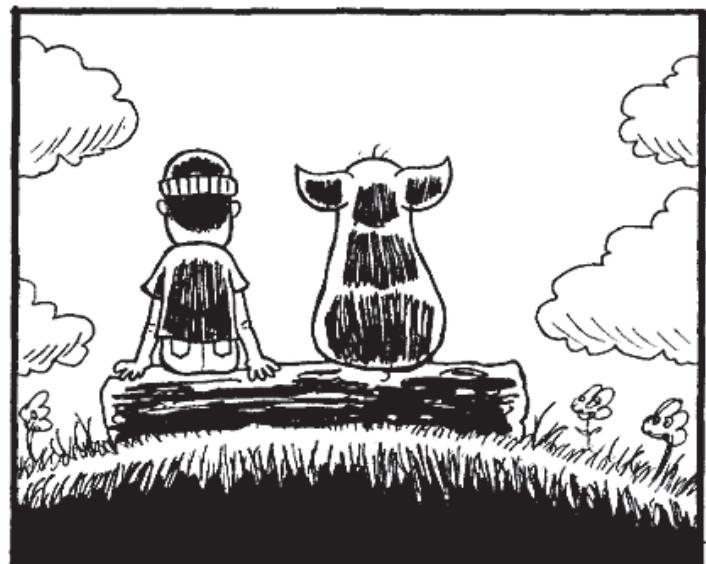
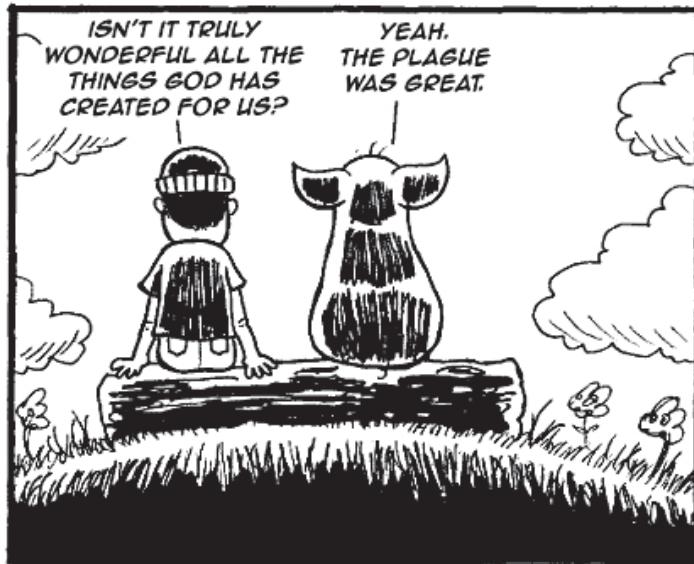
It would be important to show that how one thinks is infinitely more important than what one thinks. We could teach people to value truth and reason over dogma and superstition, and show how this will enrich their lives, both practically and emotionally. We could demonstrate the wonder and awe of what actually

exists, and open their eyes to truth that they never even knew was there.

They should be told that the meaning that one gives their life is subjective, and as a result we should expose ourselves to a range of experiences to see what truly enriches us as individuals.

Surely this would be a better place to start than an expensive solution administered in tablet form – would it not? Maybe not for our bank accounts anyway.

THEATHEISTPIG.COM



"We keep on being told that religion, whatever its imperfections, at least instills morality. On every side, there is conclusive evidence that the contrary is the case and that faith causes people to be more mean, more selfish, and perhaps above all, more stupid."
- Christopher Hitchens

The Illogical Being

by B F Moloney

B F Moloney grew up in Sydney, travelled a bit, did a bit of uni and now in his middle age is living a productive life in North West Tasmania. Like many others his atheism comes straight out of Catholicism. He writes a lot on Christian theology as well as other fictions. His works can be found as eBooks on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and other respectable eBook retailers.

He is the illogical being who has created all things that have become or are to be made logical in the world, and He has created all things necessary for this world including the illogical non act of not creating Himself. It is not necessary that He be made logical of by those whom He has created, because, having not created Himself, He is a being who illogically has always been, and who remains the necessary mystery that binds all created things together.

The more things change the more He stays the same. Everything that He has created changes because each and everything is a cause of everything else; be it linearly or by another means random and chaotic. He is the first cause because He is the same as He was, as He is, as He will be. If His creations look they will see that everything which exists has a prior cause intermediate to previous causes and so forth back in time and dimension until there is the ultimate cause, Him, the effect of all causes, who is the first premise

of there being no change until the effect of that cause is the actual change He has progressed to the very present.

He has made it so that what exists now might remain existential in the future, or is existing and will go, or has never existed, because that which could or not possibly exist justifies Him in case there is doubt as to whether He really does exist. But remember, if all things never existed there would be nothing existing now, if it were not for Him who, having always existed, makes it necessary that what He makes necessary comes from Him as He is absolutely necessary in Himself, whose necessity He does not owe to anything else, but which makes Him the cause of the necessity of all things in this world.

Imagine that something gets better when it approaches the thing that is perfectly good, the approach being without fear and in total trust of that good. He has made the world flawed so that it may think itself fundamentally good the closer it gets

to Him. He is the truest, the greatest, the best, the noblest there is, making Him the greatest of all beings, and because He is such that there is perfection in waiting for all, for He has filled them with the power of repentance, and in Him they will trust.

If He knows everything it is because all knowledge must have a source. And knowledge is useless unless it has a purpose. Knowledge of Him and His designs is the purpose He has put imagined in the minds of all whom He has designated to be His teachers to all creatures in need of His protection, sustenance and love. And what is imagined in minds can only be realised through language. And when language is shared throughout the world His knowledge is thus made material to be taught by teachers who imagine Him, they who are a little closer, for they will inspire ordinary hearts and minds into imagining that He is the divine being from whom they came, in His image, and who, when they die, will return to Him in imaginary heaven!

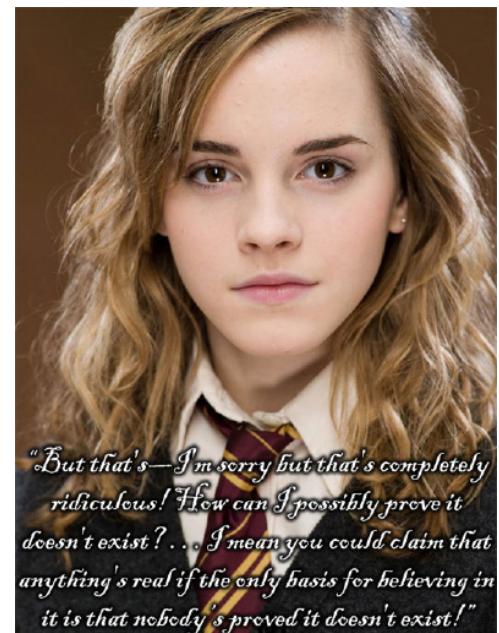


“With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.”

- Steven Weinberg



<https://www.facebook.com/WomenWithoutReligion>
<https://twitter.com/WomenwithoutRgn>



If Jesus is God

by Mike Meyerson

Richard Dawkins describes God as follows: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully".

Dawkins's description of "God" the character is accurate. The Bible attests to a God who is anything but compassionate, merciful, just, omniscient, loving and omnipotent. What follows is a list of several of God's less desirable character traits that have been included in C.Dennis McKinsey's book, The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy.

God created evil. (Isa. 45:7). He deceived and told people to lie (1 Sam 16:2). He lied himself (See Gen 2:17and Gen 5:5). He rewarded liars. He rewarded the fool and the transgressor (Prov. 26:10). He ordered men to become drunk (Jer. 25:27). God is not omnipotent (Judges 1:19) He caused indecency (Isa 20:4). He spread dung on people's faces (Mal 2:3). He broke promises (Num 14:34). He caused adultery (2Sam 12:11-12). He ordered the taking of a harlot (Hosea 1:2 and 3:1-2). He killed people (Num. 16:35, Deut. 32:39, 1Sam. 5:6, Psalms 135:10). He ordered the killing of people (Num. 25:17, Ezek. 9:6). He orders stealing (Ezek 39:10). He has a temper (Ps. 21:9) and (Jer. 44:6). He is often jealous (Deut. 13:17, Judges 3:8, Nahum 1:2). God claimed that wrath kills the foolish man and envy kills the silly one (Job 5:2). He practised injustice Ex. 12:29, Num. 14:18, Matt.13:12). He played favourites (Deut. 7:6, Rom. 9:13, Matt. 15:24). He sanctioned slavery (Deut. 15:17, Joel 3:8, 1Tim. 6:1-2 and Titus 2:9-10). He punished those who are deformed (Lev. 21:16-23). He punished the illegitimate (Deut. 23:2). He punished many for the acts of one. He punished children for their fathers' sins (Num.

14:18, Exod. 12:29, Deut. 23:2). He supported human sacrifice (Ezek. 22:26, Ex. 22:29-30). He ordered cannibalism (Jer. 19:9, Ezek. 5:10, Lev. 26:29, John 6:53-54). He demanded virgins as part of war plunder (Num 31:31-36). He ordered gambling (Joshua 14:2, Num. 26:52 and 55-56) He ordered horses to be hamstrung (Joshua 11:6). He sanctioned the violation of the enemy's women (Deut. 21:10-14). He sanctioned the beating of slaves (Exod 21:20-21) He required a woman to marry her rapist and never divorce (Deut. 22:28-29). He ordered the cooking of food with human faeces (Ezek. 4:12). He excused the sins of prostitutes and adulterers (Hos.4:14). He excused a murderer and promised him protection (Gen. 4:8-15). He broke up families (Exod. 21:4). He killed and ordered killing (Ezek. 9:6, 1 Sam. 6:19, Gen. 38:9-10).

It is clear from the above list that God displays disdain for his own commandments. Besides killing and ordering the killing of others, God condones adultery, stealing and bearing false witness.

The God of the Bible clearly has little in common with the God portrayed by ministers of religion. It is therefore unsurprising that ministers of Christianity attempt to distance themselves from the God of the Old Testament. This is well illustrated by an article published in *The Skeptic*, June 2009 (Australian Edition). The author, David Goss, described God as "originally a tribal god, located in a physical place who demanded obedience, rituals and sacrifices, who helped his tribe and harmed their enemies, and who showed little or no compassion". He illustrated his description of this God by the limerick.

There was an old man with a beard
Who said: I am to be feared
And just call me God
And love me you sod
And man did just that, which was weird.

Goss described this God as being the harsh and jealous tribal God of the Jews. Given the scriptural depiction of the character of God who could dispute Dawkins's or Goss's view of God?

But who is this God? Is this God only the God of the Jews? No, because if Christians believe in the God who made the universe as described in Genesis, then it is this God of the Old Testament in whom they believe. The God who made the universe is the same God who instructed Adam not to eat the apple. Adam, as we all know, ate the apple. This same God, according to the Christian faith, then declared all future human beings to be sinners from birth as punishment for Adam's disobedience. This required this same God to send his son to earth to save believers from the sin they incurred on account of Adam's disobedience. The God described in the Old Testament by Dawkins, and in the limerick provided by Goss is therefore not only the God of the Jews, but also the God of the Christians.

So how does Jesus fit in? The answer according to ministers of Christianity is given in John 1:1, 2 and 3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything that was made". Also "He was in the world and the world was made by him [Jesus]. (John 1:10). Ministers of Christianity frequently quote these verses as proof that Jesus was with God, and is God and was God from the beginning. The "Word" is Jesus. If this is true, and Jesus is also God, as the ministers assure us, then it is also true that Jesus is the God described in Genesis as having created the world. Jesus is therefore the God of the Old Testament. He is also the God described by Goss as the "harsh and jealous God of the limerick" and he must also be the God depicted by Dawkins.





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the groundbreaking video magazine hosted by BBC's *The Infinite Monkey Cage*'s Robin Ince



The Incomplete Map of the Cosmic Genome is a ground breaking science video magazine and it's coming to Australia for a special edition very soon.

When Cosmic Genome was announced back in July of 2013 co-creator Robin Ince declared that he was 'often lucky enough to be the biggest idiot in the room'. So together with Trent Burton, they came up with an idea to share the excitement of their collective confusion.

Cosmic Genome was conceived as a small, documentary but has mutated into a massive online video archive and magazine featuring tens of hours of exclusive interviews, performances and more with the world's leading scientists and some of the most well known scientifically curious people around. Highlights are plentiful and range from astronaut Commander Chris Hadfield and anatomist Professor Alice Roberts to Stephen Fry and Ross Noble plus well over a hundred more. There's even a Robin Ince and Brian Cox puppet show for younger viewers!

And freed from the constraints of TV, Robin and Trent were free to take Cosmic Genome wherever they wanted. Trent says, "We wanted to give these great minds a chance to be able to just talk about their passion, their life and their work without having to squeeze it into a couple of minutes before the ad break. Just seeing the light in Brian's (Cox) eyes when you ask him to just talk to us about the Standard Model of Particle Physics and your answer to his question of, 'How long have I got' is 'As long as you want'. That's what we want to convey because their curiosity is contagious".

Robin adds that they want to show that, 'understanding is not everything. The journey is a joy. Even it leads to discombobulation. Some see the arts as a place for the imaginative and science as a place for those who like counting things, but as has been observed many times before, great advances in science require great imagination too'. Cosmic Genome caters for everyone from PhD grads to someone who may not have picked up a science book since high school. There's

high level genetics through to a series called Science School explaining the basics, like why stuff floats. And it's all presented by the best and brightest in the world.

Whilst subscriptions to Cosmic Genome are already available worldwide, most of the filming has taken place in the UK. But now Trunkman Productions, who were founded by Trent in Western Australia back in 2001, himself from Fremantle, are headed to Australia to film for an upcoming special Australian edition. It's set to include some of the most respected names in Australian science such as Nobel Laureates Professors Peter Doherty and Barry Marshall and former Australians of the year Fiona Wood and Fiona Stanley as well science communicators such as Adam Spencer. Filming will be taking place throughout October with the Australian edition due later in the year.

Find out more about The Incomplete Map of the Cosmic Genome, watch some free sample films or subscribe to the archive at cosmicgenome.com



Contrasts

by **Omnitheon (Jonathan Carter)**

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

Australia is a theocratic society. So too is the United States. But the US is a democratic theocracy whereas we are a theocratic democracy. One is a substantive theocracy, its fascism held in check by a democratic state. The other is a substantive democracy with a subordinate fascist inheritance: Australia.

In one place, voting is optional, faith compulsory, in fact, if not in principle. In the other, voting is compulsory, faith as it should be optional on principle. To that extent Australia is the United States' superior and will remain so. By the self-same token we have the historical potential to become a fully secular society. The United States does not. That is also at present the general historical trend, in long and short terms alike.

In both cases, just one God is thought to rule: the One True God of Abraham. A monopoly of thought, of imagination—whether actual or ideal—governs both societies. In one case that governance is absolute, in the other only relative. Neither can boast nor yet even dream of a Democracy of Supernaturals.

To live in a society where faith is a condition of leadership, as in the States, is to live in a society whose parochial Semitic ideals secure conceptual mediocrity in the public sphere. Into this vacuum, carefully cultivated, step the minions of faith. To live in a society where faith is held preferable is to live in a society whose parochial Semitic ideals permit conceptual mediocrity in the public sphere. And so it is here in Australia.

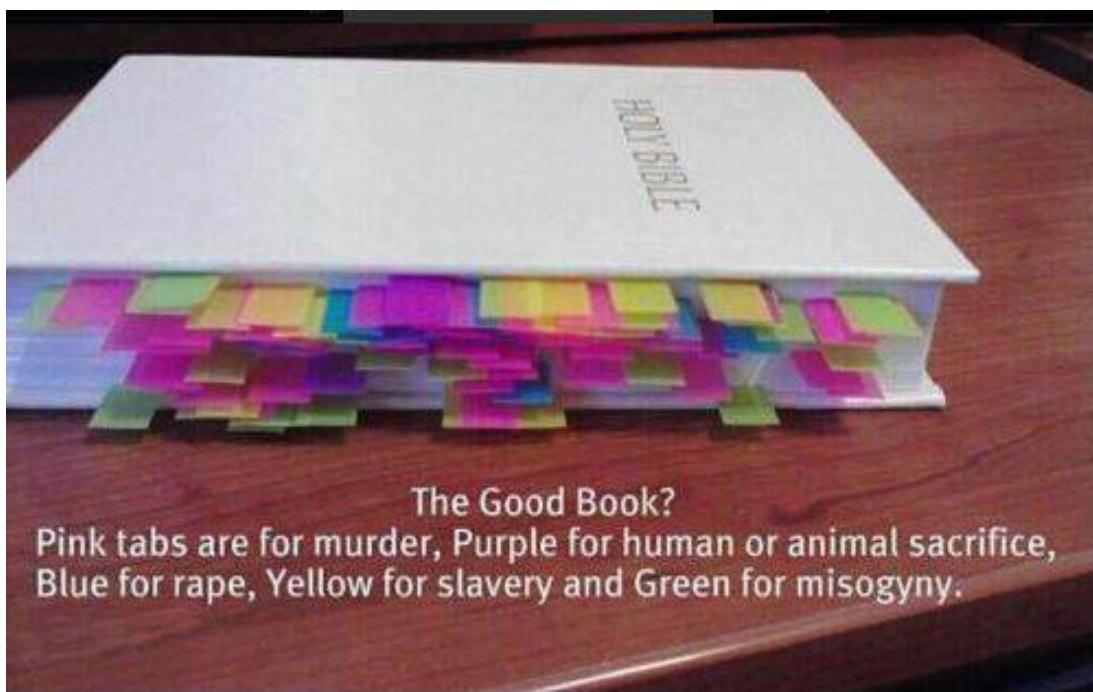
To live in a society which stamps God on its very coin—'In God We Trust'—is to live in a society where no one else and nothing else can be trusted: not foreigners, not those of other faiths, not even yourself or one another. Which at least is true and fair in such a place: an equality of distrust. It also implies that such a society's God is truly Mammon. Theirs is the Coin of God. Bite it! Since even that cannot be trusted: only a figment of human imagination, human art.

To live in a society whose courts are badged with God, a society in which truth is not pledged on one's life—the only legitimate avowal to be made for truth—is to live in

a society that cannot take life itself as its ultimate end: all life, human or otherwise. For people like that—if people they are: they call themselves spirits or souls—life including human life is not an end but only a means: a means to immortal ends, a means to personal, individual eternity. Finite life—the smallest or greatest possible price—is bargained for a non-existent infinity. This is Pascal's Wager: final resort and mercenary resort of ultimate spiritual bankruptcy.

To live in a society whose governing bodies open with a prayer to God is to live in a society with no greater principles or precepts than a figure of speech: a bankrupt society, however rich and strange. For an embarrassment of riches, however accumulated, rightly entails a human fear of the consequences.

*To live without God, to live without Gods, is to
live with one another here in life,
here in life with neither fear nor favour.*



The Good Book?

**Pink tabs are for murder, Purple for human or animal sacrifice,
Blue for rape, Yellow for slavery and Green for misogyny.**

JESUS IS REAL



SO IS GODZILLA



Reflections

by Hannah Bertrand

Hannah is currently an undergraduate English student at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio where she is the Vice President of the club crew team. She is originally from Northampton, Massachusetts, where she attended public school and developed her religious views- or lack thereof.

I was raised Catholic. I attended CCD, went to mass after and, as a child, I actually found mass fascinating! There was simply so much to see and the homilies seemed more like fun stories than instructions for what ‘good people’ should and shouldn’t do. The older I got, the more I began to question my religion, which is something my parents have always allowed and encouraged. I suppose my biggest problem came when I had questions for which there seemed to be no logical explanation. In answer to these questions, I was told by my grandfather, “That’s where faith comes in. Faith is believing in something greater than oneself, without needing physical evidence; you just believe.” But here I am, and here I don’t believe. This I believe: we live, we die, and we better make the most of the living part because no one actually knows what happens next.

After my original exploration into my religion, I developed some hardened issues that arose specifically when I began to learn about other religions. One of my friends that was Jewish asked me why ‘we’ believe in Jesus when she was taught that the messiah had not come yet, to which I had no answer. I told her that I supposed that we read stories carried down from the people that knew him and saw his deeds and that those accounts were enough to support him as the messiah. This question

never left my mind, I was nine years old. While studying world religions, I am constantly reminded of my own question that I had back in my still religious years: “How can we know that one religion is ‘right’, when each religion has people who believe just as adamantly as someone in another religion.

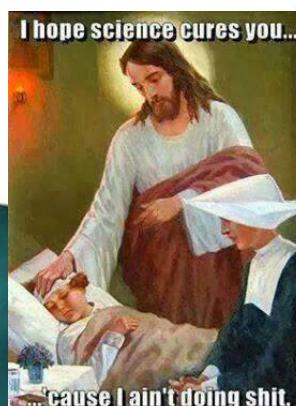
How can one possibly say that MY religion is right, and YOURS is wrong.” As an example, we treat Greek/Roman mythology as fun stories and assume that their entire religions were false, but to them, this was their reality and they all strongly believed in the gods/goddesses. Despite these views of ‘other’ religions as entirely false, it is undeniable that those religions were practiced just as adamantly as any major world religion today, if not more so! It seems easier to have everyone be wrong. Each religion in the world has supporters who live and die following that religion fervently, how can you tell someone that their entire life’s beliefs are simply wrong and they’re probably going to hell? This concept I simply cannot stomach.

Through further exploration, I have come to accept that the New Testament was, first of all, not written by the people who were there with Jesus during these ‘miracles’ etc. and secondly, that the entire Bible has been translated and

changed many times over to fit different personal and political agendas. Because of these two things, I find it simply illogical to follow the teachings of an unreliable book. All this while leaving aside the countless bloodshed surrounding religion. Furthermore, I find that religions ‘of the book’, Christianity especially, is given a bad name by the literalists like Ken Ham, who force their views onto others. The fact that some people think that the entire world is only a few thousand years old where there are years worth of scientific study to prove otherwise. I accept the view of the Bible as metaphorical reading because I understand that many people use religion as support through life, but where does the metaphor begin and end?

It seems to me that there are simply more questions than answers, which has lead me to the beliefs I have today. I also somehow find it comforting that this is the only life we have; it makes living in the moment and enjoying life seem more important than following certain rules or simply not enjoying life at the expense of working too hard to achieve something beyond. I very much enjoy learning about each religion, and respect the individual’s right to believe whatever they would like to believe, it is just simply not for me. This I believe: live each day to the fullest because you never know when it will be your last.

RELIGION



The available proof for the existence of Jesus isn't enough to convince the Dept of Transport to give him a driving licence. Why is it enough proof of his divinity for you to base your entire life on?



One God Too Many

by Sten Bjerking

Sten is a regular on the AFA Forums. He has written a book on the christian god which we have been serialising in the magazine. This is the fifth installment.

*It seems to me that all man's Gods. (or Ghouls)
Are all to Serious about our Souls.*

*They have no sense of Humour, and no Smiles
E'er agitate their Puritanic Jowls.*

Souls

Almost all Christians today think of the soul as a living entity that survives the physical death of the body. Some go a step further and believe that the soul may sometimes be visible as a ghost that resembles the deceased's physical body. This is a difficult concept for people with some scientific knowledge, to accept.

Most Christians believe that the soul is created by God. The origin of souls has always given theologians some trouble. They believe God must make them, but if so, God is making something that is not perfect as the soul is tainted with original sin. I have read some extremely lengthy theological explanations about this anomaly.

Just when the newly created souls are implanted has been the subject of a good deal of debate. A large percentage believe that the time of conception is the instant the soul is attached but many think some

time later. The majority do believe that it happens when the baby is still inside the mother, which leads us to a question that is, or should be, troubling for the faithful, "What is the fate of the souls of the unborn babies, foetuses, or embryos that have died without the cleansing ritual of baptism?"

In the past, the Catholic Church has taught that the sin burdened infant souls went to a place called Limbo where these souls enjoyed peace and happiness, but not the bliss of Heaven. This was a useful device for giving comfort to bereaved parents. Many other Christian churches don't address this issue.

Limbo has recently been abandoned by the Catholics so the fate of unsaved Catholic infant souls is once again uncertain. Vague opinions from the Vatican have emerged stating that perhaps these souls will find their way into Heaven after all, although this clearly contradicts the central Christian belief that salvation can only be obtained through baptism and accepting Jesus Christ as the saviour.

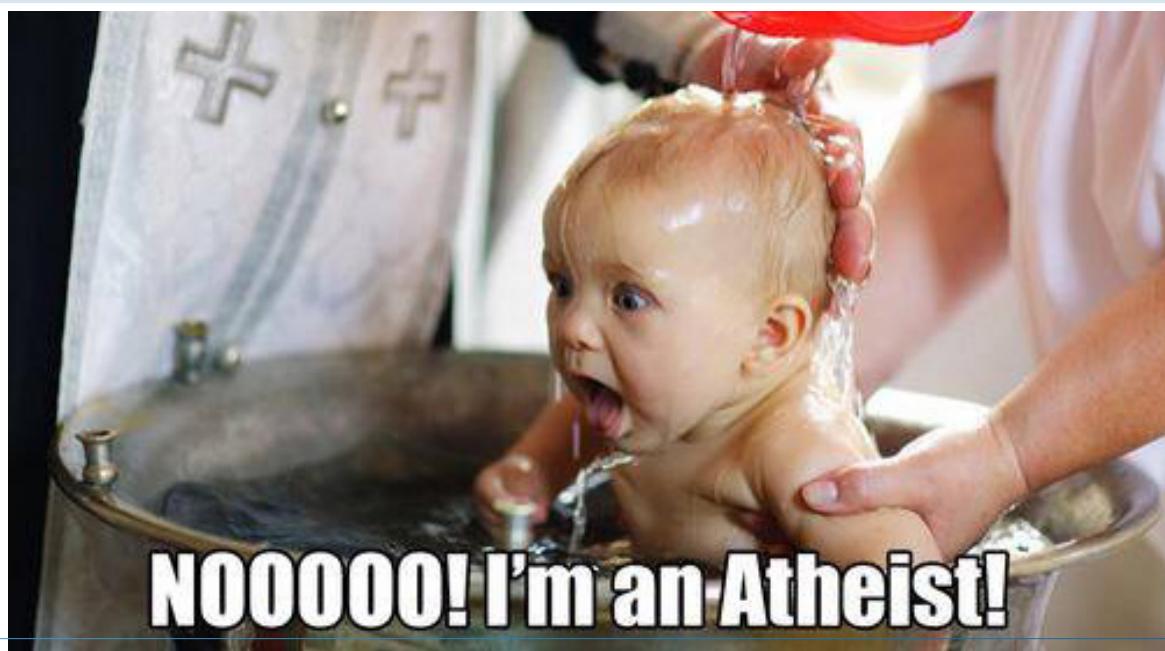
Now we come to the thorny question of "when was the first soul?". Fundamentalist

Christians have no problem with this, answering immediately that Adam got the first one followed quickly by Eve. More progressive Christians however, who have the intellectual integrity to accept that evolution is proven, try to fit evolution into their belief structure as the way God made animals and then man. With this concession other questions arise that demand answers.

If the possession of a soul is the thing that distinguishes humans from animals, as Christians believe, then as both evolved from a common source, at some point along the path of development God must have decided, "OK this man looks enough like me now so he gets a soul".

We can see problems with this idea though. It would have been very difficult for this first soul equipped couple to relate to their soulless families and friends and their children would have to find partners from people without souls also.

If a belief is very old and is seen as remaining unchanged over many years, its legitimacy seems to be enhanced regardless of how silly the belief is.



The AFA Meets the Public

by Kylie Sturgess

On July 26 and 27, the Australian Fair for Freedom of Belief and Religion was held in the lower floors of the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart.

The venue featured a number of different faiths and beliefs, including Kabbalah, First Church of Christ Scientist, Anglicans, Pagans, The Australian Religious Response to Climate Change and even a laughing yoga practitioner, called Loads of Laughter. The event wasn't only full of laughter and congeniality, it was full of curiosity, debates and buzzing activity for two full days, something I personally didn't expect would be so easy to achieve.

What were the atheists doing there? Apart from the fact that the founder of MONA, David Walsh, is an atheist, the venue was keen to allow a wide range of representatives - no matter what their belief, or lack thereof. It made for a very eclectic and interesting mixture of people, almost as if we too were an exhibition on display - a display that held meditation sessions, handed out flyers and the occasional complimentary chocolate.

As well as networking and talking to interested visitors, the Atheist Foundation of Australia was raising the profile of atheism, discussing similarities and differences with other groups and presenting a lecture on atheism. The AFA ran an information stall, with our new banner, new flyers and (fairly) new President Michael Boyd, who eagerly debated and discussed with the attendees. We had one persistent visitor from another Christian fundamentalist stall, who was initially shocked that the AFA were pro-evolution in schools. They eventually enlisted more and more of their family members to come over and debate more and more topics as the weekend went on, which was great practice for talking with the faithful.

As a part of a series of lectures, AFA member, Raphael Lataster represented

the AFA on stage, with a talk entitled "Atheists – What, Why, Who Cares?" Raphael is the author of "There Was No Jesus, There Is No God", a scholarly examination of the scientific, historical, and philosophical evidence and arguments for monotheism. He is a professionally secular PhD researcher and teacher at the University of Sydney (Studies in Religion) and even the more vocally faithful left the lecture with thoughtful expressions.

One of the issues that came up often with visitors to the stall was atheists and their relationships with theists. "My partner is a Christian/ considers themselves Pagan/ are right over there with the Buddhists - but I'm an atheist myself," which is not too unusual a finding. A 2014 Pew Research survey found that "even among people who specifically identify themselves as atheists or agnostics, two-thirds (67%) said it wouldn't matter if a family member married a born-again Christian". Raising the profile of a community of atheists like the AFA helps people to network and demystify what an atheist in the family meant.

I interviewed as many stallholders as I could, about their faith and whether they were happy with how they were portrayed in popular culture. Although there were often great differences of opinion on some topics, I found no anger or dismay about the presence of atheists at the event. There was interest, a great deal of "we think the same way too about X!" and this attitude was extended towards other stallholders as well.

The one slight exception might have been the Scientologists, who probably had the most well known profile in popular culture out of all the groups, usually on shows like South Park.

Sadly, they were the one group that I did not manage to get an interview with. I took my usual approach (the one that I use with parapsychologists, psychics, alternative medicine practitioners and

anyone who is involved in security) and bounced cheerfully over to their stall, taking our speaker Raphael with me, to have a great discussion about their E-Meter.

We attended a lecture by the Pagans and I went on a meditation workshop with one of the spiritualists, outside MONA's gothic "chapel", (an installation by Belgian artist Wim Delvoye, who also created the museum's poop machine, Cloaca).

While the TV news broadcast on Hobart's ABC only caught a glimpse of my Atheist Bus Poster shirt, we spoke to hundreds of people over two days. Telling people about the forum boards, social networking, atheist events and meet-ups was a great consolation to those who thought there was little on offer for the faithless in Australia.

Many thanks to Michael Boyd, Raphael Lataster, members of the AFA who were able to attend and help, and Catherine Donaldson for her design work.



Social Media

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

Forums

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

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

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

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

It is indeed a community of atheists, supporting and encouraging one another. The latest news is dissected and discussed. Religious websites and other illogical topics are reviewed, analysed and

dissected. Theists are welcome to discuss their own beliefs through rational and reasoned debate.

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

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

Facebook

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

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

Forum Focus

One of the popular threads on the Forums is “What pops into your head when talking to a theist”. Members are giving examples of things they hear theists say and what their own brain interprets that as. Here are some of my favourites from that thread. Let me know if you have some

Theist says: “How can you be moral without god?”

I hear: “I can’t be trusted without close supervision.”

Theist says: “Evolution is just a theory.”
I hear: “I am scientifically illiterate.”

Theist says: “I believe in Jesus/God/Allah/Whatever.”

I hear: “I am an adult but I still have an imaginary friend”

Theist Says: “It was a miracle”

I Hear: “I don’t have an understanding of probability”

Theist Says: “I (or someone else) survived because that was God’s will”

I Hear: “God killed everyone else because I’m special”

Theist says: “But if you are an atheist, where do you get your morals from?”

I hear: “If I didn’t believe in a sky fairy I would rape and pillage to my hearts content”

Theist says: “The old testament doesn’t count. God made a new covenant through Jesus”

I hear: “I haven’t actually read the bible”

The AFA Facebook site is very active. At the moment we are reaching thousands through Facebook. All members are encouraged to like and share the interesting posts and threads on the AFA Facebook site. Wolty is working hard to keep the site active and needs assistance from everyone.

Twitter

The AFA maintains a Twitter feed through the handle @atheistaus

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

Youtube

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

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

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





"Enter Ruinland" is the searing dark chronicle of human and synthetic life following a future nuclear apocalypse. An artificial intelligence will sentence to death all humans incapable of authentic emotion. Within a military bunker are 70 survivors who face execution by a fabricated being. A soldier with a questionable past must come to terms with a horrible truth. One woman's lustful choice may have fatal consequences. This is a story about the mystery of life, the finality of death, and the struggle to survive in a ruined world.

Link to free Goodreads ebook edition: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23001205-enter-ruinland>

The Other F Word

by Wildeaboutoscars

He's a moustachioed master of elongated fruit,
And his knowledge of gravity is none too astute,
But there's a certain word this Kiwi export frequently employs,
And in conversation with saner minds it frequently annoys,
No interview or monologue is complete unless he utters,
That idiosyncratic term of Bible-thumping nutters.

It's a word he loves enunciating with lascivious delight,
Both archaic and judgemental; he knows it will incite,
Outrage or defensiveness, embarrassment or mirth,
Has the penny dropped? Have you guessed? Well, for what it's worth,
The word is fornication, and at the risk of sounding trite,
Fornication! Fornication! Etcetera ad infinite.



**"Women shouldn't drive because
it damages their ovaries and pelvis."**
Saudi Sheikh Saleh Bin Saad Al-Luhaydan

"I tried to believe that there is a God, who created each of us in His own image and likeness, loves us very much, and keeps a close eye on things. I really tried to believe that, but I gotta tell you, the longer you live, the more you look around, the more you realize, something is fucked up."
- George Carlin

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The AFA will be changing the membership fee structure in 2015. The following fees are proposed:

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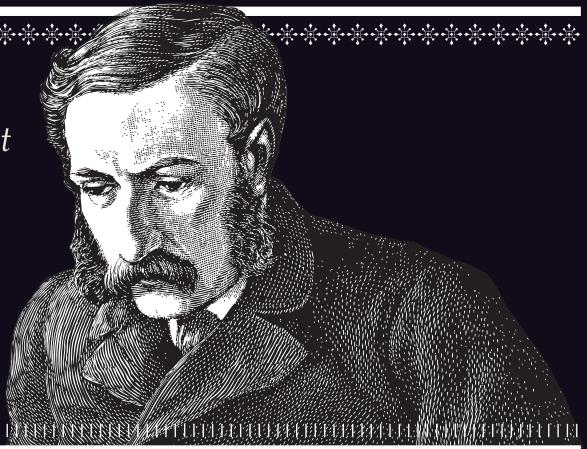
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However long Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians struggle to find multiple meanings in this text, the dominant seems to be this: Abraham's unquestioning willingness to heed gods command to sacrifice the thing he loved most is what qualified him 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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