



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

Promoting scientifically credible & factually reliable evidence

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The Australian Atheist



Religion

Because this is not magic enough?

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Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Established 1970

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PO Box 1062
Lane Cove NSW 1595



(08) 8835 2269



info@atheistfoundation.org.au



atheistfoundation.org.au



/atheistfoundation



@atheistaus



/atheistfoundation



/atheistfoundation

Our Philosophy The Atheist Foundation of Australia recognises scientific method as the only rational means toward understanding reality. To question and critically examine all ideas, testing them in the light of experiment, leads to the discovery of facts.

As there is no scientific evidence for supernatural phenomena, atheists reject belief in 'God', gods and other supernatural beings. The universe, the world in which we live, and the evolution of life, are entirely natural occurrences.

No personality or mind can exist without the process of living matter to sustain it. We have only one life – here and now. All that remains after a person dies is the memory of their life and deeds in the minds of those who live.

Atheists reject superstition and prejudice along with the irrational fears they cause. We recognise the complexity and interdependence of life on this planet. As rational and ethical beings we accept the challenge of making a creative and responsible contribution to life.

Our Aims To encourage and to provide a means of expression for informed free-thought on philosophical and social issues.

To safeguard the rights of all non-religious people.

To serve as a focal point for the community of non-religious people.

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

To promote atheism.

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

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Hello readers,

It's been another busy three months. The time for each new issue comes around so quickly! There have been a number of issues that the AFA has raised through media releases. There have also been various conversations held with other free thought organisations in relation to shared issues.

One of the issues particularly concerning me is the subterfuge around ethics classes in NSW schools. The option has been removed from all school forms. It is only provided as an option to parents who specify no religion on the 'religion' section of enrollment forms. This is sneaky and was clearly a deal done with Fred Nile to guarantee his vote on other issues before parliament. This is one that we need to be as vocal about as possible so if you are from NSW, please contact your local member to voice your disgust!

On the back page of this issue you will find an advertisement for Neil Degrasse Tyson. I'll be going and hopefully I'll see you there. An email will be sent out to all members with an opportunity for discount on some tickets for this. Watch your email inbox.

I received the following letter in the mailbag:

Dear Tracy

Congratulations to President Michael Boyd and you (and any others involved) for the quality and timeliness of AFA's media releases.

Their decisive content and well-written style shows the mature, intelligent and non-discriminatory nature of AFA's attitudes to Humanity. One only has to compare them with the gobbledegook often dished up by religious institutions to see that AFA is on the right track in presenting ideas and facts. Consider that position against the stance religious bodies take when speaking to their misguided and error-ridden views; and the obfuscation employed when confronted by the real truth, as distinct from their "truth".

Media releases "Hospitals are for Health Care" and "Diseases Don't Respect Religious Belief", dated 10 and 17 April 2015, gave me the idea to prepare a

piece for Issue 49: "Can you hear me?" I hope your many readers enjoy it. Senior religious leaders surely wouldn't, nor the die-hard members of their flock. It's intriguing to think how they might respond if they ever did read The Australia Atheist. But I doubt they'd even dare to pick up your wonderful journal.

*Happy editing.
Bob Irwin*

I would like to thank Bob for pointing out the good work that the AFA Communications Team do. When a situation occurs or issue arises, they are onto it, drafting media releases. There have been a lot of them of late. So much going on and so much needing to be responded to. So I would like to add my thanks with Bob's to the AFA Communications Team.

I'd also like to thank Bob for the quality articles he regularly submits to the magazine. This issue is no different. Brilliant article from Bob inside.

I'd also like to thank all the people that contribute quality articles and artwork for the magazine. I've been receiving so many I actually had to not include a few this time because of space. I'll include those in the next issue.

Rather than a message from the president in this issue, we have an interview by Kylie Sturgess with Michael Boyd. It's an interesting read and he lets drop information on a possible Global Atheist Convention. Watch this space!

Until next issue, take care.

Tracy



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Interview with AFA President

By Kylie Sturgess

Michael Boyd took over as the President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia in 2013. Yet not many people might know about him personally! He's been working with the team to produce press releases, has spoken out in the media, appeared on television and has represented the Australian atheist viewpoint at conferences in Australia, and now in Asia.

Kylie Sturgess, as a part of the new AtheistAus Podcast, caught up with Michael after the Philippines Atheists' PATAS Conference, held at the end of May. He's even got some news about the much-awaited Global Atheist Convention III...

Kylie: Tell us about yourself, Michael. What got you started in atheism and were you always an atheist?

Michael Boyd: No, I wasn't. I went to a Christian Brothers High School. They are the greatest institution in the country for creating atheists, actually!

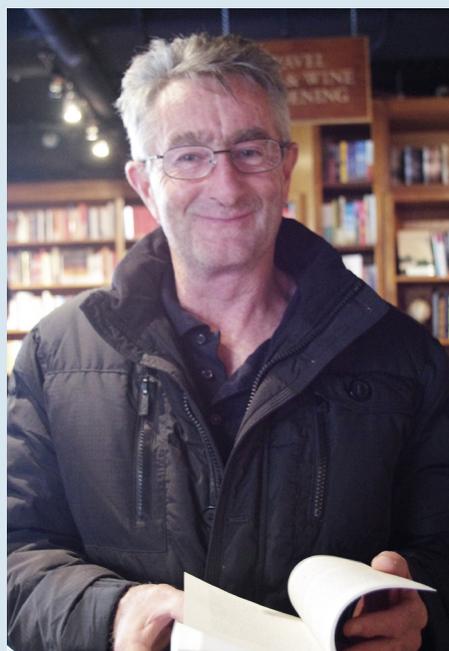
My experience there didn't encourage me to accept most of the religious nonsense I was being fed by my Christian Brothers teachers. I guess I left school as an atheist really. I don't think I really went to church pretty much from about 18 or so.

My parents and a lot of my family are quite strong Catholics, but I couldn't really accept what I was being told at school. It seemed very inconsistent, and, cruel at times. That was another thing about the school I went to, there was a lot of mindless cruelty on the part of the Christian Brothers, which didn't seem to sit very well with the Christian message about love and forgiveness and care for the underprivileged. It was all a little bit contradictory for me. I gave it up happily.

I joined the AFA about ten years ago. I was just searching something on the Internet and picked up a media release that the AFA had put out and I really agreed with it. I can't even remember now what was it about! It made me think that it sounds like a good organization to join and support, so I did.

I was the last man standing when David and Lee resigned from their positions.

I ended up becoming the president of the AFA, and it's been great. It's been a really good experience for me. We've got a fantastic team of people on the board, a committee of management that just works



really well together. We've done a lot of things in the last year or so.

We've had Richard Dawkins in Australia. That was very successful. We eventually sold out all in all venues and it was great to have him here and catch up with Richard, and to be able to present him to capacity audiences around the country.

We also had the Unholy Trinity a couple of months ago. They were fantastic. Three really intelligent guys, They've got a lot to say about the absurdity of religious belief

and the absurdity of religious believers as well. They're from the States and, of course, the story over there is incredibly comic when you think about it, the debates that happen in the States about religion and politics, the situation over there.

Kylie: It's strangely contradictory. Here, we have them all celebrating gay marriage and yet we still have people fighting for certain secular rights at the same time.

Michael: It's interesting. America is a contradiction. The wealthiest country in the world, but probably the economy where there's such a huge disparity between the really wealthy and the poor.

It's surprising to me that the Christian message gets through so strongly over there when there are so many social issues that you'd think that would make people be a little bit more skeptical about the things that they're told.

One of the features of American religion is its gross capitalist overreach, where religion is just business. I love the American religious leaders who dip into sin themselves a little bit, they always get found out by the public and are exposed to be the huge hypocrites that they are. It's always worth watching!

Kylie: They certainly have a lesson for us here in Australia in that regard, we can say to ourselves, "If it's happening over there, it could happen over here or it is happening over here so we got to watch out for it"!



Speaking of social issues, what do you think are some good things for atheists to act upon? It's one thing to not believe in God and you said yourself, you grew up to say, "OK, I choose not to believe in God." But when does it become something that you say: "OK, I'm going to do something as well as making it something that I say about myself"?

Michael: My path to non belief was partly driven by social issues. It was, in some respects, the contradictions of catholic teaching when confronted with social reality that was one of the impetuses for me to really question the whole religious doctrines that I was being told. To see that when applied, they had really negative social effects.

Kylie: As someone who is both an atheist and a social activist, you have acted on this by being someone who goes to conferences and speaks out. This year, for example, you went to the Philippines for an atheist conference. Why go to there? What's it like over there?

Michael: It's fascinating. It was a great, great trip. I guess one of the reasons I wanted to go there was I haven't been to the Philippines before. I love travel. It was a good opportunity.

It's a very interesting country, very Asian. At the same time, it's got a very, very strong tradition of European Christianity, particularly Catholicism as a result of the Spanish take over the country in the 1500s.

It's a bit of odd-ball in Asia in a sense that it is a Catholic country right in the middle of Asia. It's interesting to see just how the effect of that has been on the Filipino people.

I went to what was called the PATAS Conference, PATASCON, which is the conference of the Philippine Atheists Organization. The day before the conference, there was also the general assembly of the International Humanist and Ethics Union, which was being run in conjunction with PATASCON. That was another great event to attend.

One of the things that did come up with the PATASCON was that for ten years, activists in the Philippines have been trying to get the government to pass a reproductive health bill. That bill has been fought non stop by the Catholic Church and still hasn't passed.

One of the initiatives of the PATAS has been to run free clinics for reproductive health for poor women. That's been incredibly successful. That's given them a really genuine contact with people.

One of the other big issues in the Philippines, which is a bit of a slip-up, I think, is the question about clerical sexual abuse of children. It's something that's completely under the radar in the Philippines.

There's no reason to suspect that the scale of the problem over there isn't many, many times bigger than it is in Australia. Even though we've seen from our Commission of Inquiry that we have a serious problem - in the Philippines, not a single priest or a cleric has been convicted of child sexual abuse, which I find extraordinary. Many who have been convicted were excluded from parishes in other countries have come back to the Philippines and are practicing as clergy openly without any interference from the church!

In fact, one of the archbishops in the Philippines was quoted in an article I read recently, saying that they've instituted new regulations, which will solve this problem for the Philippines. Their answer is that any of these complaints will be referred to Rome. It's interesting, but obviously, there's a code of silence in the Philippines about this issue.

Kylie: It definitely shows how important atheist, humanist, secularist points of view are vital in such places and a good lesson for us all, really.

Michael: I agree, Kylie. Atheism is a very small movement in the Philippines. Atheists don't have much of a voice but it's through initiatives like the free clinics. Also one of the things that really impressed me at the conference was the youthfulness of the delegates.

It's a young movement in the Philippines whereas perhaps in Australia, atheists are probably not quite such a young movement. Not so many young people who are dedicated to the atheist cause. That's probably because we're such a laid back country? Although we complain often and loudly when we can, religion doesn't occupy the same large space in public consciousness in Australia as it does in the Philippines.

Kylie: We have to make sure that is maintained! Finally, what's the AFA focused on for the near future? There's been a few press release. Is there any truth to the rumors of another Global Atheist Convention? This is something I get asked about all the time so I might as well ask it.

Michael: Global Atheist Convention, it's probably the top of our list really at the moment! We need to fix a date. We need to see if we can organise some financing from one of the state governments who would support a convention.

We're fully committed to doing it again. It is a huge effort for us because we are a volunteer organization and all of the energy and effort involved in doing it is from volunteers. It will be a big event, it will be an important event and we are committed to putting it on.

I did speak with Robin Ince when he was here about some possible speakers. Robin has got a long list of people. We're shaping things up for a Global Atheist Convention - possibly next year, although maybe early in 2017.

Kylie: Something to look forward to. Of course, the AFA continue to push out press releases and all sorts of issues. We've got ones about gay rights, all sorts of things...

Michael: Yes, we've been sending out media releases. There was a recent one about Catholic Church who have been threatening businesses with a reduction in trade if they don't toe the line - an absurd thing for them to do! And there's many more news, events and so on heading our way - just remember to subscribe to the website, Facebook, Twitter and support the AFA as a member.



PATAS Convention Speech

By Michael Boyd

One of the many myths propounded by religious devotees is that humans cannot behave morally without religious belief. This myth is no more credible than the creation story in genesis, the story of Noah and the great flood, the Virgin birth or the resurrection. The most cursory look at history demonstrates that religion, far from encouraging good behaviour has been the cause of much evil in the world. The crusades, the inquisition, the burning of apostates and scientists who challenged orthodoxy, the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, the murder of atheist bloggers in recent months in Bangladesh - the list is endless and horrifying.

Nonetheless, we never cease to hear from priests, bishops, imams and rabbis telling us how we should behave and encouraging governments to pass laws that restrict our behaviour and punish us for departure from their twisted moral code. Homosexuality is an abomination we are told, sex outside of marriage is a sin, abortion is an offence against God, birth control is evil, even masturbation, surely the most victimless of crimes, is prohibited!

The sexual abuse of children in the care of churches in Australia has come under close scrutiny in Australia over the last 2 years. After much public agitation, in 2013, the government of Australia led by Julia Gillard, an atheist, established a Royal commission to enquire into this issue. The commissioner, judge Peter McLellan has conducted hearings in many different parts of the country and looked at a number of different groups, both religious and non religious including the Salvation Army, a number of different Jewish schools and synagogues, Anglican Church schools and government and church run orphanages. However one of the main focuses of the commission has been on the Catholic Church.

The picture that has emerged is not a pretty one. I will focus mainly on the Catholic Church today. However, one

consistent feature of the commission hearings has been that every group the commission has looked at has responded to allegations of abuse with denial and cover up and intimidation of victims.

In recent weeks the commission looked at abuse of school children and altar boys in a small city called Ballarat in Victoria. Up to 14 priests were allegedly involved in abuse of children over a 40 year period. A priest called Gerald Ridsdale began his ministry there in the 1960s. Within a year he began to sexually abuse children in his care and complaints were made by parents to the local church hierarchy. Ridsdale was quietly moved to another parish and his criminal offences were hushed up. He soon reoffended in the new parish and again was moved on and the incidents hushed up. This became a pattern that continued for many years. One young girl was raped by Ridsdale in the house he shared with a priest called George Pell.

Two victims claim to have told Pell about the abuse they suffered. Father Pell is now Archbishop Pell, one of the most powerful men in the Catholic Church in Australia and now in charge of the Vatican's finances in Rome. Pell was later responsible for creating a system called the Melbourne response and Towards healing, both schemes designed to pay victims the minimum compensation possible and always with a condition of complete silence.

The Commission has investigated hundreds of complaints, and the case I have spoken about today is by no means the worst. Ridsdale is currently serving 8 years in jail for some of the offences he committed. Total 138 offences; this is his third jail term. Pell is swanning around Rome in a purple gown and a funny hat. One witness presented a class photograph of himself and 32 other young children to the commission and told the commission that 12 of the 33 children in the photo had committed suicide.

Ireland has been through a similar experience as Australia with an enquiry there exposing abuse of young children by clergy on a grand scale. Last week the Irish people voted in favour of gay marriage by a huge margin of 62% despite hysterical opposition from the Catholic Church. Ireland is not as staunchly catholic as the Phillipines, although about 80% identify as catholic.

The lesson for atheists who want to see change is that nothing undermines the churches moral authority and standing in the community like a good royal commission or government enquiry into child sexual abuse. While lecturing atheists on their lack of moral compass, the church has been busy for many years aiding and abetting criminals in its own ranks to perpetrate and avoid responsibility for the most immoral behaviour we can imagine.

Clerical sexual abuse in the Phillipines was acknowledged by the church in 2002. New guidelines were published by the catholic bishops conference of the Phillipines (CBCP) in 2003. Report to the Vatican! Monsignor Joselito Asis Secretary General of the CBCP denies any cover up but cannot say how many cases are reported because bishops report directly to Rome? Not to the police. Why not? Nonsense! Can't the CBCP ask its own bishops to submit details and reports? The Vatican's response has been underwhelming; it refused a request from the Australian Royal commission to disclose documents in its possession to the commission.

It is left to citizens like members of PATAS to bring these matters to the attention of the people of the Phillipines and agitate for a comprehensive enquiry into clerical abuse of children.

Michael Boyd
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia



Can you Hear Me?

By Bob Irwin

“God is in control of all things and answers our prayers.” The Gideons.

Prayer is a ritual part of what it means to be a Christian. It takes many forms in many different circumstances and for many purposes. However, the benefits Christians believe ensue from prayer are not all they might think. In this two-part piece Bob Irwin looks at several aspects of Christian prayer and its role in keeping members in the fold, and in the dark. (And yes, there are cartoons. For anyone who might be offended or embarrassed by naked bodies, beware of one of them; or look away.)

Bob was moved to write on prayer after reading the AFA media releases of 10 and 17 April 2015. Refer Letters to the Editor in this issue.

Why do it?

Christians have prayerful conversations with their all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present God, and they believe He frequents their prayers. They also pray to Jesus as their personal saviour, who they believe was physically and/or spiritually resurrected after he was executed – and he’s just waiting for them to make contact through prayer.

Since his death Jesus’ followers took the view that he occupies a divine place in his Father God’s heaven in readiness for a return to Earth as the messiah – the saviour of all true Christian believers, at which time God, with Jesus’s help, will usher in His eternal kingdom for the exclusive benefit of these believers . . . while the rest of the people will be vanquished. It’s no wonder so many want to be in touch and onside with Jesus and God and their spiritual associates!

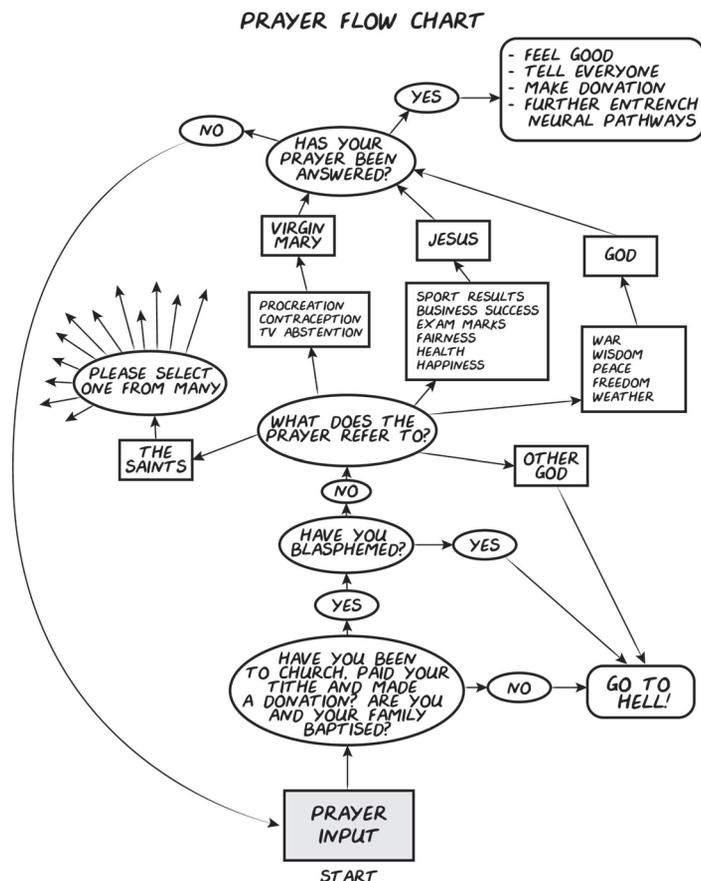
Prayers can be made to God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the angels. And for the Catholic faithful, they can pray to their thousands of saints; while the Vatican

encourages them to pray also to potential saints – which can very occasionally result in “miracles” happening, and when these are “proven” (through a convoluted internal process of the Vatican), lead to saint-hood for the identified prospect, and extravagant ceremonies for the selected participants and watchers-on.

When Christians pray they’re acknowledging and affirming that God and his heavenly helpers are willing and able to hear and answer their prayers. It is common that they ask through prayer for improvement in or continuation of an existing situation, such as getting over an illness for themselves or others, succeeding in exams or business and sporting endeavours, achieving happiness for family and friends, and seeking safety in various situations. And in quest of God’s

blessing and Christian salvation. God’s blessing, however, can take on sinister proportions, for example in wartime.

Kaiser Wilhelm II was vain and militaristic. Wilhelm, a Lutheran, believed he ruled by divine right and after he’d built up Germany’s military power prior to World War I he prayed for God’s blessing for victory . . . unsuccessfully. (Wilhelm II was the youngest grandson of English Queen Victoria – who also believed in her divine right to rule.) And how many times did the world hear the staunchly-Christian US President George W Bush make emotional petitions of “God bless America” for success against “the enemy” during the lead up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq? One can only wonder at the mental machinations going on in Mr Bush’s brain at the time.



While President Bush was speaking to God, Pope John Paul II made an appeal for world prayer in the hope that the proposed invasion would not proceed. Seems like God preferred Mr Bush's prayers . . . mistakenly as it turned out.

The heavenly in-tray

Not only does having a choice of who to pray to add flexibility and scope to the act of praying, but with Jesus, the Virgin Mary and other heavenly recipients being on the prayer options-list, God's busy workload is kept to a more manageable level. As well, they provide an alternative if Christians want to make a specific prayer, such as to a patron saint. For example, Pope Francis had a chat with Mother Mary some time ago and promised not to watch the telly – and he hasn't for 25 years. (Nor does he use the internet.)

The Christian Church has never been able to properly verify whether God, Jesus, Mary, the angels and saints are able to hear all, or even any of the prayers directed to them, let alone report on how many, if any they answer. Given there must be several billion or more Christian prayers sent each and every day to the heavenly in-tray, that's a mighty workload for the divine characters – there is already so much to do in heaven, especially for God Himself: dispensing God's will and arranging acts-of-God, and in allocating and supervising the work of His angels and saints. It would seem reasonable to assume that on top of the standard day-to-day work only a proportion of the total

number of prayers might get answered. (Of course the saints receive some prayers directly themselves, but when in an intercessory role must pass them on to God, which just exacerbates His already heavy workload.)

Whether God, Jesus and Mary pick and choose which ones to hear or just handle prayers as they arrive, manage those they can, then at the end of each day simply reschedule or even delete the balance . . . who really knows? You'd have to think there would be some sort of divine selection process, otherwise the rather selfish prayers about sporting results, exams and so on might clog up the system and diminish the prospects of worthwhile prayers over the alleviation of poverty and ignorance, and achieving an end to abuse of minors, power-lust, land-grabbing, war and corruption so there can be a just and peaceful world.

The above begs the question: Given the omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience credited to their God by Christians, it begs the question: Why the need to pray to Him if He already knows, indeed directs, what's going on and what's about to occur? Is God a paranoid attention-seeker, or does He just need to feel loved and connected?

A window on the bedroom

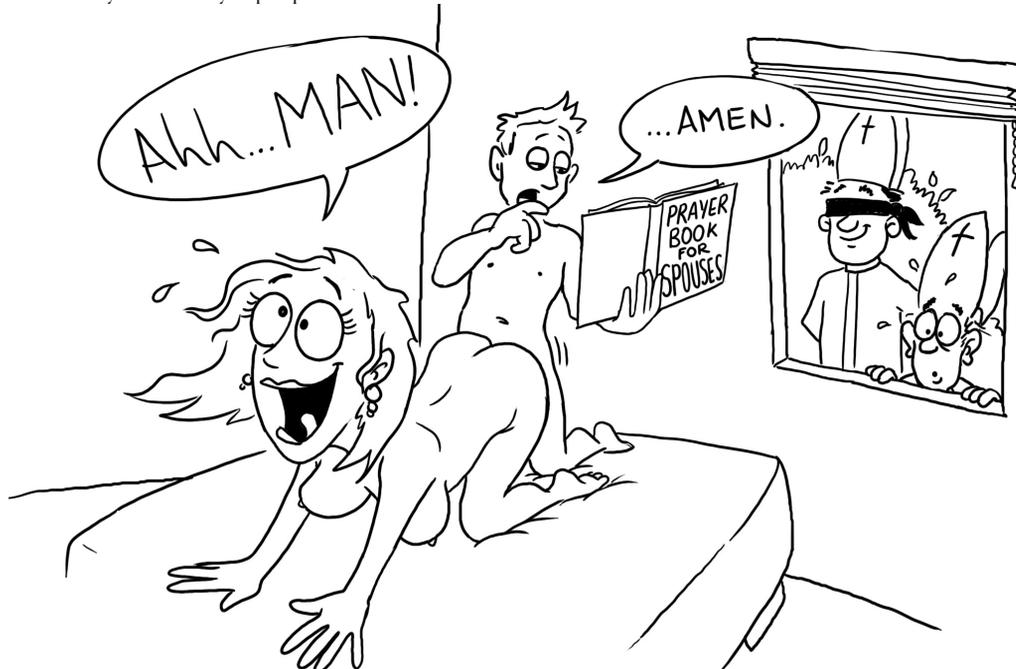
Always ready to make its presence felt in the bedrooms of its flock, the Vatican encourages married Catholic couples to pray before making love, as if to infiltrate even the most intimate moments with its

own brand of God-speak. The Catholic Church has gone to the extraordinary length of writing the specific prayer – which includes references to the Holy Spirit, and (with a touch of irony) to the Virgin Mary – and publishing it in the Prayer Book for Spouses. (Such progress! . . . the Church sure has come a long way since Pope Innocent III (1160–1216) who was quoted as having said: “The sexual act is so shameful that it is intrinsically evil.”)

When you think about it, that's quite considerate of the Church because it obviates the need for the highly excited, about-to-be love-makers to think of a prayer for themselves. All they need do is flick a switch (bedside lamp, chandelier, spot-light, torch) or simply light a few romantic candles, and fumble their way to the well-worn and dog-eared page so they can read out the prayer as authored and approved by celibate males with a history of believing the unbelievable. That really must get the already sexually-stimulated couples going to even greater lengths of pleasure and ecstasy in preparation for Catholic conception. It may also have got the virginal writer of the prayer going in thinking of the numerous occasions upon which his prayer would be read in such arousing circumstances.

It will only be a matter of time before this prayer gets an increasingly-tech-savvy Vatican's go-ahead to be produced as an audio file, enabling couples to simply hear the prayer and replay it as often as necessary. Though with the ready availability of multi-purpose, hand-held mobile devices the couple would need to be careful not to mistakenly turn on the webcam or GPS or social-networking modes while reaching for the audio buttons, especially after former Pope Benedict got onto Twitter in December 2012.

And as for the main recipients of the pre-love-making prayers: God, Jesus and the Virgin Mary, the Bible reports that only one, God, had any sexual relations (and that was probably just a one-off and without physical contact), making their answers to the titillated couple more like guesswork than based on experience.



It's like magic

For those who pray it's as though they believe that their wishes, expressed to the supernatural realm, can make events in the natural world actually happen, or alter their characteristics or intensity or frequency. It's akin to a child believing in magic: a thinking process which comes naturally to young children because as babies and toddlers their wishes and needs are answered by parents and others responsible for their care – and they don't even think about or know why it happens. Even though their personal skills may mature (domestic, social, business, artistic, sporting, and so on), some people never properly grow out of their childish wishful-thinking regarding religious beliefs entrenched through indoctrination, passive or otherwise.

They continue to think and behave as though what exists in their fantasies is part of the real world, in which a God (or gods, goblins and evil spirits) can satisfy their wishes and answer their prayers, and sometimes even cause mischief.

Such childish reaction is part of the historical culture of Christianity . . .

centuries ago people gave, by today's thinking, child-like responses to events and concepts they didn't (and couldn't) understand: how the world functioned; how and why people behaved the way they did; and evolutionary history. They could only make it up – within the boundaries of what the Church allowed. Christian leaders adopted, endorsed and embellished the made-up accounts, which in turn entered Christian traditions, texts and practices, never to change. This type of thinking – which treated the mysterious as actual – became inevitable for Christians; they had no alternative. There now are alternatives, but not for Christian theologians and lay people who wish to remain in their roles and with their ancient beliefs.

Prayer fulfils a deep obligation in Christians. It offers them hope from faith. Christians obtain meaning in their lives through prayer. It gives comfort to believers when someone dies and in leading up to their own passing, or when there's a tragedy such as a natural disaster, and in other difficult circumstances. Prayer can promote courage in time of danger. But it also risks encouraging carelessness, because believing that prayer

will magically work to one's advantage can give a false sense of security – at the expense of astute preparedness: think the detrimental effects of environmental degradation, protection in wartime and with any other issues of safety.

Praying may even distract people from caring for themselves, even ignoring or not seeking medical or other important advice in the belief God is somehow mysteriously looking after them. While prayer risks producing false expectations it can sometimes have intrinsic positive effects on the person praying, and to some recipients of prayer – as will be explained by Part II in the next issue.



Liberals Please Speak Up For Free Speech

by Hugh Harris

Hugh Harris is a freelance writer with a blog called [The Rational Razor](#) on philosophy, and rational thought.

Hugh is a regular contributor to The ABC, and Secular Web.

The Dallas Attack, Charlie Hebdo, The PEN award, and the muddle of Liberal opinion

The death of two Islamists who attacked Pamela Geller's "Jihad Watch Muhammad Art Exhibit and Cartoon Contest" once again shines a light on the limits of free speech. Only days later, some 204 writers protested at the decision of the PEN American Center to honor to the staff of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo (12 of whom had been brutally murdered in the notorious January attack) with the Freedom of Expression Courage Award.

With good reason we liberals tend to side with minorities suffering at the hands of oppression. Increasingly, liberal debate over free speech muddles the oppressor and the oppressed, tolerance and intolerance. If liberal values still entail the willingness to respect different viewpoints, and the right to express them.

A case in point is Sophia A. McClennen's: [Pamela Geller's "South Park" idiocy: Satire, hatred and the right's faith-based fear-mongering](#), Salon May 7, 2015.

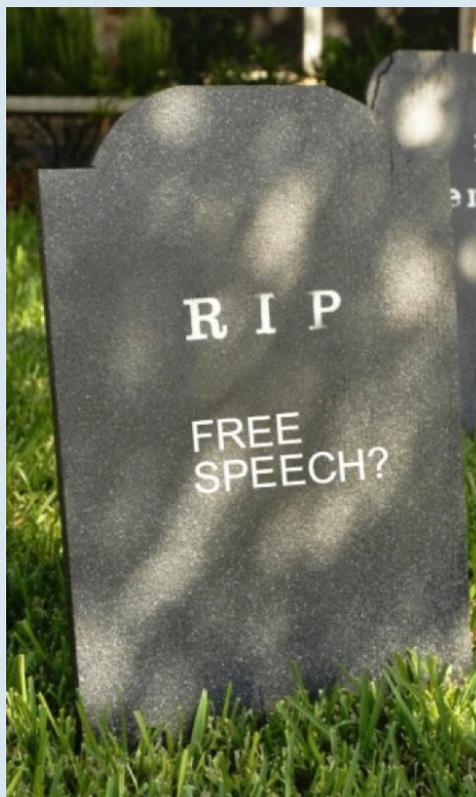
Apparently, a razor fine distinction can be made between acceptable satire and unacceptable satire. McClennen doesn't explicitly condemn Pamela Geller for hate speech, but it seems she would like to, speculating that maybe she wanted to incite violence:

...then it is worth wondering whether Geller was hoping for violence. She clearly knew what had already happened to Charlie Hebdo.

But that's rather the point isn't it? The intolerance is not contained in the depiction of Muhammad but rather in the death threat that precedes it. Liberals may argue

about the motives of Geller, but the issue is whether she has a "right" to free speech, not whether she is right.

Only if we accept arbitrary limits on freedom of speech as dictated by cultural groups can cartoons of Muhammad constitute



hate speech. We must first cede to Islam the right to forbid them. Liberals should consider whether the injunctions of Islam, or indeed any other religion, constitute an acceptable curb on liberty.

This is really about whether we will accept that some things are sacrosanct. All religions venerate their icons: respect is demanded and worship accords it. But can we really demand that people of other religions, or no religion, must observe them too?

The answer: "No." It's not only an infringement on freedom, but plainly impractical. Why should we privilege the beliefs of one group over another – by what criteria? Who decides? The extreme protagonists of Islam have no corresponding intention of respecting the beliefs of other religions. If tolerance was valued, respect would be given and received.

Hate-speech is generally accepted as fighting words aimed at inciting violence on national, racial, or religious grounds, and to excite hostility toward particular individuals or groups. Censorship serves a useful purpose in controlling violent and pornographic images, exposure to inappropriate material to children, and stopping incitement to violence directed at individuals or groups.

Depictions of Muhammad are considered offensive and provocative, but they do not call for violent behaviour against Muslims. They are blasphemous and forbidden according to the tenets of Islam, but why should the rest of us be beholden to these shibboleths?

Blasphemy and free speech cannot co-exist. Liberals who would deny the right to satirize or critique belief systems are abrogating the ideals underpinning liberalism itself. What happens when we allow dogma to rule over liberty and bow to the extremists who dispense justice via Kalashnikov? Illiberal ideals are illiberal ideals no matter how disenfranchised the group holding them.

We do not need to look far to see where this road lead. Secular blogger [Ananta Bijoy Das](#) from Bangladesh was hacked to death by a machete wielding gang whilst on his way to work with his wife. This follows the similar "hacking" murders of activists [Avijit](#)

[Roy](#) and Washikur Rahman. Saudi blogger [Raif Badawi](#), sentenced to a decade in prison and a 1000 lashes, may face beheading if his case is re-opened.

Human rights campaigner [Sabeen Mahmud](#), from Pakistan, murdered, due to investigating the disappearance of over 2000 Baloch rights activists. A Christian couple accused of blasphemy are beaten up, and then burned to death in a kiln. In India, [Shirin Dalvi](#), an Urdu newspaper editor, charged and forced into hiding for publishing a story about the Charlie Hebdo magazine.

The [Governor of Punjab and Pakistan's Federal Minorities Minister](#) both assassinated for questioning the death penalty for blasphemy in in 2011. Indian Professor, T.J. Joseph: his hand chopped off by an Islamist mob because he used the word "Muhammad" on an exam question. Charged with offending religious sentiments, and subsequently acquitted when the "Muhammad" was later confirmed to be a fictional character. Scarcely does a day end without free expression facing its age old enemy, violence, justified by offence.

The writers protested the award because they perceive Muslims, in France, to be largely disenfranchised and discriminated against. The letter acknowledges both the courage and commitment to free speech of Charlie Hebdo, but declines to lend support to arguably "offensive" material which might intensify pre-existing prejudices. Chillingly, the writers protest to the award's recipient based on the content of Charlie Hebdo, suggesting more agreeable free speech would have been preferred. How uncontroversial speech requires courage is unexplained. One wonders whether they understand that in undermining the free, in free speech, they lend support to the forces of intolerance.

This begs the question. After kow-towing to the edict that no-one must depict the prophet what logic do we use to object to the proscriptions that will inevitably follow? These might include embargoes on: consuming alcohol, women driving cars, immodest dress, expressing a secular point of view, gambling, finding fault with Islam, being alone with the opposite sex, poking fun at Islamic customs, believing in reincarnation, practicing yoga and

many, many others. If we agree to accept impositions upon our liberty we need a good reason to so, beyond the offence or victimhood reported by particular groups.

If there is any doubt, remember the treatment of heretics under Christianity prior to the Enlightenment. For speaking their mind the great reformers of the faith usually met grisly fates at the hands of the orthodox. Jan Hus, the key precursor to Protestantism, arrested, tried for heresy and burned at the stake. William Tyndale, the leading translator of the Bible, responsible for many of its memorable phrases was a controversial figure during his lifetime, when orthodoxy dictated that the Bible should only be in Latin: strangled and then burned at the stake. Socrates, Joan of Arc, Giordano Bruno, Michael Servetus all feature on an impressive list of lives cut short due to their "offensiveness." To allow the hallowed icons of religion immunity from criticism we must unlearn the lessons of history.

Any ideology, religious, political or otherwise must be open for criticism. Recall the great moral lesson of the 20th Century totalitarian regimes; the cost of sacrificing liberty for the common good was murder on an industrial scale. When dissent was outlawed tyranny ensued. The totalitarian regimes were all, at one point or other, minority groups. Liberals must remind themselves that liberty is fundamental, it underpins tolerance and pluralism, and to maintain it, free speech must be inviolable.

Falsely shouting "Fire!" in a theatre, was the exception to free speech invoked by Oliver Wendell Holmes when delivering a guilty verdict on a group distributing leaflets encouraging draft resistance in the US Supreme Court in 1919. The senseless waste of lives of World War I, a war fought for questionable reasons, caused Holmes to doubt his decision later in life.

For those who think that flouting taboos is unnecessary or provocative miss the very point of doing so. Commentators who understand what their liberalism means should unambiguously support free speech regardless of who is the speaker.

The debate is aptly summed up by PEN President Andrew Solomon:

So let me say a few words about the Charlie Hebdo

controversy. The defense of people murdered for their exercise of free speech is at the heart of what PEN stands for. So is the unfettered articulation of opposing viewpoints, as we have seen over the last ten days. Charlie Hebdo's mission of satirizing sacred targets endured despite the firebombing of its office in 2011 and the murder of much of its staff in January. Few people are willing to put themselves in peril to ensure that we are all free to say what we believe. Charlie Hebdo's current staff has persisted, and tonight's award reflects their refusal to accept the curtailment of lawful speech through violence.

The price of free speech is the possibility, nay probability, of offence. But the benefits of resisting totalitarianism, ignorance and apathy surely outweigh the toll. For the absolutists who would censor, let them advise their authority for doing so. I have yet to meet the person whose knowledge of the world is complete, and would immediately distrust anyone who made the claim. Often those causing offense through free speech are legitimately shouting "Fire!" in order to draw our attention to something. I don't agree that my access to information should be limited by the sanction of others. Should yours?



On the Divide Between Social Progressives & Atheists

by *Christis Tombazos*

Christis is an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics at Monash University. He is a new contributor, bringing rationality and reason to some topical issues.

One of the great lessons of social theory is that natural allies often fail to form a coalition. This can occur even when the mutual benefits from cooperation are significant, and the perceived differences amount to little more than a failure to communicate. In this article I argue that the current standoff between social progressives and the global atheist movement is a classic example of such a failure. A failure caused by intellectual overreaching on both sides.

Before proceeding, and at the danger of proposing only a caricature of complex intellectual standpoints, a few operational definitions are in order. Progressives, according to Arnold Kling (*Three Languages of Politics*), “...organize the good and the bad in terms of oppression and the oppressed” and they think in terms of power struggles between the strong and the weak. By contrast, a central precept of the atheist movement is that good derives from informed reasoning and critical thinking and bad often has its roots in how dogma, superstition, and religion give rise to harmful intentions. One may consider that there is nothing mutually exclusive in such standpoints. Particularly given that both progressives and atheists agree that religion is often an instrument of oppression. Yet, as it turns out, some of the most prominent public intellectuals are strictly invested in only one of these standpoints that – to make things worse – understand and discuss only within the confines of stock-standard narratives. Subsequently, their efforts to explain the world rely on only one of these standpoints even when it does not apply. This is what I called earlier intellectual overreaching.

To make the point consider the atrocities of the Charlie Hebdo attacks and the 2014 Gaza Conflict. Consider now the

language that progressives and atheists are likely to use in apportioning blame in each of these events. Here is an educated guess of terms, fragments, and sentences that are likely to come up. Progressives: “nothing to do with Islam”, “oppressed migrants”, “French intolerance”, and “power imbalance between Israelis and Palestinians”. Atheists: “Islamic fundamentalism”, “more than other religions Islam is the mother-load of bad ideas”, “ Hamas charter’s reliance on Koranic prophesy – ...when the earth will cry out for Jewish blood” (reference to this charter appears in Sam Harris’ “Why Don’t I Criticize Israel?” which may be found on his web site.)

Where is the overreach? In the case of Hebdo the overreach is clearly by the progressives. Their claim that the Hebdo atrocities have nothing to do with Islam bears no connection to reality. It is unequivocal that cartoonists were murdered to enforce 7th century blasphemy laws, with the killers walking away from the scene screaming “Allahu Akbar” and proclaiming that they “avenged the prophet”. Similar atrocities took place since Hebdo in countries where the claim that the perpetrators were subject to oppression may not be sustained. Consider for example the three separate incidents where atheist bloggers were killed by Islamists in Bangladesh earlier this year. Hebdo and Bangladesh have everything to do with Islam and the many terrible ideas that constitute the centerpiece of Islamic dogma.

In the case of Gaza, the overreach is by our fellow atheists. Suggesting that the teachings of the Qur’an played an instrumental role in the most recent manifestation of the long standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict ignores the political, economic, and historical dimensions of

one of the most complex conflicts of the last two centuries. The catalyst for the 2014 war was not Islamism. Furthermore, whatever atrocities were committed do not appear to have been driven primarily by Islamist dogma and were not only committed by Muslims. According to the United Nations report (A/HRC/29/52) that was released on 24 June 2015, both Israel and Palestinian militants committed atrocities tantamount to war crimes.

Atheists share a lot with progressives. We both choose science over dogma (fearing climate change rather than welcoming the second coming). We both choose marriage equality over traditional constraints on whom we may love. We both choose gender equality over the horrendous treatment of women that is typically advanced by religion. Much else can be said, but this handful of examples make the point that a lot can be gained by joining hands. For this, however, progressives must understand that critique of the many bad ideas in scripture – and Islamist dogma in particular – are not racism in disguise. At the same time, Atheists must recognize that while religion is a source of much evil, there are other sources. These elemental acknowledgments are a good first step in bridging our differences.



Science for Simpletons

By Dennis Morris

Dennis is the founder and past President of The Society of Freethinkers (South Africa), past President of The Humanist Society of Western Australia and a member of various other atheist, humanist and free thought groups, including the Atheist Foundation of Australia. He has authored a number of books.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE, founded by Mary Baker Eddy, emphasised the unreality of matter. Believing that disease and evil are illusions of the mind, it teaches that spiritual healing is the only cure.

Alarmed by the progress of Christian Science, Mark Twain uttered a serious warning. “Within a few years,” he said, “unless the advance be stayed, the false doctrine would conquer, not only the land of its birth, but the whole world.” Christian Science was pre-eminently a science for simpletons, and, since the world is peopled by persons who are mostly fools, the victory of this metaphysical humbug was inevitable.

Two biographies of Mary Baker Eddy are flatly contradictory of one another. One of them, the official biography approved by the church, canonised by the leaders of Christian Science. In a holograph document the “pastor emeritus,” Mary Baker Eddy herself, recommends this account to the faithful, credulous, community of her admirers.

One would think then, that this biography by Miss Sibyl Wilbur must be thoroughly dependable, but in fact, it is a truly Byzantine example of literary embroidery. Written for the edification of those already convinced “In the style of the Gospels of St. Mark” (sic), it exhibits the discoverer of Christian Science in a rose coloured light and wearing a halo.

In this biography, Mary Baker Eddy is presented to our unworthy eyes as immaculate, as filled with divine grace, endowed with superhuman wisdom, an emissary from heaven to earth, the paragon of all the excellences. Whatever she does is done well, she embodies

every virtue mentioned in the prayer books, and her character is bright with the seven colours of the rainbow, for she is womanly. Christian, motherly, philanthropic, modest, gentle and mild, but her adversaries are dull witted, base, envious, criminal, blinded by error and overflowing with malice.

In a word, no angel was ever more angelic than the founder of Christian Science. With tears in her eyes, the pious disciple contemplates the saintly portrait from which every characteristic trait has been carefully expunged.

But the rival biographer, Miss Georgina Milmine shatters this golden image with the club of documentary evidence, working as consistently in black as Miss Wilbur does in rose-colour. Miss Milmine shows up the great discoverer of Christian Science as a vulgar plagiarist who stole the theory from the ill guarded desk of a predecessor; as a persistent liar, an ill-tempered hysteric, semi-literate, a woman with an unpleasantly keen eye for business, an artful dodger, and at times a perfect fury. With the industry of an able reporter, there is here collected an abundance of evidence to show how hypocritical, deceitful, crafty and grasping was Mary Baker Eddy, how preposterous and ludicrous her doctrine. I need hardly say that this biography is no less fiercely discountenanced by the votaries of Christian Science than the rose-coloured biography is passionately extolled. In fact, Miss Milmine’s book “was eventually purchased by a friend of Christian Science, and the plates from which the book was printed was destroyed, the original manuscript was also acquired. As a result, this most valuable source-book has become exceedingly rare.”

It is interesting to note that Dakin’s Mrs. Eddy, being independent is also taboo, and that the Christian Science movement endeavoured to boycott its sale. In spite of this, the book was bestseller.

Stefan Sweig also tells of a man named Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, who learned the art of mesmerism and hypnotism from a certain Charles Poyen. In a lad named Lucius Burkmar, about seventeen years of age, Quimby found an extremely sensitive subject, so the two joined forces, Quimby as mesmeriser and Burkmar as medium.

The two set forth on tour, practising in what soon developed from mere mesmeric demonstrations into a method of curing the sick by a sort of hypnotism and clairvoyance, Quimby, operating through his medium, would make a clairvoyant diagnosis.

The method was simple enough: in full view of the public, he threw Lucius Burkmar into a hypnotic trance, then the sick person was taken close to the medium, who, supposedly speaking out of the trance, would declare the nature of the illness, and prescribe the appropriate remedy. To us who are accustomed to elaborate blood tests and x-rays as essentials of diagnosis, this clairvoyant diagnosis must seem quaint, and may well raise a smile, but Quimby and Burkmar drove a thriving trade. Quimby was, however, greedy, and eliminating the intermediate link. Why did he have to share the fees?

He now changed his method of treatment, being satisfied to sit down beside his patient and explaining his theory of disease. That sufficed a cure.



“This is my theory, to put man in possession of a science that will destroy the ideas of the sickness, and teach each man one living profession of his own identity with life, free from error and disease. My practice belongs to a wisdom higher than man, it was taught to us by Jesus, but since then it has never had a place in man’s heart.”

Mary Baker Eddy was a hypochondriac, shamming fits and convulsions in childhood to get out of doing homework and to stay out of school. In later life she feigned being partially paralysed, so as to be waited upon, paying children to swing her on a swing. Therefore the so-called miracle that cured her by Quimby’s method was not surprising. So enthusiastic was she after Quimby had cured her, so intoxicated by it, that she was deaf to the voice of reason; or did she sense fame and fortune? She also started practising the method.

She later never mentioned Quimby, after breaking from him in 1875. Fundamentally egocentric, she claimed as her “immortal thesis” the first edition of *Science and Health*, which at first had been no more than a faithful transcript of Quimby’s *Questions and Answers*, expanded a little here and there. She, however, kept writing, until finally she completed her book consisting of 465 pages.

Mary Baker Eddy claimed, “God never made a man sick.” Illness is nothing but illusion. To be ill is not merely an error, a fallacy, but a crime, for to doubt God is to be guilty of blasphemy. God cannot be the father of error. The same “argument” is incessantly used throughout the pages of *Health and Science*.

Enemies began to bring up their guns, the regular practitioners of medicine. Mark Twain republished in book form the articles he had written for the *North American Review*, making fun of Christian Science.

Aroused by the hubbub, the heirs of Phineas Quimby became aware of the vast sums of money his ex-pupil had earned through her plagiarism of his teaching, claiming it to be her “revelation,” that she had been “miraculously” and supernaturally selected by almighty God

to receive divine revelation directly from God to herself alone, of the greatest gift ever to be given to the world”.

Her son, George Washington Glover, neglected and impoverished, while his mother was earning about a million dollars a year from her many pupils and thousands of followers, sued her in court. His lawyer Senator Chandler claimed that Mary Baker Eddy was unquestionably “suffering from systematised delusions and dementia.”

However, the movement spread, the Massachusetts Metaphysical College churned many “doctors,” and each graduate was a fresh propagandist for the “*Christian Science Journal*,” enlisting subscribers, money being the name of the game, as Stefan Sweig says, “Christ and the dollar.” In her old age, Mary Baker Eddy, did not want people to know that she was frail, weak, toothless, had to be supported while walking, and taking morphine for pain. It is claimed that she even had someone else, dressed up to look like her, go for daily drives in a carriage to show that she was still in good health. It was certainly clever of Mary Baker Eddy to found her system of mental healing upon the rock of the officially recognised church, and by, when naming her “Science”, precluding it with the word “Christian” which, in America, especially at that time in history, and even now, is a term to conjure with. Few will be so bold, as Mark Twain, as to speak of a method as humbug or puffery when its exponents flourish the great name of Christ and appeal to the raising of Lazarus by Jesus as signal proof of the soundness of a doctrine.

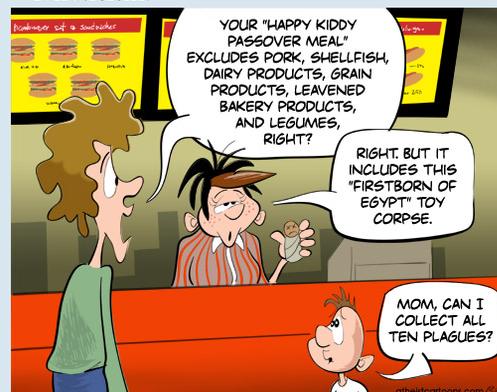
Her shrewd coupling of a new creed with Christianity was unlike Mesmer who, being thoroughly honest, refrained from describing his method as being divinely inspired. But then he did not want to start a new sect, and did not have to fabricate messengers from God, or the voice of an angel, like those who regard themselves as saints and prophets. There are, of course, those who believe what they want to believe despite documentary evidence to the contrary.

Stefan Swieg comments that: “That may be, then, that Mary Baker Eddy’s precise formulation may not be accepted in the

future, but her method of healing by faith, even though it may be by imagination, has acquired a place among the pioneers of psychology, illustrating once more that in the history of the human mind the uninstructed and untouchable impetuosity of a seeming simpleton may do as much for the advance of thought as all the experts of accredited doctrine. The first task of any new idea is to arouse creative unrest. One who overstates his case drives forward, and does so precisely because he exaggerates. Even error, being radical, stimulates progress. True or false, good or bad, every faith that a human being has been powerful enough to force upon his fellows, expands the boundaries and shifts the landmarks of our mental world.”

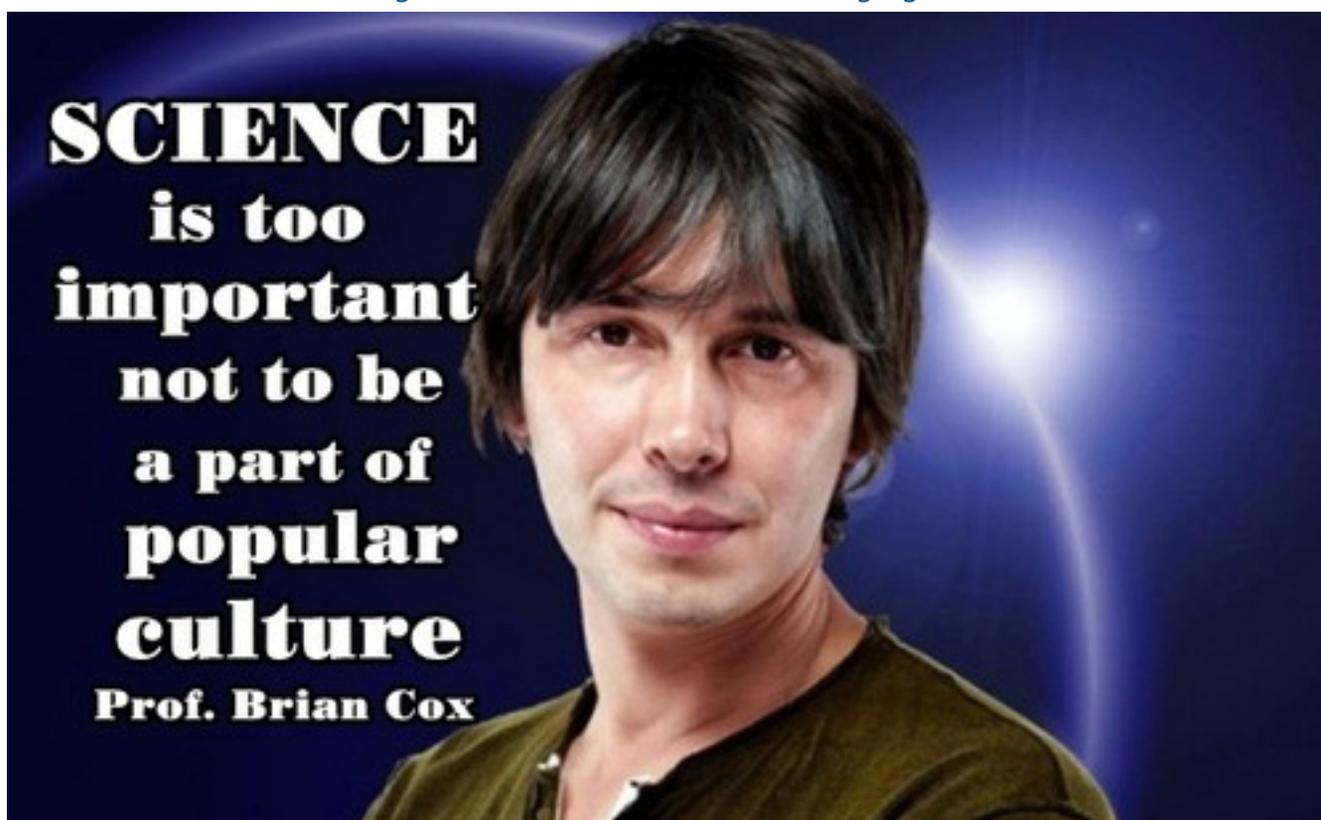
Every new religious school of thought brings the world a new illusion; a new illusionary enrichment of life. At times, even the absurd eventually gains respectability.

It is interesting to note that in a scientifically advanced country like the USA, the population has been so indoctrinated and, that most Christian sects have there origins in the USA. These groups often have preachers who are ill versed in Christian doctrine but well versed in obstinate preaching and fanaticism.





A photo of Dennis Morris standing under the AFA Census advertising sign in Western Australia.



Arab Delusion

By Majid Darwood

I was barely four years old when religion was introduced to me. At that age I was learning to throw and catch balls with other boys in the neighbourhood. I couldn't even put on any clothes by myself, let alone understand anything about religions. She wrapped a sarong around my waist and tied it with a knot so that it wouldn't come off. She then put a shirt on me and slapped a white cap on my small skull. My beautiful mother kneeled and put her arms around me and kissed my forehead. She just dressed me in the traditional way to take me for my first day at the local madrassa to learn the Arabic Koran. Shorts were a taboo, not even for the little kids of my age; both boys and girls were required to cover their legs when reading the Koran. That was the madrassa rule, no one would dare question.

The madrassa I was going to be enrolled in was actually for girls only but they accepted boys up to five. At the age of six, boys were required to join the boys-only madrassa, which was part of the main mosque in our small country town. There a bearded man wearing a white cap who could not understand Arabic taught the boys to read the Koran. He was tough and no children tried to mess around with him.

"Majid you look cute in your sarong and the cap," said my aunty Fathima. "Where is your smile boy" she asked as she walked past us in a hurry to the kitchen. She had a pot of something on the wood fire. My mum knew she was cheeky and expressed a subtle grin acknowledging my aunt's comments. They both knew I was not at all keen to go to madrassa? I was warned by my older cousins that madrassa was not the place to spend our afternoon playing times. Children older than me came home from school in the afternoon and by 3pm they were at the madrassa until 5pm, without a break. Friday afternoons were the sole occasions on which we were relieved of this compulsory routine.

"Majid hold this board with your right hand," said my mother as she held my other hand and guided me on a narrow footpath that led to the madrassa. As surprising as it may sound, I was expected to learn to read a strange language even before I learnt the alphabets of my own mother-tongue. I was too young for schooling, but old enough for madrassa, a local custom not open for discussion. This was my first step to the world of Islam, a.k.a. indoctrination, which dictated my life for five decades.

This girls' madrassa was actually an old dilapidated residential house. A widow in her 60's and her two adult daughters took pride in conducting the read-only Arabic classes free of charge as a service to the community, but some parents made voluntary contributions. The three 'Arabic teachers' themselves knew only to read Arabic text. At this madrassa we were about 75 kids seated on the cracked, cold, cement floor, amongst the ants running around between our legs. We knew they were harmless little creatures.

The boys sat on the veranda facing a busy street while the girls had to stay inside the house. There were several young kids like me who only wanted to run out and play with marbles,. Nevertheless, we sat like angels with our wooden boards resting on our lap. We were shit-scared of the stern-looking women who displayed their authority by wielding metre-long canes and waving them as they walked around. They were in control and meant business.

Younger kids like me often fell asleep with our heads almost dropping on the reading boards. But then we got woken up by yells or the beating canes. I must admit, unlike the girls, boys sitting on the veranda had the advantage of being able to look at the screeching vehicles passing on the road. After a few months, as I became a 'veteran', I began to play games with other boys. While pretending to be memorising the Arabic letters I joined with other

boys to count the vehicles going past the madrassa on either direction. The first person to count 10 red vehicles won the game and we changed colours after each round. Hey, we had to invent some fun at the madrassa?

The wooden board resting on my lap was about 15 inches long and 10 inches wide. It was coated with some white limestone clay mixed with water, which transformed the ordinary wood into a white writing board. On it was written, in home-made ink, the first ten or so letters of the Arabic alphabet. Once we had memorised the first 'page', a new white coating was put on the board and left to dry overnight for the next set of letters. As we moved up a level we were given small Arabic books to read, and finally graduated to be able to read the whole Arabic Koran. This feat could be achieved by about twelve years of age. By then we would also have memorised several of the chapters in the Koran and learnt to pray. The madrassa often conducted Koran reciting contests amongst the senior students. Some older girls would take the challenge and recite as if they were competing in a Bollywood singing contest. Barred from listening to music at that time, this was the best we could get.

The country town I grew up housed Muslims, Hindus and Christians, all living in harmony with no 'trouble' what so ever. The irony was every adult Muslim in that town could read Arabic but they had no understanding of the Arabic language, not even the persons who conducted prayers at the three local mosques.

Only when I was about twelve or so did I realise that the purpose of sending younger kids to madrassas was to introduce Islam, learn to read Arabic and memorise the Koran so that they were able to start the compulsory five times a day prayers. As I began to pray diligently I was a joy to my parents, but I must



admit, some of my prayers during my younger days were primarily to make my parents happy. During my older period I found it annoying that some parents selfishly brought their little boys (three to six year olds) to the mosque for training. These boys were a menace, running around, laughing and talking, disturbing others who had come to pray seriously. I wondered whether God would punish these selfish and arrogant parents.

The Koran was written about twenty years after prophet Mohamed died and it is described as the Arabic record of God's revelations to the prophet some 1,500 years ago. The compilers led by Uthuman (third political successor after prophet died) put the verses together and arranged them according to how they saw fit, undermining the chronological order of God's revelations and the prophet's teachings. Koran comprises of 114 chapters (known as suras) consisting of over 6,000 verses.

Muslims widely believe that Arabic is a complex language and therefore the Koran cannot be translated accurately. Under this pretext, I wonder how many twists have been added to make it look 'good' in the various translations.

In Islam prayers must be performed in Arabic regardless of whether you are French, German, or Chinese. To spread his doctrine, God chose Mohamed, an Arab, to speak to the Arabs in the Arabic language so that they would understand. With that background, when reading the Koran you will realise that it is obvious Koran was not meant for the non-Arabs like myself who didn't understand this 'complex' language. God says in s41:3 "A book where the verses are explained in detail, a Koran in Arabic for those who understand." It clearly means God was speaking to the people who already understood Arabic. Simply put, he was speaking to the Arabs, not for those like me living far away in the Maldives.

In s44:58 "Verily, we have made this Koran easy in thy tongue (referring to the Arabs again) in order that they may give attention to it." In s43:3 "We have made it a Koran in Arabic that you may be able to understand." In s12:2 "We have sent it down as an Arabic Koran in order that you may learn wisdom." In s41:4 "Giving

goodness and admonition, yet most of them turn away, and so they hear not" (referring to the Arabs). In s16:103 "...while this Arabic pure and clear." In s26:195 "In the perspicuous Arabic tongue." In s20:113 "Thus have we sent this down an Arabic Koran and explained therein in detail..." In s42:7 "Thus have we sent by inspiration to thee an Arabic Koran..." In s46:12 "...and this book confirms it in the Arabic tongue..." In s13:37 "Thus we have revealed it to be a judgement of authority in Arabic..."

The emphasis on the Arabic language known to the Arabs was clear cut. Koran was not intended to be applied to the majority of people living outside Arabia speaking a language other than Arabic. If Islam is a religion made by God who has full knowledge of all things (s33:54) then we have to ask why he reinforced, again and again, the Arabic language? I am confused, of the more than 6,000 other spoken languages in the world, why God chose a complex Arabic language to convey his complex and contentious messages? Perhaps, God was an Arab and could speak only Arabic?

Let's get serious. The Koran is an Arabic revelation given to the Arabs who obviously understood their language. Mohamed did not waste his breath preaching the rules of an Arab God to the non-Arabs. He lived at a particular time in Arabia and saw life in a particular way and was influenced by the ways he saw people, places and events. Over a period of about 22 years, he was bluntly making references to the Arabs, not to the Russians, Polish or the Japanese. As the outspoken Bangladeshi, Taslima Nasrin once asked her mother when she was a child, "why can't I pray in Bengali? Doesn't God understand Bengali?" Taslima wanted to pray in her mother-tongue, but her mum wouldn't allow her. Surely God should understand other languages? Or did God, the creator of the book of enlightenment (s22.8), really think that the world was occupied only by the Arabs?

As I grew into manhood, I too wanted answers to many baffling questions, but I was silenced by the elders around me. It appears to me, that this all-knowing God didn't know that, many centuries after the introduction of his religion to the Arabs, a

vast majority of people whose philosophy of life dictated by the Koran would be non-Arabs who didn't understand Arabic.

Muslims are required by the Koran to pray five times a day, facing in the direction of an ancient temple of the Arabs in Saudi Arabia (s2:144) that houses a black stone supposed to have come from God and worthy of kissing. It may have made sense to the Arabs, but not for the non-Arabs living in Iceland or in South America? Verse 6:114 states that "...He has revealed to you this book explained in detail," and yet we the majority non-Arab Muslims don't understand the details.

Let's take the second most important obligation, the daily prayers. The revelations are confusing even to the Arabs. Some of them pray only three times a day, instead of five times? I rest my case.

It is a reasonable assumption that religion may be valid in a particular cultural region, but not necessarily beyond that. The upshot of all this is that you don't need to be Einstein to understand that Islam is a religion made by the Arabs for the Arabs who lived within the Arabian cultural precincts. So, I am not entirely challenging the Islamic doctrine itself but I am simply saying that Islam may have a place in the Arab society and they are entitled to have their own regional religion that connects with their language, culture and their tribal system.

My question is why are we the non-Arabs getting hung-up with this monster foreign religion? It appears that Arabs pushed their religion beyond their borders by successfully pulling wool over the eyes of un-suspecting non-Arabs who now make up the largest proportion of the followers of Islam. Essentially they have indoctrinated a quarter of the world's population to be their pack of mindless sheep.

If we want to be spiritually alert and pragmatic, as emphasised by God many times, we should understand what we recite in our prayers. That simple! If you think about it, reciting verses from the Arabic Koran which we don't understand is not only nonsensical but also just plain unintelligent. Does that mean we, a billion of us, should



go out of our way to learn this desert language in order to worship a desert God? I don't think so. I bet, in any case, if we understood all the verses it is unlikely that we would recite them in our prayers to attain a state of spiritual mind because some of the verses actually mock spirituality. For spiritual wellbeing, it is better to meditate in silence than to utter nonsense.

At times, unknowingly I have called for hatred amongst the fellow human beings in my 'recitals', not be friends with Jews and Christians (s5:51). Would I recite it if I knew the meaning? No chance! Here are few other 'recitals' that poured out of my mouth, fight in the cause of God (s2:190), slay them wherever you catch them (s2:191), kill the Pagans wherever you find them (s9:5), not to pray for forgiveness for Pagans even they be of kin (s9:113), Allah has cursed the unbelievers and prepared for them a blazing fire (s33:64), not to

pray for those who have shown hostility to Islam (s9:84), and so forth.

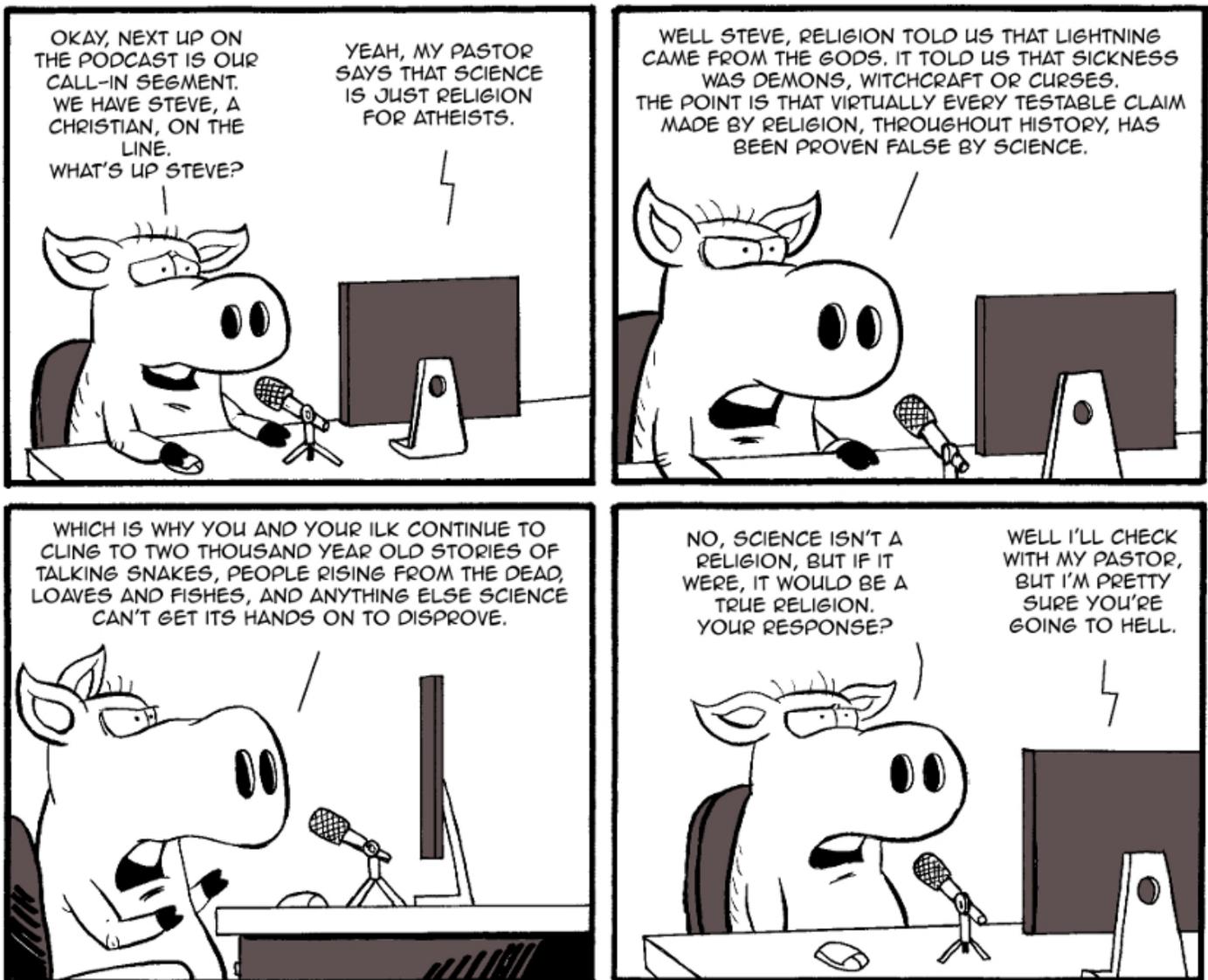
I have also uttered bunkum such as, birds also pray and praise God (s24:41). Ha, this jealous and demanding God couldn't leave the birds alone? I wonder if they also blow up each other and become martyrs? True, our parents and madrasa teachers have told us that it did not matter whether we understood what we uttered in our daily prayers, but now, as an educated adult I cannot live the delusion and allow my life to be dictated by an Arab invented philosophy of life that was meant to reform the Arabs of the dark ages. It took five decades for me to bring a closure to the religion I inherited from my parents. But I am glad I finally realised that the God of the Arabs is mysterious and an arrogant being that I would never want to meet. If there is life after death, I would like to be with Mandela.

To conclude, we became Muslims not with any critical analysis or questioning the philosophy, but by default. Islam was imposed on us at birth, based on the luck (or ill-luck) of the draw in the family we happened to be born into. But as adults, with our education and ability to think, to embrace a religion of the Arabs which we didn't fully understand, transcends the bounds of passive acceptance, and borders on abject stupidity.

This lack of intellectual curiosity and unwavering blind faith and the regurgitation of something that is not even fully understood is a characteristic that typifies the behaviours of many Muslims around the world today. The truth is, I was one of the foolish non-Arabs and a shameless goat, victim of the Arab delusion. This is not something I can be proud of.

Sadly, there are over a billion of us!

THEATHEISTPIG.COM



My Christian Mingle Profile

By Rich Wisken



Find God's Match for You®

Join Free | Member Login

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. - Psalms 37:4

Dear Christian Mingle,

As a fervent believer in the one true God, I assumed your internet dating site would be the ideal place for me to find my future wife. However, just four days after signing up, I received this email from you.

"Anything that can be considered defamatory, inaccurate, abusive, obscene, profane, offensive, sexually oriented, threatening, harassing, racially offensive, or illegal?"

WTF, guys?! You just described the best parts of THE BIBLE!

God LOVES all that stuff, so why on earth would you delete it from my profile? At this stage I have to assume it was all just a big mistake. If that's the case, I forgive you.

Seeing as my original profile is no longer available on your site, I'm going to publish it here so my potential future wife can still view it.

Hi ladies (definitely not men)

My name's Rich, and I'm just a typical old school Christian dude. By old school, I mean Old Testament. Give me the wrath of God over the grace of God any day. Soft New Testament rubbish? Ain't nobody got time for that!

If you enjoy nothing more than kicking back with a copy of the good book and reminding yourself how much of a repulsive, flawed, weak and broken sinner you are, then I'm the guy for you.

Being a decent God-fearing Christian - who lives his life strictly in accordance with the Old Testament - I find it difficult to understand why I've had such difficulty finding a wife. I really don't expect too much from the woman I own; just that she's a virgin, obeys my every command, and realises she's inferior to me in every way.

Anyway, if you'd like to get to know me a bit better, check out my Likes, Dislikes and Hobbies below:

Smite, Infanticide, Sadomasochism, Contradictions, Genital mutilation, Capital punishment, Self-flagellation, Polygamy, Fire, Brimstone, Incest, Rape, Slavery

DISLIKES:

Harry Styles, Justin Bieber, Spicy food, Condoms, Science, Gays, Shellfish, Mixing fabrics, Bacon, Tattoos, Trimming my hair/beard, Blasphemy

HOBBIES:

Golf, Gardening, Bird watching, Tenpin bowling, Pilates, Stoning psychics to death, Murdering those who curseth thy mother and father, Killing those who worship other Gods, Human/animal sacrifice, Executing my neighbours for working on the Sabbath, Murdering homosexuals, disobedient children and babies

So ladies, like what you see? Do you think I could be your special someone? If so, feel free to send me a message, but please, no Beliebers, Directioners, or New Testament time wasters.

...Okay, after reading that again, I'm still struggling to understand why you found it to be unacceptable. Obviously I'm not the only one who feels this way, as I've already received a smile and an email from two eager temptresses. Knowing that real Christian ladies still exist fills me with joy.

From: [ChristianMingle Profile Review Team](#) > Hide
To: [Rich Wisken](#) >

Regarding Your Profile
10 February 2014 1:58 am

Hello Rich,

You recently submitted your profile for approval. It has now been reviewed. Some of the content was removed as it contained:

Inappropriate Language - Anything that can be considered defamatory, inaccurate, abusive, obscene, profane, offensive sexually oriented, threatening, harassing, racially offensive, or illegal needs to be left off of the profile.

Thank you for your understanding. We hope that you enjoy the site. Again, if you would like more information about the site and its guidelines, please visit <http://www.christianmingle.com/terms.html>. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact support@christianmingle.com.

Sincerely,
The Profile Review Team

LIKES:

Taylor Swift, Walks on the beach, Romantic comedies, Poetry, Murder, Genocide, Floods, Droughts, Earthquakes, Plagues, Famine, Racism, Filicide, Disease, Ethnic cleansing, Really big wooden boats full of animals, Paedophilia, H o m o p h o b i a , Misogyny, Torture,

ChristianMingle.com

You just received a smile!

Hey, I just sent you a smile! [Go to your inbox](#) to read it.

Hope to hear back from you soon!

READ NOW!



RichWisken's Profile

Profile Views: 9

No Photos

INTRODUCTION

Edit

Hi ladies (definitely not men)

My name's Rich, and I'm just a typical old school Christian dude. By old school, I mean Old Testament. Give me the wrath of God over the grace of God any day. Soft New Testament rubbish? Ain't nobody got time for that!

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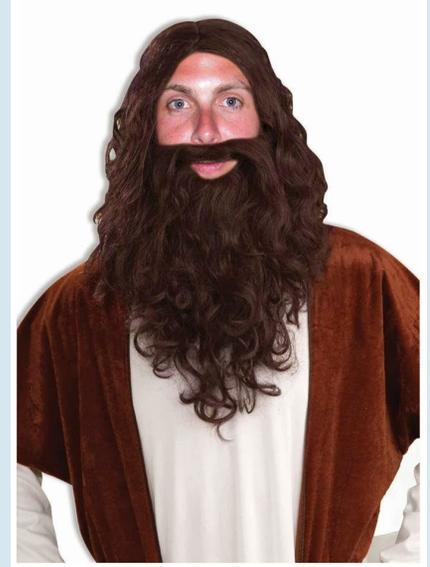
HOBBIES

Golf, Gardening, Bird watching, Tenpin bowling, Pilates

So ladies, like what you see? Do you think I could be your special someone? I hope so. Feel free to send me a message, but please, no Bellebers, Directioners, or New Testament time wasters.

Click Here to Request My Photo

Color Code Display



Above is a screenshot of my profile after you removed all the good stuff. I'm posting it to educate other confused Minglers, who like me, don't know what they can and can't have in their profiles.

Okay, so just to clarify, you're saying that it's definitely NOT okay to:

Like really big wooden boats full of animals, or the rest of the fun, violent stuff in the Bible.

...but totally okay to:

View yourself as a repulsive, flawed, weak and broken sinner.

Own a woman - as long as she's a virgin who obeys your every command, and realises she's inferior to you in every way.

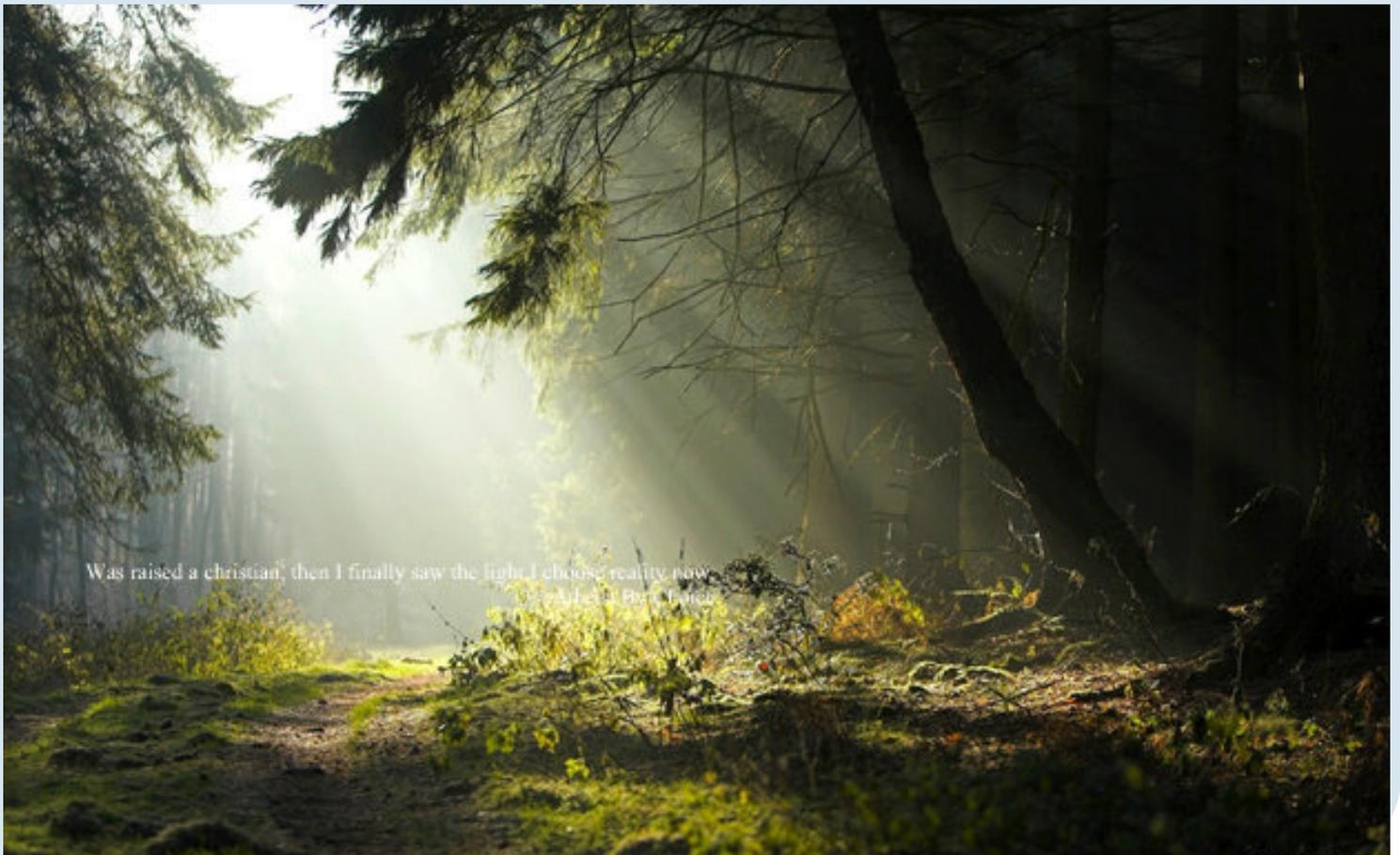
Dislike gays (all of them).

Whilst misogyny and homophobia are all well and good, I'd like to remind you that if the word of God isn't followed to the letter, you'll burn in hell for eternity. Please Christian Mingle, no more cherry picking.

Anyway, please ignore me if the editing of my profile was just an error on your part. If it was, I very much look forward to it being restored ASAP. If it was deliberate, I pray that you all die violent deaths for disobeying your creator.

Devout regards,
Rich Wisken

P.S. Why did you also remove my profile photo?



Going Clear

Interview With Tony Ortega

by *Kylie Sturgess*

A documentary about Scientology is now being distributed worldwide, after screening on HBO in the USA. Written and directed by Academy Award® winner Alex Gibney and based on the book by Pulitzer Prize winner Lawrence Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology and the Religion of Belief* profiles eight former members of the Church of Scientology-whose most prominent adherents include A-list Hollywood celebrities.

It was one of the most talked about films at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, and highlights the Church's origins, from its roots in the mind of founder L. Ron Hubbard to its rise in popularity in Hollywood and beyond. For this interview, I spoke to journalist Tony Ortega about the importance of the documentary – and also about his new book, *The Unbreakable Miss Lovely*, which is about the author Paula Cooper and her 1971 book, *The Scandal of Scientology*.

Kylie Sturgess: Hi Tony. You have taken an interest in Scientology. Is there any reason why Scientology?

Tony Ortega: I'm a journalist and I'd always heard about Scientology. I grew up in Los Angeles. I stumbled across a story in 1995 that involved Scientology. One story led to another. You build a set of sources. I had this never ending desire to keep learning about this fascinating field. Here, 20 years later, I'm still writing about it. I'm probably the only journalist in the world that writes about Scientology every single day at my own website, TonyOrtega.org. It's a breaking news story. Scientology is going through one of the most interesting periods of its history right now.

Kylie Sturgess: You certainly do! We're talking about Alex Gibney's film, "Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief." He's done other award winning films. "Mea Maxima Culpa," which examined child sexual abuse in the Catholic church and "Taxi to the Dark Side," which looked at American military and intelligence services. He's no stranger to the gritty confrontation of reality. What can we expect upon going into this film?

Tony: I tell, that's why I'm so honored that I'm included in this one. This is probably the best documentary maker in the world today. When I heard that he

was working on something in Scientology, I was thrilled. Then he actually asked me to come in for an interview.

I'm really happy that I was able to help him out. This is really his film and Lawrence Wright's film. They use me to talk about some specific issues like Scientology's tax exempt status, the role of Tom Cruise in the church. I was really glad I got to be a part of it.

I think what viewers should expect is a hard hitting film that leaves them with two questions. First of all, why does the Church of Scientology still enjoy tax exempt status today despite all of its controversies? Second of all, when is Tom Cruise going to say something? This film hits him very hard. I was actually pretty surprised when I saw it for the first time.

Kylie: How would you best define Scientology?

Tony: Scientology is a self help organisation that, at a fundamental level, uses some basic psychological techniques that help people become more confident. Their problem is that they promise the moon. They promise superhuman powers if you stick with it and spend money.

People get very involved in it to the detriment of their families and to the detriment of themselves. Scientology

then tries to hide all of that by being very secretive and very abusive to people who leave.

On one sense, it's a self help organisation that's a little out of control. It's a real bully to people, which is why I keep an eye on it. The fact that it has some celebrities involved, I think, gives it a lot more visibility than it would normally have.

It's actually a small group. There's probably only about 40,000 Scientologists in the world but it gets the publicity like it had the millions that it claims to have.

Kylie: This documentary, you've already mentioned how it looks at Tom Cruise. It also looks at people like John Travolta. I found the story of Sara Goldberg and her children particularly emotional. What do you think are some of the main highlights of this film?

Tony: I'm glad to hear you feel that way because I want people to get past the celebrity aspect. Tom Cruise and John Travolta do play an important part in this film but I'm glad that you saw that what this film really wants to get at are the experiences of really intelligent, compassionate people who get involved and then find themselves capable of really horrendous acts in the name of Scientology, one of which is the ways families are ripped apart.



Sara Goldberg's facing an impossible choice. The church essentially asked her to make a choice between her son and her daughter. Why would any church want to do something like that? But that's Scientology.

For me, what made the film so powerful was the way Alex was able to put together this narrative to show how intelligent people fall into this thing, what they're capable of, and what happens after they leave. That arc, I think, should really impress people about the power to harm that Scientology has.

Kylie: Why does it go on? Why have we got this incredible history, which the film looks at? I was quite astounded at some of the aspects of L. Ron Hubbard's life and how they managed to get that much detail. It was astounding in the book by Lawrence Wright, "Going Clear," and then, Alex Gibney's work. What do you think has been some of the main factors that has enabled Scientology to survive?

Tony: Scientology, this is not a group that sits back to find out what its fate's going to be. This is a group that's very active in perpetuating itself. They have a lot of money. They spend it on high priced attorneys in the Department of Justice. They're active in pursuing their goals.

In some ways, in the United States in particular, they have found a way to really bedevil our court system. They've got our court system coming and going. They work actively to make sure that their former members can't speak out, that the government really has nothing to look into.

If you're wondering, "How do they survive?" it's less a matter of whether they're popular or not and more what efforts they go to, to keep themselves secretive and also protected.

Kylie: It's a lengthy documentary. You're one of many people who are interviewed in this film, many coming from different kinds of backgrounds. What can you tell us about the number of people who were chosen to be involved and what they went through to ask to be included and say, "Yes"?

Tony: I think Larry and Alex were

really smart to choose eight important people. The most important people that are being interviewed are the eight former Scientologists. They're chosen not just for their experiences but also the time they cover.

You have Hannah Whitfield, who was actually on the ship with L. Ron Hubbard, helping him run Scientology in the '70s when it was run from the sea. You have Spanky Taylor in the mid '70s who helped bring in John Travolta and provide that celebrity angle.

Then you have Mike Rinder and Marty Rathbun who really helped run Scientology in the '90s. Then you have Sara Goldberg, who just a couple of years ago left Scientology, went through that terrible split in her family.

I think the point of that is Alex wants you to see that Scientology doesn't change. It's still doing the same things today that it was doing in the '50s and '60s. I think he was very smart in choosing those eight people. There are a few other of us in the film, like myself and Kim Masters and Lawrence Wright as journalists, but the heart of the film are those eight people talking about their experiences.

Kylie: Scientology is under increased scrutiny. It's been critically examined. Often it's being laughed at. It's become a punch line in popular media, like South Park. There's public rallies. Now we've got "Going Clear," this documentary after Lawrence Wright's book. What do you think of the future of Scientology?

Tony: Scientology's very good at surviving scandals. The Australian press in particular has been really good at exposing Scientology, much better than the American press.

Kylie: That's intriguing because that's where it's all happening, over there in America. Yet, it's outside that it's getting attention.

Tony: Hubbard really wanted to have a strong presence in Australia. He came to Melbourne in the early '50s. He really wanted it to grow. The press there, I think, is more aggressive than ours. And so, I've been really impressed with some of the work that's been done over there.

The thing about "Going Clear" is that it reaches an entirely different kind of audience. It reaches so many people who normally wouldn't give this a thought and makes them wonder, "How does an organization like this get away with so much today?"

I think that that momentum has really allowed Alex Gibney to get some important people thinking about what should be done. "Going Clear" clearly changes the game. I've been astounded at the response. I think once you see it you'll understand why it's having such an effect. It's not just the information, because a lot of that information has been out previously. It's the way Alex tells this tale. It's spine chilling. I think it's having a great effect.

Kylie: Alex Gibney has already had this film released over in the USA. It was on wide release on HBO television where it made a tremendous impact. I notice people are still talking about it. It's come over here as a documentary that we can see in the theatres. I believe that there's been trouble showing it in the UK. I'm not sure.

Tony: There has been so far...Sky Network was scheduled to show it in the United Kingdom. Only because there have been some changes to the libel laws over there. They found out that in one place where Sky broadcasts, Northern Ireland, has not adapted that new law. Because Sky could not cut Northern Ireland out of their broadcast they couldn't broadcast it anywhere.

I hear that that's still being worked out and that the film will be broadcast in the United Kingdom. Scientology has earned its reputation as one of the most litigious organizations on Earth. In England in particular, it's more difficult to put on a show like this. I think it will get shown eventually.

Kylie: We have a new building that's going to be created by Scientology here in my hometown. Should we be concerned? Should we be all going to see this documentary to learn more?

Tony: I think people should see the documentary to see the total picture, but that particular project is really



bewildering, because at the last Australian census only about 2,000 people identified themselves as Scientologists in the entire country. Yet, David Miscavige has announced that he's opening a new Advanced Org.

He's taking over those acoustic labs in North Sydney, I think it is. This is a \$30 or \$40 million project. Even in their own environmental impact statement they admitted that it would only serve about 70 or 80 people. It's another one of these projects that's purely for show.

David Miscavige opens these new buildings because he gets the press to say, "Oh, look. The church is expanding." There's absolutely no need for this building. He's only doing it for the publicity. It's just strange.

The same thing here in America. He's opened a lot of new buildings and they're completely empty. It's more about a show than serving actual people.

Kylie: You have a book out, as well. "The Unbreakable Miss Lovely." Can you tell us about that?

Tony: Yeah. One of the people who first exposed Scientology and its controversies was a New York woman named Paulette Cooper. She came out with a book in 1971 called "The Scandal of Scientology." She then became the target of the

most notorious retaliation scheme in Scientology history. At one point she was framed for a crime by Scientology and was facing 15 years in prison. She was close to suicide, which they were encouraging.

Her story is legendary among all of us that cover the field. I felt that it was probably worth an entire book. I worked with her for two years. In the spy documents they refer to her only as "Miss Lovely." I used that for the title.

We've been on a book tour recently. Paulette's been coming with me. We've been telling her story to people. It's really been popular. It's, again, "The Unbreakable Miss Lovely."

Kylie: In your opinion, what can people expect to come out with after they've seen this documentary?

Tony: What I always hear from people is that they might have heard something about Scientology. They might have seen a story but they see this film and they're shocked. They're amazed to see the entire picture of Scientology because the story is largely told by insiders. Not just people that were in Scientology but people like Marty Rathbun and Mike Rinder who helped run Scientology and know its most innermost secrets.

Alex Gibney weaves that together in a mesmerizing tale. I think people leave it

angry. Angry that this has been going on for so long and that Scientology spends so much money on PR and litigation that they've been able to get away with things for a long time.

I think people will enjoy it. I think they'll be shocked. I'm looking forward to the response from Australia.

Kylie: People can go to your website if they want a guide to the film or even more detail, can't they?

Tony: I have interviews with each of the people that's in the film at my website, TonyOrtega.org. It's also called "The Underground Bunker." We have something new on the website every day about Scientology. We're covering numerous lawsuits that are happening. We're keeping an eye on this new building in Australia.

Like I said, you have some terrific journalists there who cover Scientology. We're always featuring them. There's a book about Scientology in Australia coming out by journalist Steve Cannae that I'm looking forward to.

There's a lot going on. I hope people, after they watch the film, come to the website. It's got a terrific community of folks who talk about Scientology that are very knowledgeable. We'd love to have them join us.



Six Common Responses

For those Leaving Religion

by *Jim Mulholland*

Jim Mulholland was raised in the Free Methodist church – a conservative evangelical Christian tradition. In 2008, Jim resigned his pastorate, recognizing his lack of belief and religious contentment made it problematic for him to pastor a Christian congregation. Over the next four years, Jim came to realize he was no longer a Christian. He'd become a post-religious person. He has a blog at leavingyourreligion.com

When you join a religious tradition, friends and family gather. There is ritual, ceremony and celebration. People applaud your decision. When you leave your religious community, no one throws you a going away party. There is no formal process, divorce decree or annulment. Some people are embarrassed by your decision. It can be a lonely good-bye.

When I wrote the church that ordained me, acknowledged my disbelief and suggested they rescind my ordination, they didn't know what to do. One denominational leader said, "We've never had anyone give back their ordination." They chose to announce my departure as a career change rather than a theological decision. This deception, bred of embarrassment, further confirmed my decision to leave. This was the first of many instances in which others chose to explain, interpret and redefine my departure from religion in terms they found more comfortable.

Over the past six months, I've monitored the responses of others to my departure from religion. On a few occasions, people have listened carefully, accepted my explanation and wished me well. Far more often, they've offered their own account. Whether from friends, family members, casual acquaintances or even strangers, the responses have generally fallen into six distinct categories.

You must be angry.

In fairness, some atheists are angry. Some people have been victims of religious abuse and rightfully hold a deep grudge against all things religious. I am not such a person. Describing an atheist as angry

is no more accurate and just as offensive as describing an African-American as athletic. The religious image of atheists shaking their fists at God is stereotypical and even absurd. Why would I shake my fist at something I don't believe exists?

The underlying assumption of this response is that my decision to leave religion is emotional rather than rational. It suggests my departure is evidence of some personal dysfunction. Yet those who accuse me of anger would find it offensive if I suggested they were religious because they were lazy, weak-minded, or unintelligent. Here's the truth. I'm not angry at god or religion. I do get slightly irritated at religious people who insist I'm angry.

You've thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

One of my surprises in becoming non-religious was in who found my decision most troubling. Conservatives weren't surprised. They'd suspected I was going to hell for years. My chief critics have actually been progressives. They celebrated my views when I was a radical Christian, but seemed scandalized when I followed the natural evolution of many of my thoughts. They were quick to complain I'd abandoned the good with the bad

Again, this complaint reveals a progressive assumption – that at the core of all religion is an ethic worth upholding. This quote from an earlier post summarizes my response. "If the baby represents what we consider most important and valuable, I hold onto my

baby as tenderly as anyone. There was a day when that meant authentically embracing religion. There was a time when that involved passionately believing in god. Those days are gone. Today, the demand or expectation that I continue to claim those allegiances is the bathwater. My personal integrity is the baby."

You really still believe.

I've been surprised by how many people simply refuse to accept my disbelief. Of course, I can remember refusing to accept the homosexuality of my friends. Years ago, I fixed them up on dates, convinced they simply hadn't met the right man or woman. Looking back, I realize I wasn't doing this to make them happy, but to make me more comfortable.

Those who insist I really still believe are suggesting they understand my psyche better than I. When I admit to some hope in a cosmic connection, they want to identify that as a belief in god. It isn't. God, by definition, is a spirit, being or entity. I don't believe in that idea any longer. If you insist I really believe in god, you're calling me a liar.

You're weakening the faith of others.

Religion has always utilized guilt. Some accuse me – since I was a respected Christian leader – of damaging the faith of others. When I ask those with this complaint, what I should do with my disbelief, they often respond that I should have kept it to myself. Ironically, they never complained when I publicly acknowledged my faith.



In one of my blog posts, I wrote, “Since becoming non-religious, I’m increasingly aware of such double standards. The religious have long benefited from the uneven application of these standards. Indeed, most religious folk are completely oblivious to their religious privilege. When I asked my critic whether they’d been bothered by my years of vocal and public ministry, they said, ‘That was different.’ But, of course, it isn’t. That was the same behavior they now disliked, only in a religious form.”

You’ll regret this someday.

I’m never certain what to make of this response. From some, it seems genuine concern about the possible consequences – in this life and the next – of my disbelief. In the mouths of others, it sometimes sounds like a threat. In every case, I suspect the other person regrets my decision more than I do. I don’t have any regrets about being religious and about leaving. I can honestly say I’ve lived

my life with as much integrity as I could muster. When I was religious, I was fully engaged. When it no longer worked, I was willing to change

Your atheism is a religion.

This is perhaps the oddest response I receive, though I find it a common accusation by religious folk. Some seem more comfortable if they can redefine atheism – a disbelief in god – as another religion. If so, my departure is less threatening. It’s not that I don’t like baseball. I’ve simply decided to cheer for the Cubs instead of the Cardinals.

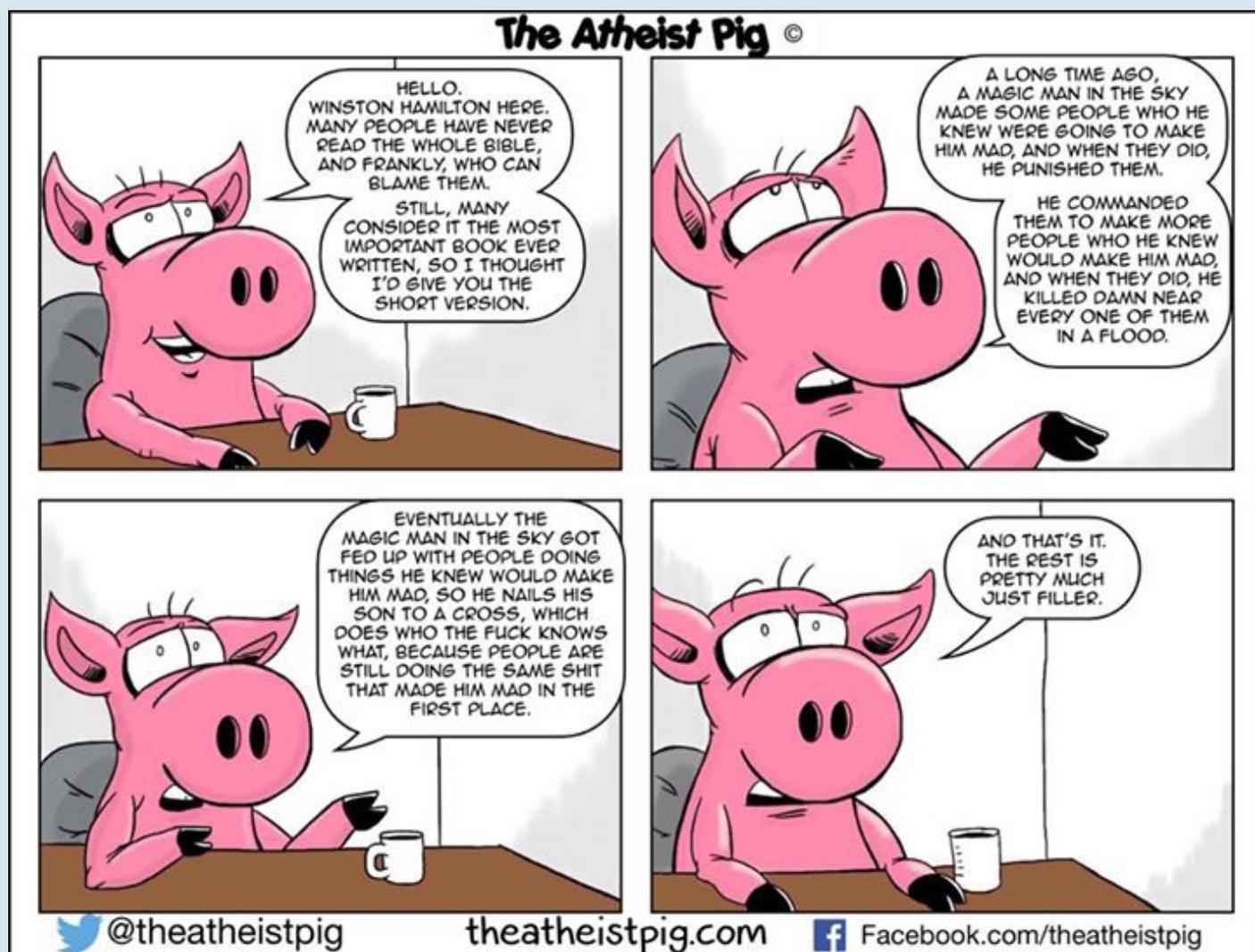
This is not the case. Before leaving Christianity, I seriously considered other religious systems. I thought briefly of becoming a Buddhist. In the end, what I rejected was not simply Christianity, but the idea of religion, of seeing the world through a spiritual or supernatural lens. My atheism is not a religion, but the absence of one. Though I may still

use religious language, exhibit religious forms, or even imitate religious practices, this is not evidence of a new religion, but of my difficulty in abandoning the old one.

Why I Left.

In one of my earliest blog posts, I explained why I left religion, wrote a book and alienated friends and family. Though I’ve learned to accept the unwillingness of some to accept my explanation, here it is again in a few words.

“After testing various responses, I found the simplest to be most honest – religion didn’t work for me any longer. While this reply didn’t always please friends and family, they understood it. Everyone has had something fail. When that something no longer works, there are two options – repair or discard. My friends and family had watched me tinker for years. If I couldn’t get it to work any longer, they knew it wasn’t for a lack of trying.”



Hypocrisy of the Pharisees

by Mike Meyerson

The character of Jesus is outspoken in the Christian Bible on the matter of hypocrisy and castigated the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Consequently ministers of Christianity often preach on the topic of hypocrisy making reference to passages in the New Testament in which Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. If we are to accept Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees as valid, it is then fitting to analyse how the behaviour of a group comparable to the Pharisees, such as, Christian clergy compare. The comparison of the two groups is based on Jesus' castigation of the Pharisees as described in Matthew 23.

Jesus and How the Pharisees Treated Workers

Jesus accused the Pharisees of making people lift great loads on their backs and of not assisting in the labour. He criticised the Pharisees for making others work excessively hard and for being unsympathetic to their plight.

"They make up heavy loads and pile them on the shoulders of others, but will not themselves lift a finger to ease the burden" Matt 23:4 REB.

How Priests Have Treated Workers

The clergy were keen supporters of slavery. I can find no record of the clergy assisting the slaves in their labours. They were unmoved by God's warning, "Whoever kidnaps someone, either to sell him or to keep him as a slave, is to be put to death" Ex 21:16 GNB.

Church leaders accumulated enormous wealth trading in forced labour and human misery. The Anglican church owned its own slave trading station in the Bahamas. The Church strenuously opposed the abolition of slavery. In more recent times the Catholic Church enslaved young women in the Magdalene laundries under abysmal conditions.

Jesus and How the Pharisees Dressed

Jesus complained that the Pharisees were

too ostentatious in their dress. He felt that they drew too much attention to themselves by enlarging the small leather boxes, (containing scriptural verses), which they bound on their foreheads and arms. He also considered the borders of their garments to be too wide.

"Whatever they do is done for show. They go about wearing broad phylacteries and with large tassels on their robes" Matt 23:5 REB.

How Priests Dress

The popes, cardinals, bishops, monsignors and others have set standards of pomposity in dress that render the Pharisees dull by comparison. The clergy dress up in ostentatious robes, gold for the pope, (a huge, gold mitre atop his head), flaming red for cardinals, deep purple for monsignors. Their clothes have wide borders. The Protestant clergy are also ostentatious in their dress.

During processions the pope used to be sheltered from the sun by a canopy of alternating gold and red stripes. The canopy was held by attendants. The pope was transported on a throne, carried by 12 footmen in red uniforms. Attendants carried fans made of ostrich feathers. (Wikipedia). Today the pope is transported in one of three custom made, Mercedes Benz vehicles, or "popemobiles".

Jesus and the Seating of Pharisees at Feasts and Prayer

Jesus objected to the Pharisees being seated at the best places at the feasts and in the chief seats in the synagogues.

"They love to have the place of honour at feasts and the chief seats in synagogues" Matt 23:6.

Priests and Seating Arrangements

The priests sit in elevated positions at the front of churches. The pope addresses his audiences from an even loftier height, and is usually seated in a chair indistinguishable from a throne. The priests are not known

for making themselves inconspicuous.

Jesus and the Use of the Word 'Father'

Jesus objects to the use of the word "father", claiming that there is only one "Father" and he is in heaven

"Do not call any man on earth "Father", for you have one Father and he is in heaven" Matt 23:9.

Jesus disapproves of the Pharisees being referred to as "rabbi" – meaning "teacher". He claimed that there is only one Teacher.

"They love to be greeted respectfully in the street, and to be addressed as "rabbi". ..But you must not be called "rabbi", for you have one "rabbi"... Nor must you be called "teacher"; you have one Teacher" Matt 23:7,10.

Priests and the Word 'Father'

The priests are comfortable being referred to as "father". The word "pope" is derived from the Latin "papa" meaning "father". The pope is not only referred to as "father" but is called "Holy Father".

Priests maintain the convention of calling those who teach, "teachers". In keeping with convention the priests call their fathers "father".

Jesus and Pride

Jesus complained that the Pharisees lacked humility.

"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" Matt 23:12.

Priests and Pride

Priests are not known for humility. Popes consider themselves superior to all others, claiming not only that everyone is subject to their authority but that they can be judged only by God. They consider themselves to be infallible and above the law claiming that their authority can be traced back to Peter himself. They supply no evidence for this self exalting claim.



These are the words of Pope Stephen, "The popes, like Jesus, are conceived by their mothers through the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost. All Popes are a certain species of Man-gods...all powers in Heaven, as well as on earth, are given to them." (The Quotable Atheist-Jack Huberman)

Many priests have unashamedly raped children entrusted to their care. Their colleagues have arrogantly covered up for the crimes of their fellow clergymen. The Church has belatedly apologised for these crimes but only in response to public outrage and legal action.

The clergy persecuted Galileo for pointing out the true relationship of the earth and the sun. Pride resulted in a delay of 350 years in making a half-hearted apology.

Jesus and the Pharisees in Heaven

Jesus claims that the Pharisees prevent people entering the kingdom of heaven, while they themselves will be unable to enter on account of their hypocrisy.

"Alas for you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of Heaven in people's faces; you do not enter yourselves, and when others try to enter you stop them" Matt 23:13.

Priests and Heaven

If, as Jesus claims, indulging in hypocrisy bars one from heaven, then no priests would be admitted. The Pharisees will not be alone in their exclusion.

Jesus and the Praying Pharisees

Jesus maintained that prayer should not be done standing in buildings of worship or on street corners. Prayers should be said privately in a room.

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in synagogues and at street corners for everyone to see them" Matt. 6:5.

"But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret" Matt. 6:6.

Praying Priests

The priests pray in an ostentatious manner. They pray in ostentatious buildings where they can be seen by all.

They pray standing, sitting and kneeling.

Jesus and the Fasting Pharisees

Jesus complained that when the hypocrites fasted they did so with sorrowful expressions. Jesus felt that when his followers fast they should do so happily. At the same time they should anoint their heads and wash their faces.

"When you fast do not look gloomy like the hypocrites: they make their faces unsightly so that everybody may see that they are fasting...But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that no one sees that you are fasting" Matt 6:16,17,18.

Priests Fasting

Jesus insisted that his followers when required to fast, do so, but not in the manner of the Pharisees. Whereas the Pharisees observed the fast days the priests have, by and large, dispensed with the rigours of fasting.

Jesus and Charitable Donations

Jesus considered that the Pharisees were too open about their donations to charity. He felt that these contributions should be made secretly.

"So when you give alms, do not announce it with a flourish of trumpets, as the hypocrites do in synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others" Matt 6:2.

Charitable Acts of Priests

The priests have accumulated enormous wealth for the Church. Much of this wealth has been stolen from innocent people who were frequently tortured and murdered on trumped up charges of being witches, heretics or blasphemers. Much of the Church's wealth has also been given to it by the poor. The clergy have given little to alleviate the suffering of the poor.

Jesus and the Robbing Pharisees

Jesus accuses the Pharisees of robbing widows of their homes and then saying long and insincere prayers.

"Alas for you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You eat up the property of widows...You will receive the severest sentence" Matt 23:14

Robbing Priests

The priests created widows, widowers and orphans on an industrial scale. They tortured and robbed the innocent taking not only their homes but also their money and valuables. They then took their lives. This lucrative industry of theft, torture, and murder, known as the inquisition, was managed by the church. The inquisitors included clerics such as popes, bishops, friars and priests. They presided over a period of human misery from 1250 to the mid 19th century. They were also responsible for the witch hunts during which they tortured, and frequently raped their female victims before burning them alive. It was not until 1816 that the Catholic church officially condemned the use of torture. (Sam Harris-The End of Faith). The ministers of the inquisition hypocritically intoned prayers while torturing and killing their victims.

Jesus and the Proselytising Pharisees

Jesus berates the Pharisees as hypocrites claiming that they travel vast distances to proselytise, and in so doing they condemn those who convert to damnation.

"Alas for you, scribes, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to win one convert; and when you have succeeded, you make him twice as fit for hell as you are yourselves" Matt 23:1.

Proselytising Priests

Proselytising has been zealously practised by priests. Great multitudes were encouraged to convert to Christianity frequently at the point of a sword or the threat of burning at the stake. Many were killed for refusing to convert.

Consider a situation in which a missionary priest crosses oceans and countries to convert, say, Buddhists. He presents his case to a devout Buddhist. The Buddhist, an intelligent and logical man, decides to read the Christian scriptures and the history of the Church for himself. He finds some problems. He cannot come to terms with the claim that the only way to salvation is through belief in the priest's god, and that those who do not believe in this god are hell-bound no matter how good they may be. He feels uncomfortable that his Buddhist friends, relatives, and all ancestors would not be with him in heaven. He is disturbed to find that although the priests say their religion is about love and peace, their scriptures have many violent passages.



He discovers that the Christian God says that he is not come to bring peace but a sword. Matt 10:34. The God also encourages hatred of one's own family Matt 10:35,36 and the God's prophecies are not reliable. Matt 16:28

The Buddhist examines the history of Christianity and discovers a horrifying story of forced conversions, theft, torture and murder. He declines to join the followers of this religion.

From the perspective of the priests this good and devout Buddhist is now doomed to eternal damnation. The missionaries, including clergyman, have set out in their thousands, crossing seas and countries to spread the word and convert people to Christianity. In so doing they have, according to their understanding, knowingly condemned millions of people to eternal damnation.

Annie Dillard makes a similar point: "I read about an Eskimo hunter who asked the local missionary priest, 'if I did not know about God and sin, would I go to hell?' 'No', said the priest, not if you did not know'. 'Then why', asked the Eskimo, 'did you tell me?'" (The Atheist Bible)

Jesus and Justice, Mercy and Honesty

Jesus admits that the Pharisees pay a tithe of mint, anise and cumin but admonishes them for their failure to obey the important teachings of the law such as justice, mercy and honesty.

"Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin; but you have overlooked the weightier demands of the law— justice, mercy and good faith. It is these you

should have practised, without neglecting others" Matt 23:23 GNB.

Priests and Justice, Mercy and Honesty

The priests have shamelessly disregarded the notions of law, judgement and mercy. They ignored the commandment not to kill. They unjustly tortured, killed, raped and plundered for centuries during the crusades and inquisition.

They dishonestly propagated repugnant slurs, such as the blood libel, ritual murder and desecration of the host. They falsely accused innocent women of being witches before killing them. Mercy was not a consideration.

The priests extorted money from naive believers through the sale of indulgences. They unjustly and cruelly persecuted and murdered the men who first translated the bible into English.

They dishonestly retarded the progress of science by forcing men such as Galileo to retract their astute observations. They refuse to accept the validity of Darwin's work in the field of natural selection. They have discredited condoms as a protective measure against AIDS.

They castrated choir boys in order to preserve their pre-adolescent voices for singing at church services.

They have a record of sexually abusing and raping innocent children entrusted to their care. Their colleagues often collaborated by dishonestly protecting the criminals in their midst.

Priests of charismatic churches carry out faith healing services, dishonestly

claiming that they can cure a multitude of disorders including cancer.

Jesus and the Pharisees Tombs

Jesus castigated the Pharisees for making fine tombs for prophets and decorating the monuments of people who had lived good lives.

"Alas for you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build up tombs of the prophets and embellish the monuments of saints" Matt 23:29.

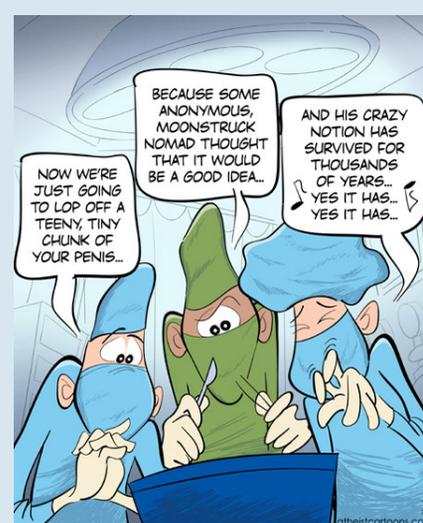
Priests and Tombs

The priests approve the most ornate and decorative monuments as final resting places for the dead. Westminster Abbey is a familiar example amongst thousands of such monuments. British royals are traditionally buried in resplendent mausoleums such as the Royal Mausoleum on the Frogmore Estate. The Vatican has many such monuments.

ANALYSIS

I have shown using Jesus' standards as a yardstick, that the hypocrisy of the priests far exceeds that of the Pharisees. The crimes that the priests have committed against humanity are, moreover, of a magnitude that renders the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, hardly worth mentioning. It should also be noted that while the crimes of the priests are historically documented, there is no historical record confirming the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

There is, however, a question that remains to be answered. Is Jesus himself a hypocrite? We have a right to expect that those who accuse others of hypocrisy are not themselves hypocrites. But is this the case? That is for another article in the next issue.....



Book Review

By Janine Gebert

One can often sense a feeling of apathy among the non-religious -- from mere skeptics to hard-line atheists. It's a state of lethargy that can possess those who assume Australia will evolve naturally to a 'secular reality' simply by osmosis; or that concerted action is unnecessary as religious dominance will eventually wither without intervention.

That's why we need new books to be written that remind us, and in clear detail, why it's essential to reinvigorate the debate on what needs to be done -- and how. And this is the key ingredient; "how".

Two new books fit the bill on that score. The first is Professor Peter Boghossian's, 'A Manual for Creating Atheists', with its Socratic techniques to engage the faithful, and how to undermine their fundamentally flawed faith. Many will have attended Boghossian's dynamic presentations as he toured the country in June and July.

But the second book, 'Sacred to Secular' by Brian Morris, also provides a timely call to action, based on his expertise in journalism. Morris makes the point that, "too many good books have identified the myriad problems of religion but very few address the critical issue of what we then need to do about it." And there's another connection between the two authors, apart from 'action' aspect, as Peter Boghossian provided the principal review for Brian's book. Others include Dr Meredith Doig, Hugh Mackay and Dr Paul Willis.

Morris also stresses that while the current national focus is on Islam, together with the climate of fear generated by the federal government, it is the covert machinations of Christianity that present the greatest unreported threat -- certainly in the areas of education, commerce, politics and the entire socio-political agenda.

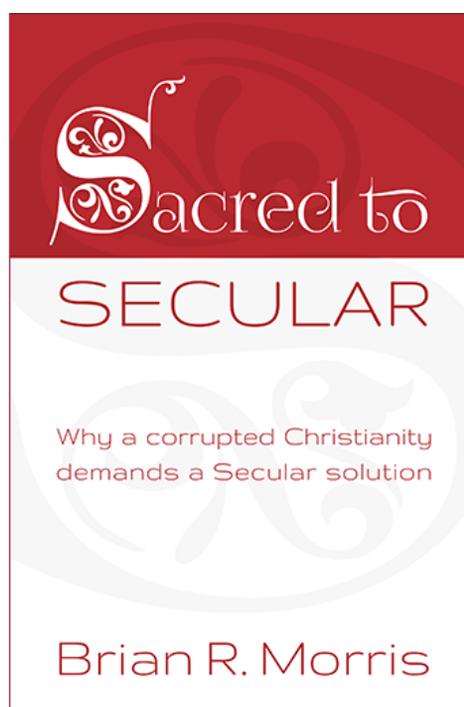
The book paints a progressive narrative, touching briefly on the development of Christianity, how religion remains embedded in society, and the harm it continues to inflict. There are detailed specifics on the rise of evangelism in schools and the arrival in Canberra of the 'Prayer Breakfast' phenomenon. The concept reflects an American model

puts Christian affiliation at an inflated 61.1%. The chapter reflects on changes foreshadowed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the 2016 Census, and the campaign that will be required to challenge any attempt by the federal government to reverse the ABS recommendations for change.

Throughout the narrative, Sacred to Secular points to the social benefit already achieved by the successful societies of Scandinavia, with specific details of how they consistently score at the top of every Human Development Index (iHDI -- adjusted for inequity). Being more than 80% secular, the Scandinavians tick every box from a nationally high IQ to the lowest crime rates, all by comparison with countries of high religiosity.

But in Chapter 9 Morris brings to a head a set of 25 secular issues, by no means an exhaustive list, and suggests a variety of options for individual or group action. He argues for moving Australia toward the clear examples set by countries including Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The book's layout and style makes it easy to read and Morris perhaps succeeds in his aim of making the text relevant for a broad range of readers. It's easily accessible to those who are newcomers to atheism and secular politics -- it's written in an informative style that's not overbearing or couched in academic terminology. But the book is also relevant to hard-nosed atheists. Not only is it a good overall 'refresher', it provides interesting insights and covers some new ground in secular politics. But the crunch, "hopefully" says Brian Morris, is to overcome apathy and instill some motivation with 'Strategies for Action', in the first section of the Appendix. The book is available through many outlets which are listed on the Plain Reason website -- www.plainreason.info -- and it's reasonably priced at \$25.



started by a sect known as 'The Family' and whose philosophies underpin the Tea Party -- the right wing Christian movement that has strangled the political process of Congress. Canberra may well be viewed in a similar light.

While the 'God' question is placed into perspective in chapters 5 and 6, and chapter 7 provides insights into religion from the perspective of neuroscience. There's an analysis of recent research and the effect of altered brain chemistry relative to a person's religious belief. The question of faith itself it also tested.

Another section investigates the astronomical financial and political benefits that accrue to Christianity from the artificially high Census figure that

Media Releases

2015 Budget Continues Chaplain Double Dipping

The Atheist Foundation of Australia (AFA) has examined both the Government's 2015 Budget, and the Opposition's Budget-in-Reply.

On the secularism front, one aspect of both is particularly disappointing – the continued wasting of the tax dollars of all Australians on the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) and its army of evangelising amateurs.

The Budget confirmed that funding for this program will continue to the tune of \$60 million a year for four years – nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in total. The Budget-in-Reply was largely silent on this issue, leaving Australians to conclude that the Opposition would similarly continue with this funding waste.

What else could a quarter of a billion dollars be used for? By comparison, the Budget allocated only \$16.7 million over 3 years to addressing the real and urgent issue of domestic violence in Australia. That's less than \$6 million a year, or less than 10% of the NSCP yearly budget.

Surely addressing that issue with \$240 million would provide a greater tangible benefit to Australia's children (and their families) than the NSCP.

“There haven't been noises from various quarters about ‘double-dipping’ around this Budget, while many appear to ignore the most blatant double-dipping of all.” AFA President Michael Boyd noted. “Churches and religious bodies already share in \$30 billion per annum in religious tax concessions, and represent some of the wealthiest groupings in our community. Yet they put their hands out again, expecting taxpayers to pay \$60 million per year to fund their covert religious recruitment efforts aimed at our schoolchildren”.

The AFA calls on both the Government and Opposition to use precious taxpayer funds to address real problems, rather than waste them propping up the NSCP.

Michael Boyd
President, Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Congratulations Ireland

The Atheist Foundation of Australia (AFA) congratulates Ireland for becoming the first country to move to marriage equality via a popular vote. With voter turnout at extremely high levels, including expatriate citizens flying home just to vote, and a resounding 62% voting in favour of equality, Ireland has set an example for the rest of the world to catch up with – including Australia.

AFA President Michael Boyd commented that this strong endorsement was achieved in the face of a concerted campaign against the proposal, with the Catholic Church at the centre:

“Historically, Ireland has been a deeply Catholic nation. The comprehensive rejection of the ‘No’ case, which was spearheaded by those religious interests, represents a massive loss for the Church and demonstrates their gross over-estimation of their own importance and influence.

If a nation like Ireland can so emphatically discard and disregard religious indoctrination and scare campaigns to achieve marriage equality... there's hope that Australia can follow suit, one day soon”.

At least the majority on the “No” side had the good grace to accept the Irish people's verdict and to congratulate the “Yes” campaign on the monumental achievement. Unlike the Australian Christian Lobby, whose media response was disappointing and insensitive for its churlishness, pretense that “Australia [is] different” from Ireland, and predictable resort to slippery-slope fallacies, misrepresenting the basics of the “Yes” case and elevating so-called “freedom of religious conscience” above equal rights for other human beings.

Most importantly, our congratulations to a wonderful group of Irish family members, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and people – who at long last will have the same right to marry the person they love, that everyone else takes for granted. Australians deserve no less, and the AFA calls on all sides of politics to move beyond pandering to narrow religious interests and proceed towards marriage equality here.

Michael Boyd
President, Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc



Media Releases

Resisting Equality

The Atheist Foundation of Australia (AFA) welcomes the US Supreme Court's decision that marriage equality applies across that nation.

Of particular note was the majority finding that denial of marriage equality was inconsistent with the fundamental principle of "equality under the law". While Australia doesn't share the US Constitution, it certainly shares a similar principle as a keystone of our legal system and human rights framework.

Foreshadowed resistance to the decision by some US states, officials, and politicians – to cease issuing all marriage licences, to tie up implementation in "procedural matters", etc – has been nothing short of petulant and absurd. Much of it has been couched in terms of "religious freedom" – which in this case means the freedom to impinge on the legally confirmed rights of other humans.

If only Australia was immune from that type of petulance and machination.

In a similar vein, the AFA unequivocally condemns the Sydney Catholic Archdiocese's reported attempts to secretly strong-arm Australian businesses and organisations who have come out in public support of marriage equality.

Their letter (as published) issued none-too-veiled threats about the Archdiocese being "a significant user of goods and services from many corporations, both local and international", and reminds that "many of the Catholic population of Sydney would be your employees, customers, partners, suppliers".

It goes on to obliquely demand that those companies reconsider their public support for marriage equality on the spurious grounds of "over stepping their purpose". Has the purpose of religion suddenly become to achieve victory by whatever Machiavellian tools they can muster?

Lessons should have been learned from the society-wide revulsion at their hardball tactics against vulnerable abuse survivors, brought to light by the Child Abuse Royal Commission. Sadly, those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them. The Catholic letter clearly comes across as yet another attempt by the church to unethically silence, bully and intimidate others for its own benefit. It seems that the mea culpas and protestations of rediscovered humility as a result of the Royal Commission revelations were completely hollow.

"After calling for attention via veiled threats, the letter attempts to blind with statistics, noting that Catholics are 26.7% of the area covered by the Sydney Archdiocese, and questioning whether support of marriage equality is really representative of each business' diverse stakeholders." commented AFA President Michael Boyd.

"They're deliberately ignoring this statistic: a 2014 Crosby-Textor poll found that 72% of Australians supported marriage equality, including 67% of Australians who identified as Catholic. And this poll was long before the moves towards marriage equality in Ireland and the US, which would be a positive influence here."

"So, the ones who are being 'unrepresentative' in this debate are the Catholic Church in general, and the Sydney Archdiocese specifically. In their mounting desperation to prevent marriage equality in Australia, they are not even representing the clear majority view of their own parishioners accurately, let alone wider Australian society."

The AFA applauds Maurice Blackburn and the Football Federation of Australia, who have both publicly stated that they will not be backing down on their support despite the Catholic Church's letter, and we call on other Australian businesses and organisations to follow suit.

Michael Boyd
President, Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc



A Lesson in NSW Religious Ethics

The Atheist Foundation of Australia (AFA) is taken aback at revelations that the NSW State Government is seeking to remove any reference to ethics classes on school enrolment forms, after intense private lobbying from religious interest groups.

What sort of “ethics”, religious or otherwise, are being modelled for our children by the following actions, as reported in the media?

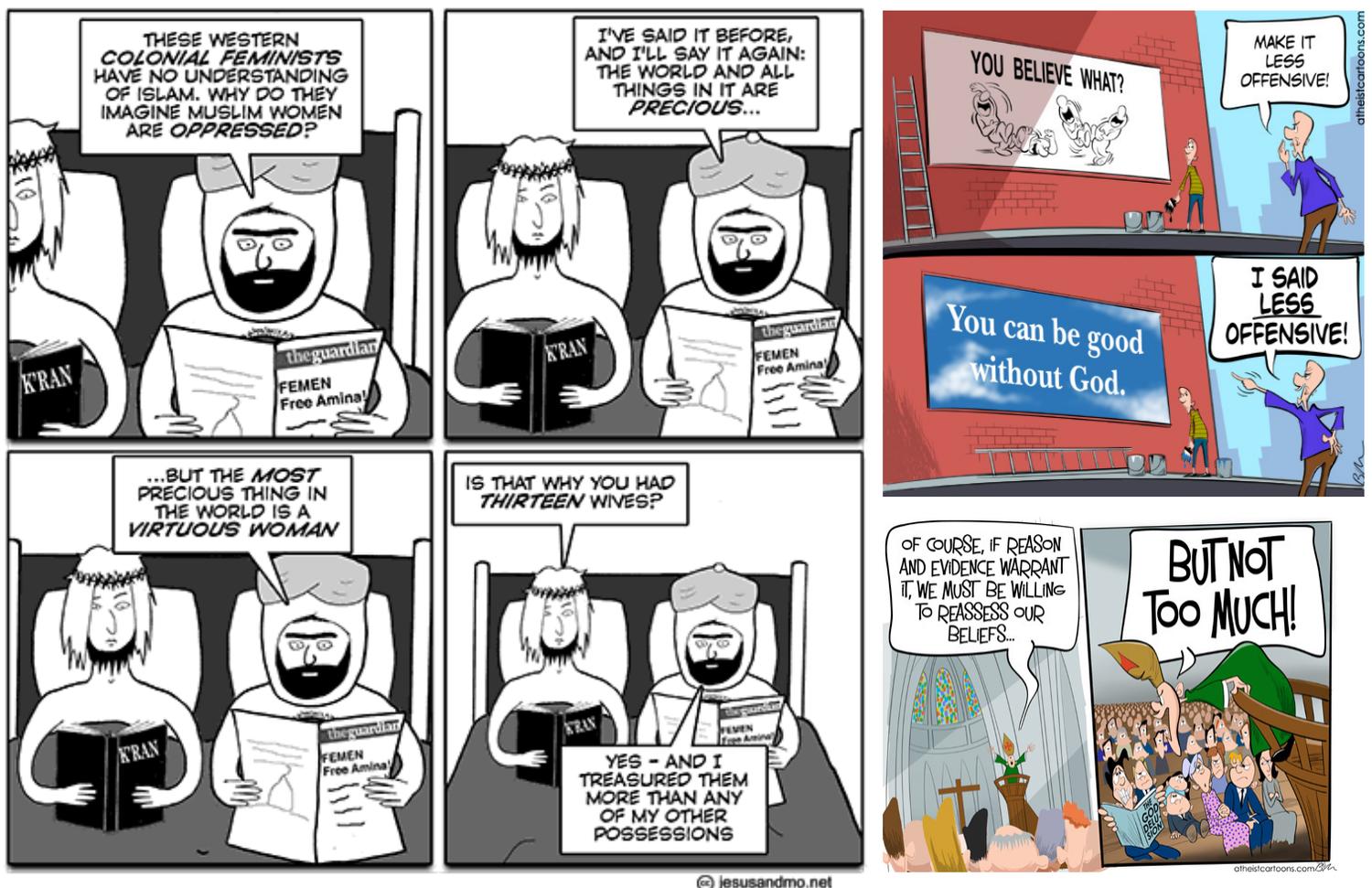
- Despite (or perhaps because of?) the demonstrated popularity of secular ethics classes, the government will start hiding information about their availability, once again privileging religion in a secular society.
- While religious interest groups had access and input into changes which will benefit them, the Minister apparently did not consult or meet with parents or ethics classes providers – along with children, those who will be most affected by this change.
- Rather than the government being open and upfront about their specific intentions, parents and voters found out about this via a Freedom of Information request.
- To remove alleged “confusion”, the ability for parents to opt-out of SRI will apparently be severely curtailed, and the option of ethics will not be mentioned at all – surely causing further confusion for parents as to whether the option is available at all, and undermining informed parental choice.
- No real reason has been given as to why these changes are needed. What is the alleged “problem” that these are intended to fix? That secular ethics classes have become too popular?
- While all parties to this deny any connection with Fred Nile’s support for legislation, it is difficult to see this as anything but an attempt to curry favour with Mr Nile to prompt his party’s support for the government’s legislative program.
- AFA President Michael Boyd said:

“It seems that the NSW government actively wants to put more religion back into public schools in an increasingly secular 21st century Australian society, when parents have resoundingly voted for the secular ethics alternative. What is the government afraid of?”.

The AFA calls on the NSW Government to stop trying to preference already privileged religions by stealth, and to maintain a policy of enabling parents to make a fully informed choice at all times – including about opting-out of SRE, and the availability of secular ethics classes.

Michael Boyd

President, Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc



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Atheist Foundation of Australia

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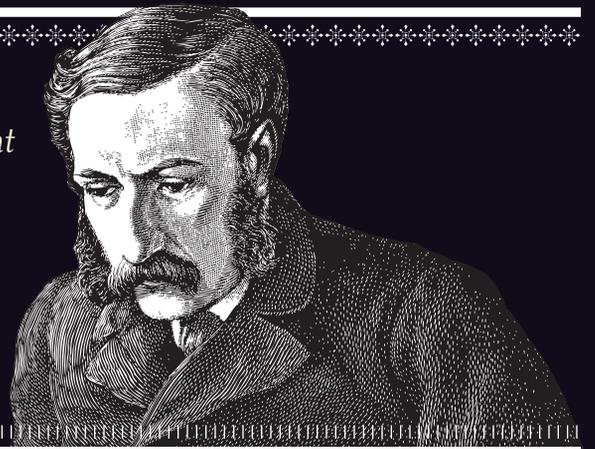
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However long Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians struggle to find multiple meanings in this text, the dominant seems to be this: Abraham's unquestioning willingness to heed gods command to sacrifice the thing he loved most is what qualified him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