

# secularworld

A Positive Voice for Atheism

Third Quarter: 2016



ATHEIST  
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INTERNATIONAL

FOR A SECULAR WORLD

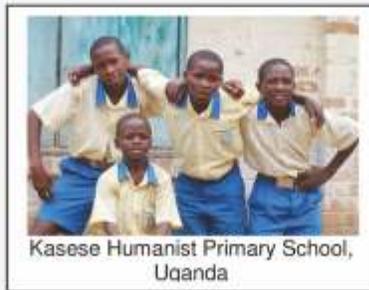


# If Atheists Speak But No One Notices, Are We Making A Difference?

It's not enough to simply espouse a naturalist view based on science and reason. The **AAI Foundation**, an internal program of Atheist Alliance International, supports educational and community improvement projects - including through international exchanges - and advocates on behalf of atheists facing discrimination around the world, particularly in developing countries.

The AAI Foundation sponsors and supports a number of activities around the world:

## Humanist Schools in Africa and Asia.



AAI has been an active sponsor of humanist and secular schools in countries where religious organizations control the majority of educational institutions. AAI and its partners provide a secular alternative to focus on critical thinking, science and reason in a naturalistic and nontheistic worldview. **Since 2009, these schools have served over 1,200 children.**

## Legal assistance and family support for atheist discrimination and oppression.



Alexander Aan is an Indonesian man who was attacked by his neighbors, fired from his government job, and then arrested by the Indonesian police and convicted with a 3-year prison sentence for 'inciting religious hatred' after posting 'God does not exist' on his personal Facebook page. AAI covered Alexander's legal costs and provided family support while working with local human-rights groups to campaign for his release, for a change in Indonesian law and to fundraise to assist with his family's ongoing expenses while Alexander, the family breadwinner, languished in prison.

## Relief assistance to countries and regions devastated by natural or man-made disasters.



Since 2010, AAI has organized relief efforts with our affiliate groups and raised thousands of dollars for natural disasters that have befallen communities around the world. Per Robert Ingersoll: "Hands that help are better than hands that pray."



## Overseas social work project sponsorships

## Scholarships for the next generation of humanist leaders in indigent countries



**The AAI Foundation exists to improve the quality of life for communities through the application of critical thinking, science and reason. It is through your support that this important work continues.**

**[www.AtheistAlliance.org/Activities/AAI-Foundation](http://www.AtheistAlliance.org/Activities/AAI-Foundation)**

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A Positive Voice For Global Atheism

Third Quarter : 2016

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ATHEIST  
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FOR A SECULAR WORLD

# Letter from the President

## ONUR ROMANO

It is with deep gratitude that I offer a heartfelt 'thank you' to our supporters, members, volunteers and friends of the Board of Atheist Alliance International, who have placed their confidence in me to lead AAI as its incoming president. First, I'd like to thank Stuart Bechman who had served AAI since 2009 and also inspired me to volunteer for AAI in 2015 for all of his services and the vision he preserved and passed on. I would also like to pay respect to our past and present board members who set a great example in our efforts of supporting organized atheism. Finally, I also would like to thank our former president Christine Shellska who helped a lot during this transition and honored me by accepting to continue in the Board for another term. I am honored and excited to see what is possible for this global alliance fighting for a secular world.

As the annual general assembly of our organization comes closer, we should look forward at our agenda with greater respect and admiration. It is time now to co-author the next chapter of AAI's story.

Looking ahead, my vision for AAI is that we will become:

- An organization where there is a strong focus on both education and the development of atheist thought and where excellence is expected and not an aspiration;
- An organization where outstanding will power is combined with an ability to inspire our volunteers to higher achievements;
- An organization that values creativity, innovation, and the entrepreneurial endeavors of its member organizations, individual members, supporters, volunteers and directors;
- An organization where local, national, regional and international groups and organizations are the focus of our



endeavors and their success is the major outcome of a well-connected and supportive atheist community;

- An organization whose culture is inclusive, its people diverse, and its accomplishments more than the sum of its parts.

In short, we will be the premier global organization that is in collaboration with other organizations that support the advancement of human rights.

All of us need to write that next chapter because it is only by working together that we can realize our goals.

First, we must ensure the success of our members by offering them a well-connected international free-thinking community. This will include making policies in a discipline of our members' choice and that will allow them to grow as organizations, develop an appreciation of the accomplishments of others, and start on the path that will allow them to become leading NGOs in their regions.

Second, we must continue to build the visibility of our organization as a premier global alliance across the world.

Third, we must build a community that supports the achievement of our goals. We must ensure that the alliance values all of its members—and that diversity and inclusion are hallmarks of our community.

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

And fourthly, we must grow. Growth in all areas is necessary: in membership numbers, stature, policy making, scholarships and research, and pride. This includes pride in the accomplishments of our member organizations, individual members, supporters, volunteers and directors.

Our future is tied to strong enrollment and our continued ability to attract some of the best and brightest organizations and researchers from around the world. I ask for your help to identify individuals and organizations who could benefit from Atheist Alliance International's lens and to tell AAI's story with pride. I also ask our member organizations, let us know when you do something exciting so that we can share it proudly across the institution.

In the years ahead you will hear me use the words 'celebrate' and 'share' together. We have much to celebrate—recognition, achievement, accomplishments,

and services we provide. It is important that we share that news across the world so that we all know the breadth of our success.

And so when people ask you about AAI, let them know that our organization is indeed known for building a stronger and well-connected international atheist community. But AAI is also known for issuing recommendation letters to UN for atheist asylum seekers, participating in collaboration with other organizations on joint statements, awarding scholarships, facilitating development of humanist focused secular schools and running fundraising campaigns for various causes. AAI also holds a United Nations Special Consultative Status and we facilitate policy making, advancing researching, publishing reports, petitions and sponsoring events. Indeed, we have much to celebrate—and to share.

Our path is clear. Let the next phase of our journey begin. ▲

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# Become a **Supporting Member** of **Atheist Alliance International**

**Supporting AAI means promoting naturalism, science and reason while challenging and confronting religious privilege and discrimination against atheists and religious minorities around the world.**

AAI's projects include **funding new groups and conferences, school and social service projects**, bringing attention to **religious discrimination**, as well as **legal and asylum support** for those targeted by religious bigots.

**AAI operates entirely through the support of our members.** Even more, if you live in the US, your donation to AAI is fully tax-deductible.

**AAI members are also invited to directly participate in projects supported by AAI around the world**, whether it be teaching or assisting a primary school class, participating in a speaking tour on atheism & humanism, or working with one of our affiliate groups to improve the local quality of life.

**Your monthly contribution helps AAI sustain and expand our programs.** Join our team and know that you are making a difference in challenging religion and expanding freethought around the world!

**All members receive** members-only access to the AAI website | Freethought Audio Library e-version of *Secular World* magazine (printed copy at additional charge) | *Imagine!* quarterly newsletter

**Monthly memberships include a printed copy of *Secular World* magazine**

**Thanks for your support! Together, we'll create a sane and rational world!**



FOR A SECULAR WORLD



**atheistalliance.org**

# Letter from the Editor

**RUSTAM SINGH**

I'm constantly questioning myself and I hope this is common with everyone whether the world is getting increasingly more anti-scientific and more violent against atheists, or am I just growing up and becoming more aware of things that have always existed? Maybe it's just evolving, because modern societies have at least enabled even the most conservatives to be aware of the fact their actions and vocal representations of bigotry will be countered with an equal if not more lawful action and representation by liberals and rationalists, so they want to advance their toxicity through different mediums. While we are undoubtedly in the peak of scientific progress and the most aware of the world we share with nature we have ever been in human history, we're also battling the primitive plague of religion that refuses to adapt and advance, thus deleting even the trace amounts of moral guidance it might have provided during the time it was first adopted. Fear and more aggressive defence for outdated belief systems are the breeding ground for bigoted cultural-political leaders today, which when given the right kind of power, convert a social evil into a law, further fanning the flames. A long term cure would definitely be making sure rationalists are voted in power, but a quicker solution even if not as efficient would be to persistently be a voice that counters bigotry in every form wherever we see it.

As I write this from India, we are witnessing terrible atrocities smudge the public's consciousness daily in our headlines. Spread of irrational belief systems are not just contained in hippie YouTube videos of individuals running a mom and pop business selling their obnoxious concoctions for a "natural" aphrodisiac or "super foods", but have trickled down mainstream into our belief systems and even textbooks. When fundamental education, most crucially high school level education is infiltrated with altered historical accounts, anti-scientific teaching that favours traditionalism, a progressive future is instantly jeopardized. From firm beliefs that ancient Indian texts predicted just about everything important (which sounds straight out of an



*Ancient Aliens* episode), completely accurate astrology, head transplants between an elephant and a human to advance metallurgy and even nuclear war machines decades before a flushable toilet, a fierce sense of traditionalism and rabid nationalism has been given a far bigger priority in my country than scientific progress. Using typical reverse engineering methods that Islamic scholars use, or creationists use, Hindu or Vedic science believers have managed to convince themselves that their holy book had predicted or makes sense of all the big questions in life which are by any logical measure are completely refuted by undeniable laws of science today. While this is the trend globally in every country, what's really odd here this belief system is not just backed by extorting the audience's religious upbringing, but also challenging their pride for their country. You seldom see creationists argue fiercely over how their silly beliefs are actually fundamental core beliefs of America itself and denying them would make you anti-American. Similarly, you rarely see paedophilia supporting Islamic clerics supporting that their Islamic science is synonymous with their Middle Eastern country's beliefs and disagreeing with them makes them anti-national. However, in India, for some strange reason possibly from a post-colonial hangover, Hindu/Vedic science is interchangeably used as Indian scientific belief systems (according to these religious scholars) – and disagreeing to it makes one a traitor to the nation.

Sadly, judging by global standards of how rationalists and atheists are treated, I can't help but feel a little bit privileged. My neighbours in Bangladesh are witnessing what appears to be a state funded or systematic ignorance of the murders of freethinking bloggers at a number that's been persistently increasing. As the holy month of Ramadan glows in its glorious representation of *The Hunger Games*, we are reminded to not be politically correct and call out for the bias expressed by Islamic nations, where merely drinking water or having food in public (even on the terrace of your own private house) if you're non-observant Muslim can put you in a serious spot. As much as we would want the support of liberal theists, it is important to understand that religion cannot be cherry-picked to suit the parts that we like, or want to believe. By definition, as is described in every religious text, you either accept the whole package, complete with its ancient beliefs, bigotry and hatred or reject it completely (and face a threat to your life in some nations).

I would love to dream of a world free of bias, where everyone believes what they want to, no matter how silly, except for children or matters of national security and where the government gives no special provision to religion and doesn't adopt a state religion. However, that's far from anywhere in the world currently, because as an intelligent species, humans are terribly flawed. We have to understand that for every Muslim terrorist, there exists at least hundred times as many very liberal ones, or those that keep their views to themselves. For every anti-abortion, gun yielding, wall supporting Christian, there would be a hundred more that really just want to lead a normal life where everyone does their own thing. For every anti-rational, excessively patriotic, caste supporting and anti-beef Hindu, there would be at least a hundred more that could not be less bothered about those trivial issues. For every Khalistan supporting, paranoid about body hair, sexist, conservative Sikh, there would be hundred others that laugh off any politically incorrect Sikh joke. For every Buddhist that got violent, there would be more that spend their life preaching peace. These flowery statements are actually undeniably true, and if they weren't there would be a World War 3 going on to verify. There is no argument in saying that a majority of current active religious people are non-violent.

Clearly, those that choose to stick by their holy book to the most conservative translations of their texts are the ones we may label as dangerous to society. Having multiple scripts and translations and sub-divided cults and castes even in religions that explicitly prohibited any further divisions doesn't help the equation either. The real question here is,

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

are these fundamentalists any more wrong than those theists liberals claim that they are right in their interpretations? All religious texts explicitly state that their holy book is the only correct one, and since the books are finite in text, their explanation should also be finite. Therefore, there can only be one corrected answer. Who gives the authority to those individuals that only see the positive passages in the text and call the rest obsolete metaphors over those that choose the violent texts and call them their motivation? There can be two logical approaches here. One, you believe both views are wrong, and viola, now you don't believe in your religion and if that's your case, congratulations, you've walked towards the atheist side (we have gluten free cookies that still taste great!) Two, you question how can a book that claims to be the finite and ultimatum answer to all life questions can have contradictions, and then congratulations you're questioning religion, and might just end up being an agnostic, which is a great place to start.

However, as atheists, we need to understand the support liberal theists give us in our journey towards a rational, equal and God-free society. A secular world will not be free from religion, it will be free from public policies that favour religion and have no official religion in power, politics, laws, education, healthcare or social strategies that favour any religion. People will and should still be allowed to believe in whatever lunacy they want to, but in the privacy of their own homes and not effecting children or public policy. Seeking support from liberal theists, such as LGBT Muslims, or LGBT and abortion rights supporting Church groups, or beef eating and atheist rights supporting Hindus, or anti-fundamentalist liberal Sikhs would highlight our cause with greater acceptability and passion. While we do so, I believe it is still important to stand our ground and not succumb into believing that the entirety of any religion is good, as much as they'd like us to believe. Individuals can be good and these individuals can be religious or atheists, but religion by itself is only toxic to our growth, conscience, intelligence and struggle for equality. Thus the age old quote, to hate religion and not religious people is ever so important to be reminded. However, it's also important to pick our battles.

Massacres like those in Orlando highlight the need for us to urgently address the fundamental oneness that religion has separated from us over the years. LGBT rights, women rights, or minority rights are inalienable human rights that should even be brought in debate or negotiation, because they are fundamental, non-negotiable human rights. This is of course accompanied by other human rights such as the freedom of speech and abolishing blasphemy laws and the

### KASESE HUMANIST PRIMARY SCHOOL

- A Project of the AAI Foundation -



<http://kasesehumanistschool.webs.com/>

Located in rural East Uganda, the Kasese School has been supported by AAI since 2008 and has provided a secular education based in science and reason for over 3,000 students.

90% of the schooling in Uganda is provided by religious organizations. The Kasese Humanist Primary School is unique in providing a Humanist education.

Your support allows us to underwrite the costs of schooling for rural students, including books, teachers, meals, and dorm rooms!



Thank you again for your ongoing support!



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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

only way we can gain a momentum towards it is showing the terrorists and conservatives that for every hate their spew we've got more love to spare. If terrorists can utilize the power of social media to their evil motives, we too can portray our passive aggressive resistance through the same by showing a safer and liberal alternative for a start. By adopting minorities or people that feel left out of the system in regular portrayals in our cultural media, we help bridge differences and misconceptions about their communities, thoughts, beliefs and lifestyles. While we mourn one individual's hate crime possibly (arguably) motivated by religion in Orlando, we also rejoice Mexico's celebration of a historic advancement towards legalizing same sex marriage.

One can argue how hate crime in all its painful forms has roots arising from religion, and that being an atheist will not automatically make one immune to bigotry. On the surface definition of the belief system of atheism, this is correct. However, I also like to think that being an atheist one has already rejected a major form of moral a vast majority of the world population is still handcuffed to, and that's a great start. This provides a safe ground to assume one would be open to debate and logically debate moralistic stands on important humanitarian topics instead of using a fictional book to argue against them. If you're an atheist, that also means you're not following any cult that says you're

spiritual, "looking for energy of the universe", or into alternative religions. While it doesn't conclusively say you'll now be a rationalist too, it is a very likely place to be. From here onwards, whether you chose to be an active humanist, rationalist, nihilist, skeptic, or even a racist - would be entirely on your hand, minus religious motivation. Of course, if you identify as secular, you also understand that being secular is about distancing yourself from every religion and religiously motivated bigotry, discrimination and bias, thus also naturally adding a zeal of humanitarianism to your character.

For this edition of the Secular World magazine, we share stories of AAI's past, present and future including atheism in Georgia, the irony of believing there's a loving God while there are people starving, a response to a condescending letter by a Christian to an atheist, details on the dysfunctional atheist law in Ireland and a talk on Islamic beliefs.

As always, I encourage your feedback, constructive criticism and hate-mail, all of which helps us decide what content you'd love to read in the next editions of the Secular World magazine.

Thank you.▲

**Know of atheist discrimination?  
Oppression against nontheists?  
Atheist Alliance International**

The Freedom of Thought Report

A Global Report on Discrimination Against Humanists, Atheists and the Nonreligious



[www.FreeThoughtReport.com](http://www.FreeThoughtReport.com)

# An interview on Atheism in Georgia & AAI's Future

Atheist Alliance International's President Onur Romano recently gave an interview for a documentary which talks about AAI's past, present and future with a focus towards our work in Georgia and his experiences as an open atheist-activist in Turkey. Here are some excerpts:

**Tell us about who "Atheist Alliance International (AAI)" is comprised of?**

Atheist Alliance International was founded in 1991 to build a secular world where public policy, scientific inquiry and education are not influenced by religious beliefs, but based upon sound reasoning, rationality and evidence. AAI's mission is to challenge and confront religious faith, strengthen global atheism by promoting the growth and interaction of atheist/freethought organizations around the world and to undertake international educational and advocacy projects. AAI was granted special consultative status by the United Nations in 2013.

**What inspired the inception of AAI?**

The need for a global federation of atheist organizations and individuals world-wide, committed to educating the public about atheism, secularism and related issues inspired the

initial inception of the Atheist Alliance in 1991. In order to make a change in the rest of the globe, especially in certain regions, we need international support and unity if we want to be heard. Joining forces and exchanging ideas about each other's agendas is important. The way I see it, the founders of the alliance have agreed that existence of an international alliance is one of the most important steps.

**What is the objective of AAI for the future? Where do you see AAI in 10 years?**

AAI may be one of the oldest and the biggest international atheist alliance as of today, but I picture AAI as a much greater alliance 10 years from now. I believe the top three objectives would be:

- Supporting our member organizations with their initiatives,
- Investing more in research and education,
- Being able to award many more scholarships such as the scholarship awarded to G.K., a 19-year-old HIV-positive single mother of two based in Kampala, Uganda.

We also want to expand our presence at the UN – producing more oral and written statements, as well as collaborating on the same with other like-minded organizations who tackle issues of common interest. We are planning to put together an Atheist UN-Network, to be launched this September. We want to expand our Asylum Project. We have been overwhelmed with requests, and we are currently working to streamline the process.

We want to expand our educational outreach. The Guatemala Project on critical thinking led by the BC Humanists is a good example of what we can accomplish by expanding our network of associate and affiliate organizations. As we gather more organizations, we will have more opportunities to, for example, fund initiatives like our initiative for Kasese Humanist Primary School in Uganda.



## Has members of AAI faced threats by religious communities?

I can't speak on behalf of anybody except myself in terms of our Board. I have received many death threats. If the question is expanded to include our individual and organizational members, then yes, many of them have received hundreds if not thousands of death threats. However, as the founder of some of the affiliate members of AAI, I can tell you that receiving death threats are part of the game if you are an openly militant atheist activist.

If you live in Turkey as a militant atheist activist, it is a normal part of your daily life to face discrimination, violence or social ostracism. That's what you sign up for in the name of making a change. Of course, I have been through very similar experiences as well even though I come from a considerably secular family. Some of my extended family members still try to keep their distance with me because of my (infidel) views.

**Since the independence in 1991, has the persecution of vocal atheists in Georgia increased? If yes, is it by a specific community of religious people or are all religious communities involved in persecuting irreligious/atheist people?**

According to the 19th article of the constitution of Georgia, all people in Georgia are entitled to enjoy the freedom of speech, thought, consciousness, confession and belief. Yet, the situation has changed for the worse since the independence. In the first few years, in times of the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, about 30% of the population were still atheists, due to the communist propaganda that worked during the previous 70 years. Yet, as almost a fanatic believer himself, the late Zviad Gamsakhurdia was very active in linking the Georgian national idea with the Georgian Orthodox faith, trying to oppose the communists in all the battlefields of ideology. The process was facilitated by the "baptism" of Shevardnadze, who, formerly an atheist, a high rank communist and a Minister of Foreign Relations of the USSR, has converted to Christianity to gain political support. Another major factor for this was Shevardnadze's long lasting friendship and collaboration with Ilia II, the Catholicos Patriarch of All Georgia, who stayed in the office during all these years until now and gradually won the support of the Georgian masses by being successful in the unsuccessful country.

The cooperation of the state and church reached its apogee in 2002 (again during the last term of Shevardnadze), when a concordat between the state and the church was registered in the constitution. The constitution recognizes a special role for the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and

## AAI LEGAL / SUPPORT FUND

**- A Project of the AAI Foundation -**

There are places in the world where being "out" as an atheist – or, for that matter, even expressing open doubt about the dominant religious



Alexander Aan, Indonesia

faith – makes you a target of violence and incarceration.

AAI receives pleas from atheists and skeptics every month seeking protection and asylum assistance and who have few other



Raef Badawi, Egypt



Ghazi Beji, Tunisia

help as it can through its affiliate groups. Our legal support fund provides legal assistance to those

arrested and asylum support to those seeking to find safer sanctuary.



Rimsha Masih, Pakistan

The demand for such services far exceeds our resources and

rely solely on contributions from our supporters. Please consider contributing to the AAI Legal / Support Fund, a project of the AAI Foundation, to continue to provide help to those in need.





**Katskhi pillar and church, where the climbing club was suppressed**

made it *primus inter pares*, the GOC was liberated from taxes, and it received the right to be present in the matters connected with education, property, matrimony, culture, armed forces, prisoners and even production. The state undertook the obligation to “remunerate” to the church the losses it suffered during the 70 years of USSR, thus declaring itself the heir of the USSR, which it should not be. In this way, the constitution of Georgia became inferior to the eponymous document of 1920, when the church and the state were completely separated.

Since then, the government pay some fabulous sums of 20-30 million Lari per year to the church. The GOC becomes a great economic and political power, and tries to intervene in the totally secular matters of the state. The number of atheists has diminished to 0.7 % and 0.6%, according to the last two censi (in 2004 and in 2014, respectively).

Certainly, we can assume that atheists are more “persecuted” now than back in 1990s, but facts are very scarce. Recently, a boy, younger brother of a Facebook friend, an atheist, his surname being Abzianidze, was bullied in school. A lecturer, Mikheil Khundadze, giving a lecture about Nietzsche on a public street, was stabbed in his chest with a knife by a local guy in November 2015. Fortunately, the wound proved not to be fatal, but he had to be hospitalized. Usually in Georgia the form of confrontation of the believer societies with smaller non-believer groups or individuals takes the form of discrimination, not persecution. Georgians have been reproached, scalded, not employed and the likes if they do not belong to a major

group.

Some specific communities tend to be more aggressive, such as the Orthodox Parents' Union and Father Basil Mkalavlishvili's congregation, and some other church officials were also noticed in such activities to more extent than others. A priest, Theodore Gignadze seems to be involved in the “ideological” battle with atheists and his videos are popular on YouTube where he insults atheists stating they are “fools”. Two other priests were judged for the violence on 17th May 2013, named, Antimoz Bichinashvili and Iotham Basilaia.

**Although Georgia is very young, and is considered a secular nation, how often does theocracy interfere with secular laws?**

Well, I'd say that not Georgia, but the last republic is young. Georgia has a long history of being a nation state, going back to the times of Alexander the Great. During these times, theocracy had become the offender of secular laws many times. It is said that in the 5th century, King Vakhtang Gorgasali (the founder of Tbilisi, the capital) tried to fight against corruption in churches. The story goes that the Archbishop Michael, during their meeting, kicked king Gorgasali in his mouth, breaking his front teeth!

Another story in the official history books is that, King of Georgia, Ashot I Curopalates in the 9th century was in an affair. The church intervened and took his mistress away from him, locking her up in a monastery, despite the fact that the king loved that woman madly and even tried to



**Father Maxime Kavtaradze enjoying the view from Katskhi Monastery**

return to her.

Only the great king of Georgia, David IV (the Builder) was able to perform reforms and make the church serve him, appointing his people at high positions in the church in the 12th century. In these times, Georgia was an ally of crusaders, and even Georgian monks were taking part in battles against invading Muslim coalitions. Such a unison was rewarded and Georgia became a local hegemon country, staying victorious for 150 years and entering its Golden Age. The victory of the secular power was not long and the supremacy was disputed many times in the history again.

In the 18th century, Anton I, the Catholicos Patriarch of Eastern Georgia, declared the greatest poem ever written in the Georgian language, Shota Rustaveli's "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" to be Satanic and publicly threw old manuscripts and some printed copies of this 12th century poem in the river. Due to such religious persecution, the oldest copies preserved nowadays pertain to 17th century and older manuscripts were lost, though the poem should have been rewritten many times during five centuries in the meantime.

During the times of Tsarist Russia, when Russia annexed Georgia in 1801, lots of the treasure of GOC was carried away to Russian museums and private collections. In the USSR, after invading the Democratic Republic of Georgia by force in February 1921, during the first years of rule of communists in 1920s, the GOC was utterly offended. Churches were destroyed and used as stables. Priests were shot to death. The Catholics Patriarch Ambrosi Khelaia, who stayed loyal to the independent Georgia, was tortured and imprisoned by communists. As the modern day Georgia is the heir and successor of the old kingdoms of Georgia and of the Democratic Republic of Georgia of 1918-1921 and not of the USSR, Georgian nationalists still respect the personalities of those church leaders who remained loyal of the nation state of Georgia and fought against all kinds of invaders including Russian communists. That's one of the political reasons why it is difficult to propagandize atheism in Georgia, as this is the same idea which one of the most acutely hated invaders carried with them.

Most of the more recent cases of theocracy interfering with the secular rights are milder and are not connected with direct human victims. Apart from those presences which we mentioned, i.e. constant presence in the sphere of



**Father (Reverend) Giorgi Razmadze's estates (or may be nunnery) and church. This has been the official who has just caused the shutdown of the metal music festival in Tbilisi**

education, land-owning, ceremonies, culture, defence and penitentiary systems, and even in economy, there can be mentioned the famous case of 17th May 2013 that was the interference of the church in the right of LGBT community to express themselves publicly. In some of his Christmas epistles Ilia II has declared that Mtskheta (one of the religious centres of Georgia) is a holy town and no atheists can live(!) there. He also mentioned that the children conceived by artificial methods are deprived of love and will not grow up normally, which is just ridiculous. When the Parliament discussed certain project laws, the priests were sitting in the Parliament trying to lobby the law (on the protection of religious sentiments, suggested by the Ministry of Internal Affairs!) sometime in 2014-2015. The bitterest cases, in my opinion, were the cases of interference of some of the priests into the process of elections in 2012, trying to influence the congregation members who were also electors and to make them vote in favor of the new political force, the party of "Georgian Dream" which holds the office as of today.

It seems that now with the upcoming elections we should expect the presence of the "theological factor". This would be with minor interferences, such as grabbing new lands and estates just for the symbolic price of 1 Lari by GOC which happen almost every other day and the power of GOC is still growing.

I'll cite several recent cases of this month: a mountain

climbing property near Katskhi pillar and monastery was seized by GOC because it was too near to the monastery and the services were disturbed by noise. A metal music festival was ruined in Tbilisi because of the activity of the church leader and congregation. But what about other religious communities and all their attempts to influence the secular sphere that are intensively opposed by GOC in the first turn? For example, when Muslim communities wished to build new mosques in Batumi, GOC organized protests to oppose this idea through demonstrations.

Another recent case, this time, had a political character: Archbishop Eliah preaches his congregation not to watch the opposition's political TV, Rustavi 2, and just to say "away with Satan" when occasionally browsing their TVs to that channel. Rustavi 2 supports the nationalist party "National Movement" that had the notorious conflict with Russia known as "the five day war of 2008" and lost the war and then the power, too, in 2012. It is strange that the Church works in good tandem with these political forces which try to keep peace with Russia or are openly pro-Russian. It seems that the most popular views in GOC during last 25 years is collaboration with the bigger neighbour due to the fact that Russia is also an Orthodox country, despite political controversies as two regions of Georgia remain occupied by Russia since 1992-1993 against all international treaties and despite the fact that Georgia's sovereign territories are recognized by the United Nations and by most of the

countries all over the world.

### **The blasphemy lawsuits you faced in Turkey, are they still ongoing issues?**

Yes, the blasphemy lawsuits I am facing are still ongoing cases. It is not only blasphemy lawsuits they have charged me with but have also brought several other lawsuits.

I am being tried because of

(A) my social media posts and (B) Various public speeches for

- 1) Insulting religion (blasphemy),
- 2) Insulting the president of Turkey,
- 3) Insulting the prime minister of Turkey,
- 4) Insulting the police and the armed forces of Turkey and
- 5) Insulting the statehood and the justice system of Turkey.

They are suing me for a total of 44 separate public speeches and social media posts. I am not going to go into the details, but I will give you some examples so that you can have a better idea. One of the charges are because of a speech of mine on a TV show I attended to represent the Association of Atheism, Turkey where I compared Koran and the Incredible Hulk as story books. Another charge is a Facebook post where it says 'There is no god. Religion is a lie.'

One of the charges is for insulting the Turkish armed forces and the police forces. How? Because I posted stuff like A.C.A.B. (all cops are bastards) during the 2013 Gezi resistance movement which I was a part of. Some of them are in a slightly more aggressive tone towards the current Islamic administration of Turkey, the president, prime minister, head of the bureau of religious affairs, etc. as you might as well already predicted.

### **Your move to Canada -- is it in any way related to being persecuted in Turkey?**

I was planning to move to Canada for my post-grad and PhD studies anyway, but only for a few years to study. However ten days before I was about to fly to Canada, I found out about the blasphemy cases being brought, so it was either going to court for my public speeches or taking the plane. I took the plane!

I think I might even be applying for an Asylum to Canada under these new circumstances. I don't think I will be able to go back to Turkey ever again even to visit, since the public prosecutor's office brought five separate lawsuits against me ten days before I was about to leave for Canada. Quite surprisingly they brought all of the cases and charges on the same week which means that the preparation of these

'parallel' court cases have been going on for some time now.

I guess I have been subject to such special treatment because I am one of the well-known figures of the first atheist organization in Turkey and the Middle East. After the research they did on me, the Turkish Police visited the headquarters office of Ateizm Dernegi (Association of Atheism, Turkey) in Istanbul in late January looking for me and told volunteers in charge at the office duty that day that I needed to visit the Police Headquarters to answer some questions. So, I asked my lawyer to find out what is the deal. I have consulted many lawyers and all said "run if you can" after they reviewed the papers. They said it might take them a long time to fight these cases but I will most likely be found guilty at the end of the day anyway. At least from some of them if not all.

Most likely, I was to be detained during trials which usually takes over 1 or 2 years. Being detained during trials as such is almost like a standard procedure in Turkey, especially if you have insulted the president. There are many journalists and academics (professors) doing time even today just for that very same reason. Quite ironically they are also suing me for criticizing such a justice system.

It was very exhausting to pack all of my moving boxes so they can be shipped and say my goodbyes to everybody in a slightly different way than I thought since under the new circumstances I will not be able to visit most of my relatives and friends for a long time, if not never again. I am not the only one being tried in court for such act. Since we have established our organization in Turkey in 2014, the past and present board members and directors who openly acted as media faces of the organization have been under lots of threats, insults, alienation and discrimination. Many directors and ex-presidents lost their jobs and at least a dozen members are being subject to similar legal cases for blasphemy or insulting the current administration/president.

If they can't get you for that particular case, then they dig your past and try to re-open other legal cases they can get you for. For example, a famous Armenian-Turkish "outspoken atheist" academic in Turkey, Sevan Nisanyan was tried for blasphemy for a few times and got away with it because of his outstanding defence statements (lectures). A few weeks later they dug his old cases and 'the prosecutors of the administration' as we call them, found that he had some illegal restoration of historical house problem, so they re-opened it, arrested him for that and Sevan Nisanyan has been in a Turkish prison since January 2014 and serving a jail term of 12-plus years because of being found guilty on re-opened blasphemy cases he once won. The justice system in Turkey right now is a true laughingstock.▲

# Let Them Eat Cake – Just Kidding! Let Them Starve

TRACEY MELODY

*(Originally published at :*

*<https://godlessmama.com/2016/02/24/let-them-eat-cake-just-kidding-let-them-starve>)*

I recently had the misfortune of encountering an article by one Peter Guirguis titled “3 Strange But True Reasons Why

God Doesn't Feed All the Starving Children in The World.”

(I will not link to the article because I cannot in good conscience send traffic there, but intrepid readers will be able to find it easily enough.)

The author explains in great detail

why his god – who, you may recall, is supposedly omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipresent – prefers to let children suffer and die in agony through malnutrition rather than put his considerable talent to use to, you know, make some food. Alas that the title is rather misleading, given that the reasons he cites are not strange – at least not to those of us who are used to hearing theists make excuses for the failure of their god to alleviate starvation – and whether or not they are true is a matter of some dispute.

## Reason #1: It Isn't God's Responsibility to Feed the Starving Children of the World

“Of all the times that I have read the Bible from cover to cover, I can't think of a single Bible verse in which God makes a promise to feed all the starving children in the world.”

Well then, since there is no bible verse in which god is quoted as saying, “I promise to feed all the starving children in the world,” that totes lets god off the hook! Of course there are verses in which he promises to sustain us (Isaiah 46:4), prosper us (Jeremiah 29:11), meet all our needs (Philippians 4:13), give us plenty to eat (Joel 2:26), help us (Isaiah 41:13), satisfy the appetites of the righteous (Proverbs 13:25), and give us whatever it is we pray for (Mark 11:24); but apparently those should in no way be misconstrued to infer that god will actually sustain us, meet all our needs, give us plenty to eat, help us, satisfy the appetites of the righteous, or give us whatever it is we pray for. On the issues of what god was in fact promising in these passages and why he is seemingly constrained to doing only

that which he explicitly promised, Guirguis remains silent.

He then goes on to spout the usual nonsense about how it is our job, not god's, to feed starving children. Never mind that the majority of humans on earth live under circumstances that preclude their ability to influence



whether, how, or where food is grown and distributed: They themselves live in or near poverty; or suffer food insecurity of their own; or lack access to information or freedom of movement or other resources; or haven't the skills or power to implement political and scientific programs to improve food production and distribution; and so on. For most of us with the ability to take some action, the extent of what we can reasonably do is donate to the local food pantry or give money to NGOs, neither of which is going to eradicate hunger. Oh, and how humans were supposed to harvest, preserve, transport, and distribute adequate food across

the globe to famine-stricken areas before the advent of modern technology (i.e., for the nearly the whole of human history) is anyone's guess.

### Reason #2 – God Isn't Like Humans

Atheists make a mistake when they say things like, “If I saw a starving child and had the power to feed him and I don't, then I am evil. That's the same thing with God, He is evil because He has the power to feed starving children and He doesn't.” The mistake that atheists make here is that they compare themselves to God, or they compare God to themselves. They put themselves in God's shoes. God's goals are different than our goals. His purposes are different than our purposes. His way of justice is different than the human way of justice.”

This is the claim that theists always make when confronted with the problem of evil: That we can't apply our own standards of morality to god, which of course begs the question: Why not? And why, if nearly all reasonable and morally normal people would feed starving children if they had the power to do so, and many (if not most) theists at some point struggle with why their god does not do so, is the ethical instinct of all humankind chucked out the window and deemed inferior to a god whose actions are manifestly unethical? Furthermore, this is not so much a reason why god doesn't feed starving children as it is an admonishment that we should not ask for one.

### Reason #3 – God's Justice is Coming Soon For All

“While God does see hate crimes, rapes, and murders as sins, He also sees lying, cheating, and hating people as sins too. So since God is a just God, then He's going to have to give justice to all if He were to judge the world today. That means that there would be a lot of people who would receive punishment for eternity for breaking God's

standards. So instead, God is saving His judgment for Judgment Day . . . So when you don't see justice taking place immediately, it's because God is giving everyone a chance to repent, and put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.”

There is a great deal with that statement that is problematic, the most obvious being that it is entirely irrelevant to the question of why god does not feed starving children – unless Guirguis is saying that since Judgment Day will happen someday, there's no point in feeding starving kids in the meantime. Regardless, it is yet more transparent rationalization of god's inaction: “It may seem like he isn't doing anything, but that's just because he isn't doing anything right now. He has to wait and see how many more people will come groveling to him before he decides he's ready to get his Armageddon on.” In other words, we can't see god's ethics, and we can't see his mercy, and we can't see his love, and we can't see his justice, but we still somehow know he is ethical, merciful, loving, and just, so let's all just accept suffering as inevitable in the meantime and STFU.

Let me be clear that I am not refuting the good Mr. Guirguis because I am seeking to refute the existence of god. Indeed, the god hypothesis has been resoundingly refuted (or at least sufficiently challenged) by many others before me so I have no need or desire to re-invent that wheel. My point is rather that religion – especially the Abrahamic ones – require people to question and suppress their own innate senses of right and wrong, empathy, and compassion in order to reconcile the action (or more accurately the inaction) of their deity. It desensitizes people to suffering and injustice – after all, if god is allowing it, he must have a reason, so who are we to argue? I can only hope that one day people will decide that if god is allowing suffering, maybe it's his ethics that are questionable, and proceed to embrace and heed their own conscience.▲



Tracey Melody is a liberal, atheist, anti-theist writer and parent seeking to make the world a better place through the spread of secularism and the exposing of the harms of religion. In addition to [www.GodlessMama.com](http://www.GodlessMama.com), she contributes to a number of other political and atheist pages and blogs.

# Dear Christian: I Had To Respond To This Condescending Letter To An Atheist

COURTNEY HEARD

I read a viral letter to your atheist “friend” recently on the internet, and while I am sure the author is expecting all of us heathens to just melt at her kindness, we're not as dumb as you Grace, the author, think we are. The condescension seeped off the page like brown biosludge from a walker who just got brained by Daryl Dixon's arrow. We see through you, oh godly one.

Your first mistake was your poor analogy:

*If you have seen the sun, which I assume you have, but someone else has never seen it and denies its existence, would you change your view to satisfy their denials?*

As though this is the same as an atheist asking you to open your mind to the possibility there may not be reason to believe in a god. A more apt analogy would be,

If you had seen a glowing ball of fire in the sky, and felt it's warmth and concluded without any other knowledge that it was proof of Ra, the sun god, then explained this to someone who did not believe in Ra, would you open your mind, upon their request, to the possibility that what you had seen and felt may not be evidence of a god, but instead



RELIGION  
IS THE  
OPIUM

is just evidence of a glowing ball of fire in the sky?

***I have experienced and seen the God of the Bible, and I cannot deny His existence just because you do.***

Here's where you've begun to get condescending. In order for us to have to deny God, we must know, deep down inside somewhere, that he's there. We're atheists. That means we don't believe he's there, so there's nothing to deny. You can try to force a belief in god on us all you want, but all that tells us is that you cannot fathom the possibility that there are people in this world who simply do not have a belief in any sort of deity.

What your atheist friend is asking you, Grace, is how do you know what you've seen and what you've experienced is God? We have no doubt you believe the experiences you've had. We have no doubt you heard something you think is the voice of God. We are not suggesting you're a liar. What we are asking, however, is, is it possible that what you've experienced and what you've heard could be something other than God? Further, could it be a different God? What evidence have you that what you've seen and heard is the God of your Bible? How do you know you're not experiencing the trickster magic of Anansi or the shape-shifting confusion of Loki? Could it be possible, that you attribute these experiences to your God, because that conclusion falls in line with what you had already believed?

Is that possible Grace?

There are people in India who have had similar experiences to you and consider them proof that Vishnu exists or that Ganesh exists. Which one of you is right, and how do you determine that?

What we are asking, more briefly, is, could it be possible you've reached the wrong conclusion?

These are the questions intellectually honest people ask themselves. Some take it to great lengths, like René Descartes, who locked himself up in an oven for three days to assess what he really knew. All he could come up with, other than smelling like fresh baked bread, was that he himself existed, because he had thoughts. I think, therefore I am. No one's asking you to climb into an oven, though, Grace, we're just asking you to be honest with yourself and ask yourself honest questions and answer them with, well, you guessed it: honesty.

The point, my dear friend, that I am trying to make is that it is impossible for me to prove God's existence to you because you are unable or unwilling to consider its plausibility.

This contains more horseshit than O.J. Simpson's National Enquirer-acclaimed novel, If I Did It. It's not that we are unable or unwilling, Grace darling, not at all. You must know

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Please consider contributing to the AAI Student Scholarship Fund, a project of the AAI Foundation, to continue to provide help to those in need.



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we were theists before we were atheists, so clearly, we're willing and capable. The reason we don't believe is simply that there is not enough evidence for God's existence. Many ex-theists followed in Descartes footsteps and asked themselves, how do I know this is true? When you strip away every assumption that's not backed by evidence, then, you're left with no reason to believe in God.

If you ask yourself why you don't believe in Baron La Croix, the Voodoo god of sex, is the answer that you are unable or unwilling to consider his plausibility? If I requested, politely, that you consider the Baron's erotic existence; if I offered you my own personal experience and swore that I had heard his voice and seen his massive, throbbing member, and was driven mad with otherwise inexplicable lust, would you consider his existence? If I presented to you my copy of the Voodoo Hoodoo Spellbook (<http://tinyurl.com/hjglms0>) as proof he exists, and told you that there are 60 million people the world over who revere the great Baron as a deity? If I told you that every sopping pair of panties was his work? If I asserted the Baron was responsible for every stiffy your husband ever had? Where did your husband get the idea to stick his custard slinger in your backdoor? Why? The Baron, that's where! Who is the muse inspiring every artistic pornography film? It's the Baron! Look around you, Grace. Every child is a testament to the seductive powers of Baron La Croix. Just look around you, the evidence is there.

What would it take for you to believe in the Baron, Grace? You can't prove he doesn't exist.

***What if instead of looking at the world with the assumption that God doesn't exist, that instead you view the world with the assumption that He does?***

The problem here, my little cherub, is that we don't assume God doesn't exist. We simply don't believe in him until such time as his existence can be proven. We don't make assumptions – that's sort of the point. Living your life based on an assumption is, in my view, irresponsible and reckless, especially if one has children. Instead, I live my life based on what I can know and as I learn new things, I incorporate them into my worldview. New things could include a god, if, at some point, one is proven to exist.

Perhaps, the scientific community is not as open-minded as they think. They base all of their findings on their assumptions that there is no God; thus, their equations have much room for error.

Oh, sugar lump, no. Science is not based on the assumption god does not exist, else there would not be scientists who believe in God. Science, like me, only incorporates what it already knows and can prove, through demonstrable, repeatable and testable evidence. You and I both know,



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custard buns, that God can't be tested. God cannot be subject to repeatable experimentation with the exact same results every time. God cannot be demonstrated to anyone on demand. Until God can be tested, repeatedly with predictable results in a demonstrable way, science will not accept his existence. That does not mean science has written off the possibility a god exists, it simply means we haven't the evidence to prove it yet. There are lots of things that have yet to be proven, such as the idea that there may be alien life out there somewhere. In the vast universe, amongst all the breathtaking galaxies, it's hard to believe we are the only life, isn't it? But we cannot say definitively that there is life out there... because we have no evidence of it... yet.

Perhaps, I should ask how many times you have personally experienced or seen the Big Bang Theory? Maybe, then I could accept your rationale.

Things can be observed many ways, not just through personal experience. For instance, I've never been to Estonia. I've never seen it with my own eyes; I've never stood on its soil. However, I can rest assured Estonia is there because if asked for evidence of existence, it could be proven many ways. I could meet a person from Estonia who carries with her, her Estonian passport and Skypes back home to talk to her Estonian Mom who misses her very much. I can hear this Estonian traveler speak Estonian and ask her about Estonian food. I can watch her fly away back to Estonia and have her email me back with pictures of her neighbourhood in Estonia. Further, if I still did not believe her, and I was sure that every map, every textbook, every Atlas, the UN, Wikipedia and every Estonian were all in on some huge conspiracy to trick me into thinking there was a country named Estonia when no such country actually existed... if this were the case, I could simply hop on a plane and fly to Estonia and Estonia itself could prove her Godless existence to me as I stepped off the plane.

The Big Bang is just another word for the starting point. Scientists have observed, repeatedly, that the Universe is expanding in every direction, which means that in the past the Universe was smaller. From this, we can deduce that at some point, the Universe was a single speck and we have been expanding from that ever since. That is the Big Bang Theory simplified, and yes, this expansion has been observed and confirmed.

There are many renowned scientists that believed the inerrancy of the Word of God and His Biblical record for mankind.

How can this be if, as you said, science bases all of its findings on the assumption there is no god?

With all due respect, I cannot deny the reality of the God of the universe because I have "encountered" Him. I see evidence of Him in my daily life, the world around me, in the very existence of life, and in the God-initiated Christian "Law of love."

But can you at least examine your beliefs closely, open to the idea that you might be wrong? As an atheist and a skeptic, I do this daily. I have changed my mind about many beliefs I used to hold dear, because I practice this skepticism all the time. It's not safe or responsible to close your mind to the possibility you might be wrong. No one has all the answers, honey bear, no one.

Call me "narrow-minded," but I am unapologetic for what I know to be true.

This is where you and your atheist friend differ. You insist you know, despite a lack of demonstrable evidence, and we admit we don't know because of a lack of demonstrable evidence.

I ask you, Grace in the Moment, which is the more honest approach? ▲



Courtney Heard is a Canadian blogger who writes as Godless Mom on [godlessmom.com](http://godlessmom.com) - she writes about atheism, the justice system and her life. You can also catch her on the Common Heathens podcast, at [commonheathens.com](http://commonheathens.com)

# The Functioning of a Dysfunctional Irish Law

JOHN HAMILL

Atheist Ireland has consistently opposed the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act, 2014. This legislation was introduced by our Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton, in order to allow both religious and secular bodies to perform civil marriages. By providing much more onerous criteria for secular bodies to meet, this legislation discriminates against our non-religious citizens. However, in attempting to do so, it is also comically inept in its efforts to define what a religion is.

The first sign of trouble in this regard, was when Minister Burton described for our parliament, the kind of people who shouldn't be permitted to celebrate weddings in Ireland. The Civil Registration Act then became the first piece of legislation in the history of the Irish State, to be aimed at Elvis impersonators.

"Another concern I had about some of the material in the submission from Atheist Ireland is that we must be specific about the criteria because there are places in the United States where the criteria for [performing weddings] are very broad and, as a result, an Elvis impersonator in Las Vegas can perform wedding ceremonies. None of us wants anything like that here. There is all-party agreement on that point."

- Minister Joan Burton, Irish Parliament, 20th December 2012

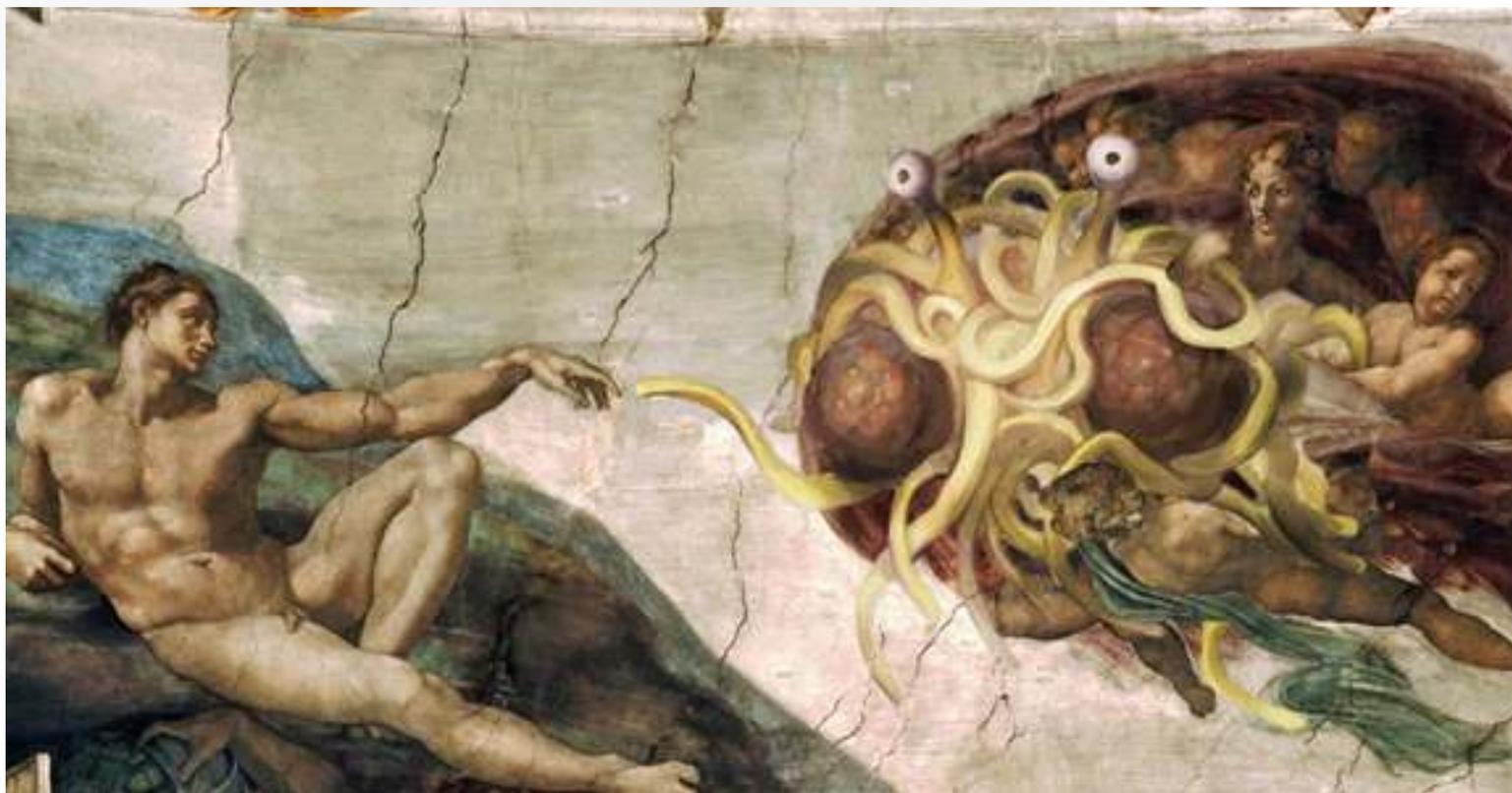
From these august beginnings, the operation of the Civil Registration Act has since gone downhill.

Legislating for Hats

The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster applied to the Civil Registration Service in order to be recognised as a religious body. Where the application requested a description of their form of worship, the Church stated that they "teach while wearing colander based headwear". The Civil Registration Service rejected the application because of this answer, saying that it "lacks credibility".

Comparative Clerical Millinery of Pastafarian versus Catholic Votaries

In *Christus Dominus*, the 1965 Papal Decree on Bishops, Pope Paul VI stated that "Bishops ... have been made true and authentic teachers of the faith". Teaching therefore must be viewed by the Irish State as a credible form of worship, since the Roman Catholic Church has been





### Comparative Clerical Millinery of Pastafarian versus Catholic Votaries

accepted by the Civil Registration Service. However, it is unclear why teaching while wearing unconventional millinery is viewed by the Civil Registration Service as an entirely acceptable form of worship for Roman Catholic clergy, while a very similar form of worship is not acceptable for other Churches. Whatever the reason, Ireland has a Minister for Social Protection who is not only legislating to ban white jump suits with tassels from weddings but also applying different laws to different citizens, based only on subjective opinions about their hats.

#### Legislating for Magic Powers

The Civil Registration Service has also objected to the form of worship that adherents to the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster participate in, on the basis that “any group of people” may come together in this manner and

that this “does not in itself constitute a religious body”. In this regard, the Civil Registration Service distinguishes between just “any group of people”, as compared to Roman Catholic priests who have been awarded by the creator of the universe with the power to transubstantiate wine into the blood of an Iron Age Jewish carpenter.

This is an interesting legislative test to introduce into the Irish Statute Book but problems arise when the votaries of other denominations also experience supernatural events. For example, an Ordained Pastafarian Minister has reported clandestine messages that were received during a visitation from the Flying Spaghetti Monster, while he enjoyed a plate of tagliatelle in Dublin one evening. Named after an inner city housing development, these covert revelations have become known within the Church as the Three Secrets Of Fatima Mansions.



Fatima Mansions Housing Complex, Dublin Ireland



**Roman Catholic “Nazarenes” parading, who may or may not be actual Roman Catholics**

Fatima Mansions Housing Complex, Dublin, Ireland.

How then can the Irish Civil Registration Service have determined that every Roman Catholic priest in the country does indeed have magic powers, while the purported carbohydrate based apparitions of other citizens are to be discounted? Perhaps it is not a surprise that Minister Bruton has been unable to define any objective criteria by which civil servants may distinguish earthly phenomenon that have a celestial origin, from those that just “any group of people” might experience.

Legislating for Surreptitious Citizens

When the Civil Registration Service asked the Church of

the Flying Spaghetti Monster how many adherents they have in Ireland, the answer provided was “thousands, but many remain in hiding”. This is not surprising as Pastafarians have long discussed their persecution by Christians. However, the Civil Registration Service rejected their application based on this answer, as they claimed that the Church failed to “credibly answer ... for the number of members”.

It should be noted that during July of 2014, in their concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland, the UN Human Rights Committee under the International Covenant on Civil and & Political Rights, stated the following:



**Some members of Atheist Ireland ... if you see any of these people please inform the police!**



## Splitters

“The State party should take ... into account the Committee’s general comment No. 22 (1993) concerning the right not to be compelled to reveal one’s thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief in public.”

As such, it is the Human Right of any Irish citizen to remain an anonymous adherent to any religion if they so wish. Pastafarians have a Human Right to remain in hiding, due to their belief that they have been persecuted by Christians for hundreds of years.

Roman Catholic “Nazarenes” parading, who may or may not be actual Roman Catholics.

Furthermore, if this requirement was applied to the Roman Catholic Church then they would also be rejected by the Civil Registration Service. In 2010, the Roman Catholic Church changed Canon Law to prevent adherents defecting. As such, there are currently many active members of Atheist Ireland who have been unable to leave the Catholic Church. In this context, there is no conceivable way in which the Roman Catholic Church could “credibly answer ... for the number of members”.

The only way the Civil Registration Service can know whether the number of adherents quoted by any Church is accurate, is to read the minds of all Irish citizens. As improbable as this may sound, since the Civil Registration Service has already recognised the Spiritualist Union of Ireland as a valid religion, perhaps this is indeed the approach that they have adopted? After all, by the standards of the Civil Registration Service themselves, acting as a spiritual medium couldn’t be something that just “any group of people” could do.

### Legislating for Atheists

The Civil Registration Service also rejected the application

from the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster on the basis that it is “contradictory” to have Pastafarian adherents who are also members of Atheist Ireland. It is true that many members of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster are atheists. However, this is also true of many other religions.

The Dublin Buddhist Centre has been recognised as a religious body by the Civil Registration Service even though Buddhists do not believe in god. As such, it has frequently been observed by some Buddhist scholars that Buddhists are atheists too.

The Civil Registration Service is responsible for determining which organisations in Ireland are religious in nature and it appears to be incapable of understanding the difference between religiosity and theism. Unimpressive as this may be, the rejection by the Civil Registration Service did not actually refer to atheists per se but rather to membership of the Atheist Ireland organisation. Consequently, members of Atheist Ireland can now take their place alongside Elvis impersonators and those wearing unapproved hats, as the legislative targets of Minister Burton.

Some members of Atheist Ireland ... if you see any of these people please inform the police.

Assuming that there are some members of Atheist Ireland reading this article who were baptised, if you have not been excommunicated or have not defected from the Roman Catholic Church, perhaps you would like to contact the Civil Registration Service on this matter? You could explain that it is “contradictory” for them to continue to recognise the Roman Catholic Church for the purpose of performing weddings, while they count members of Atheist Ireland among their adherents.

## Legislating for Splitters

Another reason provided by the Civil Registration Service for rejecting the application from the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, is that a previous application had been received by their office, which referred to the “only leader” of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster in Ireland. The most obvious question that this raises is why schism in other Churches wasn’t perceived as troubling by the Civil Registration Service. For some inexplicable reason, several Muslim organisations have been recognised as religious bodies in Ireland, without first succumbing to demands from Minister Burton that the divide between Sunni and Shia be resolved in advance.

Furthermore, dozens of different Christian Churches with directly competing claims to exclusive authenticity, are also registered by the Civil Registration Service as religious bodies. For example, Catechism 1068 of the Roman Catholic Church states that:

“... it is through the liturgy especially that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.”

We are left wondering why the Civil Registration Service

did not then explain to all other Christian denominations in Ireland that they couldn’t be registered as religious bodies, since another body in Ireland had already claimed to be the “true Church” for Christians.

In fact, this issue is much easier to resolve for the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster than for any other Church. This is because one Church really is very clearly the only true Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster in Ireland. Anyone else who claims to be the “only leader” of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster in Ireland is therefore definitely a “splitter”. The Flying Spaghetti Monster hates splitters, may their penne be forever overcooked. Praise be His noodly appendages.

## Splitters

Not for the first time, efforts to legislate for religiosity in Ireland seem to be aspiring to Monty Python and falling short. Perhaps one day our politicians will legislate for all citizens equally, rather than seeking to identify the religious to award them with unwarranted privileges. It’s a crazy idea ... but it just might be crazy enough to work. In the mean time, we will continue to observe the functioning of dysfunctional law.▲



John Hamill has served on the national executive committee of Atheist Ireland for several years, including his participation in the first meeting of a sitting Irish Prime Minister with an atheist group. John also worked as part of Atheist Ireland’s successful role within the Irish Marriage Equality referendum campaign.

# 'One-Night Stand Ex-Muslim' Calls for Authentic Religious Pluralism, not 'Toxic-Corporatist Diversity'

WALLACE RUNNYMEDE

Every person's university experience is different. There are at least three kinds of self-development at university, and they are certainly not mutually exclusive. Some sail through university like the cattle to which Mehdi Hasan notoriously likened the 'kafirs,' and never challenge our beliefs.

Others engage rationally and come to new and fresher understandings of themselves and of the world; following the salutary Quranic injunction to be 'people who think.' The latter tenet is nevertheless utterly alien to the fundamentalists and downright Islamist theocrats who often shout the loudest concerning the same; even if genuinely progressive Muslims, as distinguished from 'moderate political Islamists,' quote the phrase with more character and beauty.

And then, of course, there are those who join a variety of the 'hundred flowers' of conformist ideologies and parties that boisterously greet (and in some cases, grievously afflict!) the eye and the heart of the young and naive. Of course, as regards this third choice, there are manifold possibilities.



This is partly on account on the plurality (not to say 'pluralism') of choices. Some people join fringe Christian sects. Others join curiously 'fundamentalist' forms of Dharmic (or Dao-ic) religion that are the mirror images of the purportedly less exotic best frenemies of the woeful/'Whoa!-ful' Watchtower and eager Eddyites. Some become extreme 'regressive left' authoritarians. Others tend towards a 'fun-rad' quasi-libertarianism/anarchism which is so Darwinian or Arcadian (or both!) that merely spilling a cup of coffee leads them to roar about the Vast-Mainstream-Thermodynamic Conspiracy.

Some of these happy few may then reach the ne plus ultra of 9/11 truther speculation, sciento-logic-al illogicality, although these are by no means the most mainstream of conspiratorial perspectives. No, not even in the booming, buzzing, blundering confusion that represents the best and the worst of the 21st century campus in many countries. And again, not least the UK of my birth, and where I have spent many years, as a university student and otherwise.

But when I say there are 'manifold possibilities,' for those who take the third path of theoretic/practical promiscuity, I am not merely referring to the glossy and voyeuristically carnivalesque kaleidoscope of ideological 'diversity' so typical of an age of problematic objectification and commodification such as this. (But then, what age is not an age of commodification, in one way or another?) Rather, I also refer to another variety of life choices for the callow libertines of the soul and intellect. There are those of us who have a brief ideological fling. There are others who get deep into a loveless and even abusive marriage, which they finally leave at great cost to themselves and others.

And then there are those who become eternal (and eternity-mongering) doormats for the great and the wise to trample underfoot at their own good pleasure. As someone who once dared to spend a fleeting night of amorous entrancement with Muhammad and who then woke up from my drunken stupor and said, 'it's not me, it's you!', I am prepared to say to speak from my brief experience of Islam.

My views on the value of Islam have fluctuated over time. I was curious about the religion as a child, but knew very little about it. After this springtime of idle curiosity, I had my brief summer of love during my Bachelor's Degree. In autumn, I become somewhat embittered. But now, my winter is not one of discontent; but one of the resentment that signifies a rage against the dying of the light and withering of the flowers of a youthful naivety; but a more mature and Voltairean prickliness that sees the humorous of the tragic, and the tragedy of the ridiculous.

I do not believe that Islam is 'good' or 'bad' in an overall sense, because I have no idea what either of these would look like. I would say given the historical complexity and plurality (if not always pluralism) of Islam, Islam is morally ambivalent in character. 'Morally ambivalent' here means 'not one-sidedly positive or negative,' rather than merely 'morally neutral', as any human-created ideology dealing with substantial human concerns could ever be on a level with mathematics! No matter what Big Brother and Soviet ideologues thought, with their tedious complaints about mere 'bourgeois mathematics.' (Yet perhaps mathematics is not monolithic? Yet even so, would that not be a possible red herring, even if such would be the case? A highly mystical and recondite hint 'for people who think.')

I do not cite the foregoing by way of justification. Nobody needs 'credentials' in order to criticize the fallible human ideology of a fallible human being: in this case, Muhammad. I merely wish to present this information in order to add my voice to the swelling tide of those who, whether after a whimsical fling like mine, or a long unhappy marriage, have rejected the often baffling farrago of fairly reasonable ideas and abjectly moronic imbecility that constitutes one of the world's great faiths. And not only this, I would like in doing so, to emphasize the value of testimonies and witnesses from people who might be reluctant to speak up because, like me, their time 'on the inside' was fleeting, superficial, trivial and brief. I would argue the contrary. All stories are 'marginal' in their own view, and every 'marginal' story has



## REPRESENTING ATHEISTS INTERNATIONALLY

**AAI has consultative status with the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Council of Europe's Commission on Human Rights— and will soon hold similar status with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights!**

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the potential to bring additional insight that might not otherwise be brought to discussions.

My brief arrangement with Muhammad and Allah is something that has shaped my ongoing character development in the years since I rolled out of bed, head pounding and heart hammering with joy and trepidation, and said: 'you weren't all you were cracked up to be.' My character development is also informed by my theoretical reflections, which are not merely 'personal' in the sense they occur inside my head and not someone else's, but in the deeper sense that my very identity, my very sense of self is closely related to some of the ideas that scholars have been presenting to me. And so, I would to take this opportunity to express more clearly the relationship between my reflections on 'diversity versus plurality and pluralism' and my intimate encounter with the self-styled Lord of Creation and his equally self-styled Messenger.

The tone of 'diversity' rhetoric is relentless sunny, optimistic and Whiggish. Rather as the notion of 'neurodiversity' risks turning individuals such as myself into mere 'Aspies,' mere noble-savage-savants, the lens of 'diversity' presents religious plurality as a museum piece, a glorious Mardi Gras explosion of flamboyance and joy.

This same (and ever monotonously self-same) masturbatory cult of diversity is not content to respect plurality, to acknowledge plurality, to take plurality seriously. For if it were, then it would no longer be 'diversity' in the voyeuristic sense, but pluralism. When I say 'diversity,' I am not taking about the diversity of religions, political ideologies, sexualities, neural universes or anything else. That is what I am

# STAND UP FOR REASON CAMPAIGN

**In Uganda, hundreds of children are marked as "witches" each year by Christian evangelists who market their exorcism services to local villages that have suffered misfortune or loss.**



**These children are abandoned, attacked, and maimed or even killed by their friends and family.**

**Those who are fortunate to survive are rendered orphans who are forced to beg and steal to survive.**



**HELP US STAND UP FOR REASON IN UGANDA.**



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

calling 'plurality,' and not diversity. The best response to plurality, as I understand it, is pluralism, by which I mean an attitude that signifies opposition to two attitudes.

On one hand, an authentic pluralism must oppose exclusionary and pessimistic attitudes such as monoculturalism, nationalism, racism and anti-Muslim bigotry. The latter, of course, is not to be confused with what the regressive left call 'Islamophobia,' which is actually a victimless crime. As the saying runs: 'Ideas don't have rights; people have rights! It is impossible to cause offence or hurt to a human-made ideology; nor indeed, a 'man-made' one! The other attitude to be opposed is the 'heterophilic' or 'other-loving/other-fetishizing' human zoo of an insincere, superficially 'radically inclusive' but actually selectively inclusive glorification of plurality. Rather than coercively celebrating other people's religious and otherwise ideological 'diversity,' it would be better to recognise the positive, negative and ambivalent aspects without illusion, as far as this as possible, without fear or favour.

For while it is true that fascists, political Islamists and others wish to assimilate or even destroy plurality and its bearers, real or imagined, it is surely unreasonable to merely do the opposite of what such authoritarian and totalitarian ideologues wish to accomplish. As is so often the case in politics and ideology, merely flipping a bad schemata on its head and exchanging black for white or white for black, is a cop-out, and signals a lack of serious dedication and maturity. I suggest that many secular and humanist readers may actually be by no means averse to the words of Henry Wotton in 'Foxe's Book of Martyrs':

*Take heed of thinking, the farther you*

*go from the Church of Rome, the nearer you are to God.*

So, if the question is 'should difference/plurality/diversity be assimilated and destroyed, or should it be celebrated?', then where does the error lie? Is one of the answers wrong, and another one of the answers right? Or is the question itself astonishingly naive? There is an old saying, 'Ask a stupid question, get a stupid answer.' Viewing the matter in this light, it is possible to see that the rigid dichotomy between assimilation/liquidation and patronising 'celebration' (also a form of more implicit assimilation in its own right) is irritating and unconvincing. Why not decide to treat Muslims, Ex-Muslims and non-Muslims alike in terms of a reformed pluralism that is very different from the golden cage of fetishization?

For as the old idea runs, the 'fetish' need not only be the remains of a former living person, reduced to mere dull and static objecthood. Rather, the 'fetish' also signifies a lack on the part of the fetishist. Might it be that religious pluralism has taken the byways of 'religious diversity' partly because much of what is available in some countries, whether religious traditions or other cultural artefacts, are considered too 'vanilla' for the refined palates of the regressive left?

Examples are abound. Marxism has faced a crisis of confidence, while anarchism has as many 'dead white men' as Marxism. Christianity is deemed discredited. Secular liberal parliamentary democracy, or even secularism in a broad sense, is depressingly familiar to some, and thus too 'mainstream' for the edgy ideological hipsters who seek glorious pearls from an 'orient' of their own weary and threadbare imagination.

Yet, as someone who saw some interesting things in my very brief dalliance with the religion of Muhammad, and as someone who is also neurodivergent but definitely not 'neurodiverse,' I will say that they are chasing an empty dream. Beneath the aura, there is an emptiness, and a

coldness. I know what that emptiness is like. I was seeking something once. In the end, years from now, I can say that the 'thing' that 'everyone' is seeking does not exist.

But that's no reason to be despondent. Facing up to the truth in all its bare austerity and coldness is liberating. Whether you prefer the invigorating Alpine air of Nietzsche or the coolly chastened rationalist reflections of Karl Popper, it remains the case that facing up to the truth that there is no 'final refuge' is true optimism, and not pessimism. One who is forewarned is forearmed. And perhaps that very same lack of a 'final refuge,' or at least the lack of anything even remotely approaching final certainty on that point, is the closest thing to a refuge there is. Is it not enough for you?

At most, I am inclined to think that even if there is an afterlife beyond this world, it is surely not the debauchee's bacchanal which the political Islamists selfishly peddle to their slavish acolytes. If there is such a thing as a paradise, and there is certainly no clear evidence that such is the case, then there are surely tears in heaven.

If there were indeed such a place beyond this world, something I would not be so arrogant as to affirm with any certainty, then that in a way would be the final abject humiliation of the heterophiliac voyeur's paradise of 'diversity.' If there is a heaven, I would be inclined to think of it more as one of a painful pluralism. Perhaps this earth is the closest thing to such a higher sphere? But Earth is not a higher sphere, in any case; but a higher and better life is possible. Not one more Whiggish, grand and glorious; but one more tragic and bittersweet, with a kind of joy that the solemn puritans of Islamism, fundamentalist religion and regressive left sects and parties will never know, unless they learn to say:

*Blessed are those who come in the name of truth, and not of false comfort and baubled glory.*

Yes, humanism and post-humanism are radically imperfect and human-made approaches to the world; but at least they don't demand any pretence to the contrary! 



Wallace Runnymede is an igtheist Christian, but is impatient with foundationalist and fundamentalist views about God and about religion. His satire has been published on a number of outlets; in particular Glossy News. He also blogs at Wallace Runnymede.

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Hofesh – Freedom from  
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The Heathen Society  
[www.hedning.no](http://www.hedning.no)

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[www.dlc.fi/~etkirja/Atheist.htm](http://www.dlc.fi/~etkirja/Atheist.htm)

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