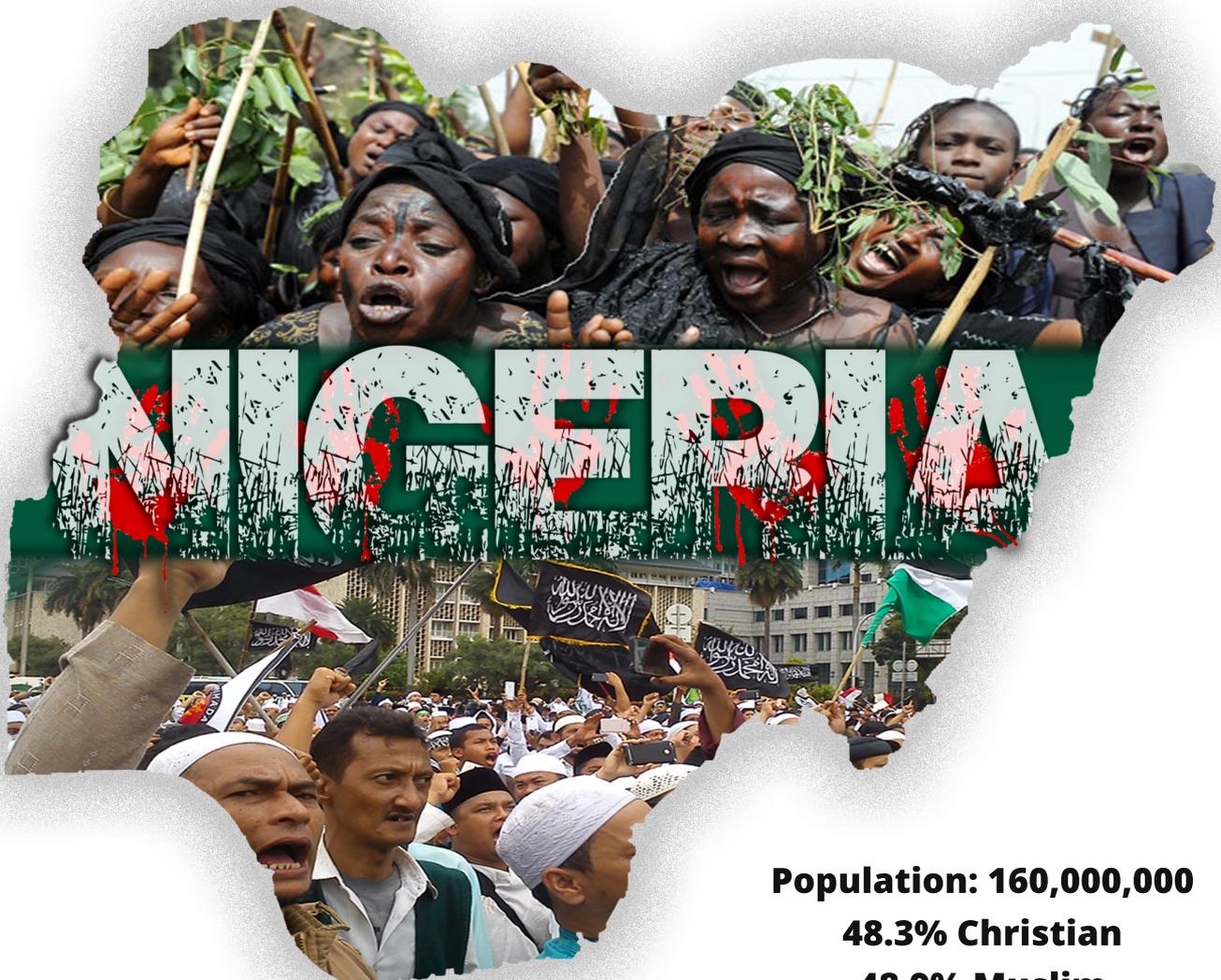


# secular world

\$2 where sold

August 2018

## Around the Globe:



**Population: 160,000,000**

**48.3% Christian**

**48.9% Muslim**

## In This Issue:

<i>Editorial</i>	1	<i>Science Lab</i>	10-11
<i>President's Letter</i>	2	<i>Human Progress: Leaving Religion Behind</i>	12
<i>Conference in the Capital of Nigeria</i>	3	<i>Escaping Faith</i>	13-14
<i>'Witch' Children in Nigeria</i>	4	<i>Argument to the Best Explanation</i>	15
<i>Islamic Face Covering (part 2)</i>	5-6	<i>Pseudoscience Taught at Creationist School</i>	16
<i>Things Theists Say</i>	7-8	<i>Free Will?</i>	17
<i>Applying Logic to the God Proposition</i>	9	<i>Atheist Alliance International: Hero</i>	18

# The International Worship Center Proposal



## Editorial

***This edition of Secular World focuses on Nigeria — one of Donald Trump's so-called 'shithole' countries.***

Nigeria does have problems and many of them are faith-based. In a 2009 Gallup poll, 96% of the population rated religion as 'very important' in their lives.

When the British handed over the colony in 1960/61, a secular constitution was drawn up. Section 10 quite clearly states that, "The Government of the Federation, or of a State, shall not adopt any religion as State religion". Sadly, this is being disregarded.

The northeastern part of Nigeria is predominantly Muslim and home to the radical jihadist Islamic group Boko Haram, which hit international headlines in 2014 when it captured 276 schoolgirls from Chibok.

Boko Haram has killed tens of thousands, displaced 2.3 million from their homes and was ranked as

the world's deadliest terror group by the [Global Terrorism Index](#) in 2015. The name "Boko Haram" is usually translated as "Western education is forbidden" and the group seeks to establish an Islamic state in Northern Nigeria under Sharia law. *The Independent* newspaper includes this area in a list of 13 nations that execute atheists.

***If only they knew there is no evidence for their god.***

On the positive side we are supporting our affiliate, *Atheist Society of Nigeria*, (ASN) in their battle with the Christian Governor of Akwo Ibom State. He has announced not only that he is the 'spiritual leader' of his state, but that he has provided public finance for the construction of an 8,500 capacity 'International Worship Center' (See photo above).

According to [ibomtelegraph.com](#), the State Government's contribution to the project includes payment for the land, the site preparation and the design. Christian Governor Udom Emmanuel conducted a foundation-laying ceremony in January 2018 so he is caught

red-handed. ASN lawyers have recently issued a demand to the Governor that he must cease this unconstitutional project.

***Please donate to this campaign by clicking [here](#)***

Some more good news — the very first Nigerian Atheist Convention was held in November 2017. AAI's Vice President, Bill Flavell, delivered the keynote speech. More recently, meetings of Humanists have been staged in Jos and Owerri, and our President Gail Miller sent a recorded message (See next page). New Chapters of Humanism are starting up — Watch this space...

**John Richards**

AAI Publications Director





## President's Letter

***Two Nigerian cities, Jos and Owerri, recently held their first ever meetings of Humanists.***

***This is the transcript of my audio address played at the openings.***

I am deeply honored to have been invited to express a message of welcome to all the delegates of the first Humanist event to be staged in the Nigerian city of Jos/Owerri. Events like this are sorely needed. Few nations are more beleaguered by faith than Nigeria. Religion takes financial resources away from genuine worthy causes such as feeding the poor, sustaining the

elderly, caring for the sick and educating the young. Money is redirected by clergy towards constructing extravagant buildings for worship and providing comfortable lifestyles for themselves — the self-proclaimed Earthly representatives of mythical gods.

These clergy predate upon those who, through no fault of their own, were misinformed in childhood. The gullible are seen as legitimate targets for a protection racket. They are told they are sinners, in order to destroy their self-esteem, and then they are robbed of their cash for a promise of imaginary salvation from an imaginary threat.

This gangster business sometimes hypocritically dresses itself up as 'charitable' by using a small proportion of its wealth for window dressing activities such as sponsoring a school or a hospital. Do not be deceived. The true colors

of religious enterprise are shown by the shameless pastors of the prosperity-gospel-raising collections to buy their fifth private jet.

Nigeria has real faith-based problems: victimization of gay people, denigration of women, persecution of children labeled 'witches', misappropriation of public funds for religious purposes, and family breakups when a member leaves the cult.

These problems cannot be solved by belief, they can only be solved by action — by the teaching of critical thinking and respect for evidence. Assemblies like this one, organized by Leo Igwe, Mubarak Bala, Pearl Osibu and others, are the start of the process of bringing Nigeria into the twenty-first century — the Age of Realism.

I am proud to be associated with the beginning of great things. I wish you good luck with this meeting and with the birth of the new Chapter of Nigerian Humanists.

**Gail Miller**

*President, Atheist Alliance International*

# Conference in the capital of Nigeria

## *'A sovereign nation under God'*

This conference was supposed to be on how law and religion could enhance human flourishing, but the meeting of the Regional Body ended up providing a forum for Nigerian scholars and policymakers to debate the secularity or, more accurately, the non-secularity, of the Nigerian state. The heated and intense disputes revealed how sharply divided Nigerians could be on the subject of secularity.

The capital of Nigeria, Abuja, was an ideal location because a few kilometers from the venue for the conference, Baze University is where all the plots and intrigues to politicize religion and to religionize politics in Africa's most populous nation take place — at the gigantic National Mosque and the Christian Centre, which were built in the central business district with (unconstitutional) funding from the federal government.

Speaker after speaker highlighted the conflicts over the Nigerian constitution, especially the ambiguous relationship between law and religion, church/mosque and state.

A Muslim appeal-court judge pointed out that Nigeria was a multi-religious state, but he failed to show where this was stated in the nation's constitution or to say what the official state religions of Nigeria are. In fact, he claimed that section 10 — which states that, "*No part of the Federation or state should adopt any religion as the state religion*" —



*Delegates at Baze University, Abuja*

did not imply that Nigeria was a secular state!

Another Muslim appeal-court judge said that a Muslim in Nigeria could renounce his or her faith to avoid being tried in a Sharia court!

***Altogether, the speakers gave an impression of a country struggling with legal cacophony and confusion caused by different legal systems.***

From all the presentations, questions and comments on the intersection of law and religion in the country, it could be said that Nigeria is an *aborted* secular state. The original crafters of Nigeria's constitution had a secular intent: they wanted a separation of state and religion, but the project of secularizing Nigeria has been hijacked. Nigeria operates an Islamic democracy in the Muslim majority areas, a Christian democracy in the Christian dominated sections, and a mix in other parts of the country.

Although many local speakers at the event showed a disdain for the term *secularism*, they failed to offer an alternative model of governing Nigeria given its multi-religious and multicultural heritage

The Islamists cannot Islamize the entire country and the Christians cannot fully Christianize Nigeria either. The secularization project has

stalled and the Islamization and Christianization processes are incomplete. They are all unfinished and unfinishable projects. The Nigerian state is suspended between secularization and religionization.

### ***So, what is the way forward?***

Secularists in Nigeria need to adopt a more proactive approach and counteract the schemes and plots of theists. A secular Nigeria cannot just happen by mere wishful thinking. Nigerians must *make* secular Nigeria happen. Secular Nigerians need to be visible in Abuja, and be actively involved in campaigning for the separation of state and religion.

Secularists should explore the possibility of establishing an office and employing personnel to lobby lawmakers and politicians, and vigorously campaign for the realization of a truly secular Nigeria.

**Leo Igwe**

*Nigeria Correspondent*





## 'Witch' Children in Nigeria

*Sitting on a chipped wooden bench, the three-year-old swings her legs excitedly.*

*Her sandals barely touch the floor as she watches a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles cartoon.*

*It is hard to believe that Comfort is a witch.*

*Yet, this is why she and her two older siblings are now living in an emergency shelter in the city of Calabar, in the southeast corner of Nigeria.*

*It's little more than a basement with a television and half a dozen threadbare mattresses.*

*The door is locked most of the time for the children's own safety.*

*The shelter was intended to be a temporary solution — a stop-gap until the children could be placed with extended family.*

*But no one wants to risk bringing the children — all of whom have been branded witches — into their homes.*

*Once her cartoon has finished, Comfort totters outside and lifts her shirt to reveal a sea of whitened welts across her back.*

*These ragged scars trace the outlines of the red-hot machete that a neighbor used to force her to “confess”.*

*Use the link below to read the full article about children in Nigeria being accused of witchcraft, written by Marc Ellison and made possible by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting*

Go to this [link](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/nigeria_children_witchcraft): [www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/nigeria\\_children\\_witchcraft](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/nigeria_children_witchcraft)

# Islamic Face Covering

## (part 2)

### *David Rand deals with the ongoing debate*



In the last issue of *Secular World*, David Rand described the situation in countries that have attempted to ban the covering of women's faces.

Taken together with other rules often applied in Islamic nations, the veil can be regarded as part of an intention to subjugate females. In these countries, a woman's word in court is not considered to be equal to a man's, and a woman cannot leave the house without a male chaperone. Women are second-class citizens, but rebellion and change is occurring; in Iran some young women are risking jail for refusing to wear a hijab and Saudi Arabia has only recently permitted women to drive a car.

#### **Arguments For Bans**

The very nature of the Islamic veil as described in the last issue constitutes sufficient reason to ban it in several circumstances. Let us review:

1. The veil is an ambulatory prison for women, a flag of an extreme right-wing international political movement. It should be banned wherever such prohibition does not constitute an undue infringement on personal freedom.
2. Freedom of religion and from religion are both corollaries of

freedom of conscience. The wearing of ostentatious religious symbols by public servants while on duty elevates their freedoms above those of users of services, granting a privilege to the religion displayed. It is an infringement on the freedom of conscience of users because it subjects them to politico-religious advertising in a situation where the state has a duty to be neutral. This is especially serious in public schools where children are very vulnerable to the influence of teachers. Banning religious symbols worn by public servants, and in particular teachers, constitutes a small infringement (at work) on their personal freedom, which is completely justified by the necessity of protecting the freedom of conscience of users and pupils.

3. The wearing of politico-religious (or commercial) advertising while working as an agent of the state is unacceptable because it compromises state neutrality.
4. Face-coverings impede communication, especially non-verbal communication for which facial expression is critical.
5. Face-coverings are an obvious form of disguise. Furthermore, all veils may reduce the wearer's visual range and restrict head movement, causing serious security issues. Even the hijab and chador which do not

cover the face should not be worn while driving a vehicle or operating heavy machinery.

6. Even in the absence of security concerns such as suspicion of criminal intent, face-coverings make it more difficult to determine the identity of the wearer.

Any workarounds that may be provided in an attempt to mitigate problems caused by veils are an unacceptable waste of resources. The solution is to ban the veil, not accommodate it.

#### **Arguments Against Bans**

Various pseudo-arguments have been advanced in an effort to rationalize a total refusal to ban religious symbols or face-coverings.

1. The argument of individual rights, i.e., that any ban is an unjustifiable restriction on personal freedom. This makes sense only if freedom of religion is given priority over all other considerations — more important than that of freedom from religion to which all users of public services have a right — thus granting a privilege to the religion of the wearer.
2. The "Don't tell women what to wear" argument. Religious symbol bans do not tell anyone what to

*cont. on page 6*



wear; they simply restrict religious advertising. At any rate, dress restrictions are commonplace in society.

3. The symmetry argument, a cruel variant of the two previous, arguing that freedom to wear and freedom not to wear are equivalent, as if there were symmetry between being required to remove a veil and being forced to wear one.

4. The argument of small numbers, i.e., that in some countries only very few women wear, for example, the niqab. But globally the numbers are *not* small. Even if they were, prevention is important. Would abolishing slavery be unnecessary if there were only a few slaves?

5. The argument of racism. This is nonsense as we are dealing with religion here. A collection of religious believers does not constitute a race.

6. The argument of religious bigotry, i.e., that such bans may be motivated by nefarious prejudices. Although religious bigotry can and certainly does occur, its existence does not negate any of the solid reasons why bans are necessary in some circumstances. Doing the right thing for dubious political reasons is still better than doing the wrong thing.

7. The “stigmatization” argument, claiming that any ban on the Islamic veil would “stigmatize” Muslim women. This amounts to granting a privilege to Islam. We do not

hesitate to denounce Christian fundamentalists and creationists who publicly promote their views. We would not even consider the extravagant notion that we are somehow “stigmatizing” Christians. Similarly, when Islamic fundamentalists and misogynists aggressively campaign for the normalization of a portable cage for Muslim women, we must denounce their campaign. Christian and Muslim fanatics stigmatize themselves.

8. The argument of xenophobia or “Islamophobia.” This seems to be the favorite, default argument when all else fails. Opponents of religious-symbol bans simply fling baseless slanderous accusations which constitute a new crime of blasphemy and are tools to censor open and necessary discussion of Islam.

#### **False Solidarity**

Total tolerance of the Islamic veil does not help Muslim women. On the contrary, it harms Muslim women because it abandons them to the pressure of their family and community to conform to the increasingly aggressive demands of fundamentalists.

As for those women who wear the Islamic veil purely by choice, they can choose not to wear one if they seek employment in the public sector. If removing the veil for the sake of employment is so repugnant to them that they refuse to do so,

that simply indicates that their religious fanaticism is stronger than their desire to integrate into the work environment.

In particular, Western women who occasionally don a hijab or other Islamic veil in so-called “solidarity” with Muslim women are doing serious harm. They betray women in Muslim-majority countries who are forced to wear the veil. In those countries, pressure on women to conform to fundamentalist religious practices is severe and women who resist that pressure by going out in public without a veil often risk arrest, imprisonment, acid-attacks or worse.

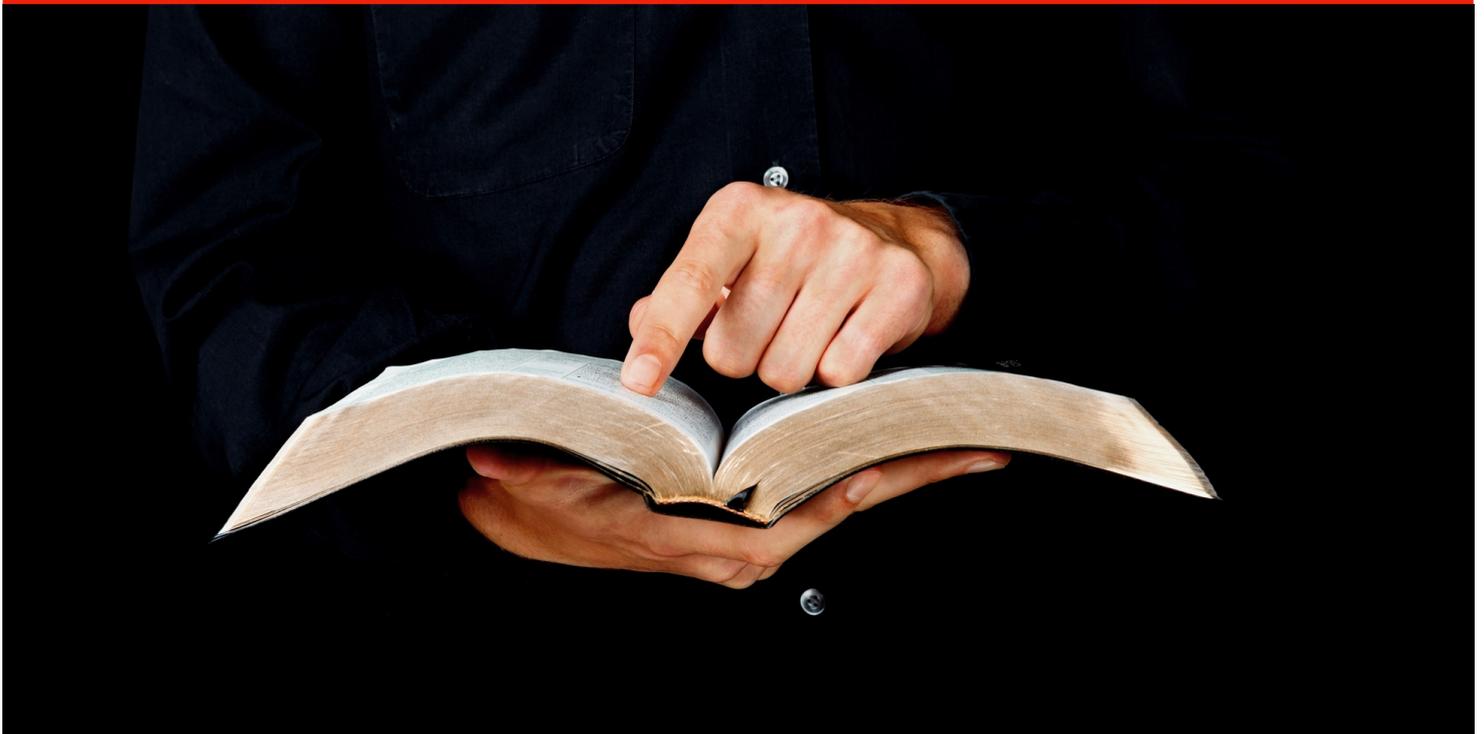
As *Headscarves and Hymens* author Mona Eltahawy points out,

***“Western women who wear the veil contribute to the subservience of women elsewhere in the world for whom wearing the veil is an obligation.”***

**David Rand**

*Canada Correspondent*





***"My god is  
the one true god,  
absolute  
and eternal."***

**Everyone likes to believe that their thinking is sound.** This is particularly the case for the theists who have a belief system that they rely on to explain everything. In their minds, questioning their belief system is close to implying they are insane.

The problem is, many of the concepts that they hang their belief system on are vague and uncertain.

*Absolute* and *eternal* are criteria that cannot be met in a universe where time exists. If there was a beginning, (and they *want* there to have been a beginning) there was a time when today's 'truths' did not apply. Even the 'Laws' of Physics are not eternal: you cannot use equations to describe the behaviour of matter that has not appeared yet!

***'Eternal' is just a concept.***

All the 'truths' that we currently accept are *relative*, not *absolute*. Even the age of your child is relative to the *now* and that's another vagueness: when *is* now, exactly? Is it the moment you pronounce the 'n' or when you say the 'ow'? If we subdivide time into ever smaller fragments we don't find a

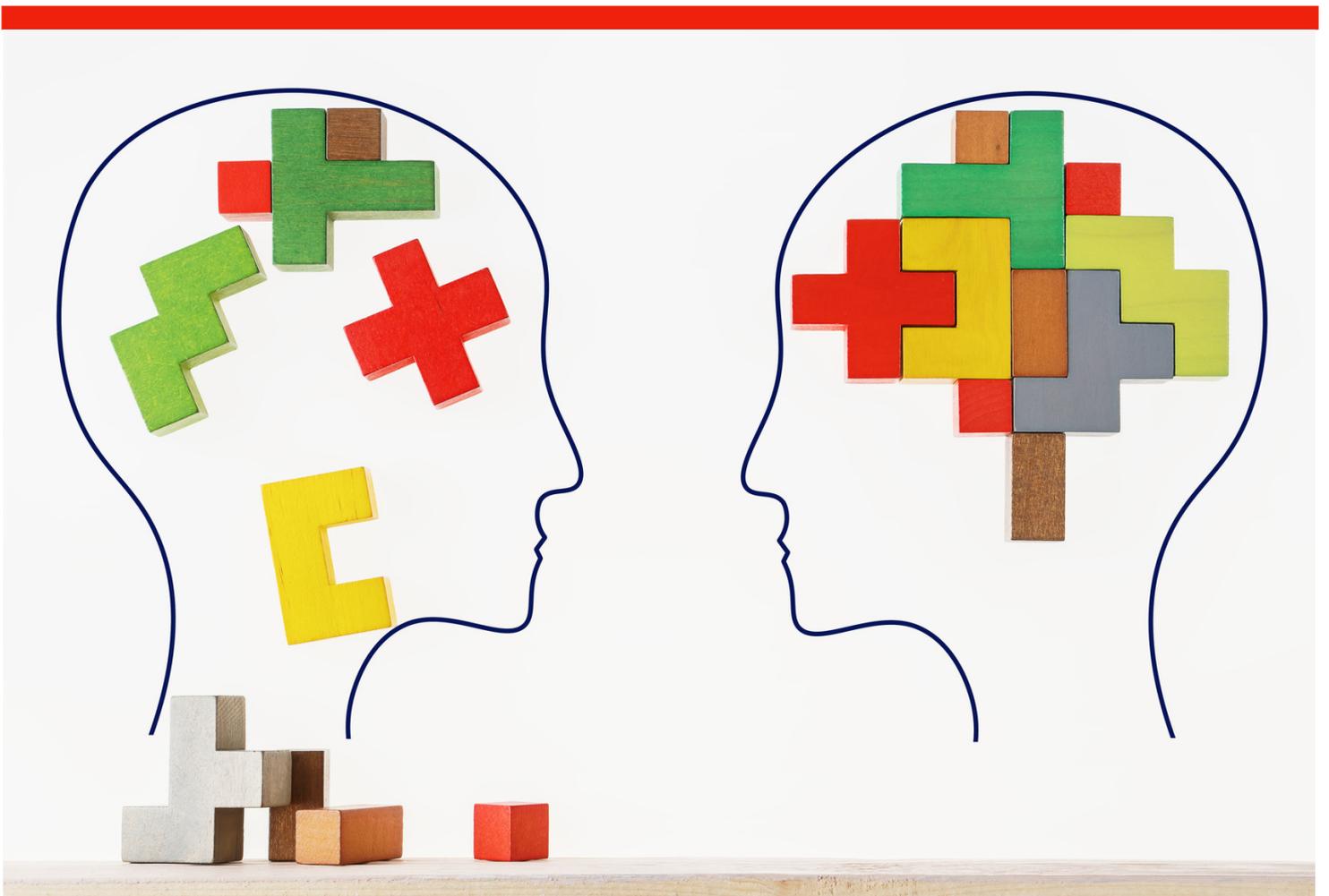
picosecond labelled 'now'. There is no stopping point, just continuous before and after.

***There is no 'now'.***

What about the speed of light in a vacuum, isn't that absolute? Well, we can *calculate* the speed but we cannot *measure* it since we can't achieve a perfect vacuum — we can't keep neutrinos out, and once you put photons in you ruin the vacuum. And, we can only speculate how light behaves in a black hole — it goes in, it doesn't come out. Neither is light *eternal*, the universe was dark until the first stars began to shine.

Let's take another candidate: 'Absolute Zero', the coldest cold, a complete absence of heat. Heat is the motion of particles and, once again, we cannot measure a total absence of it because we can't make a zero Kelvin temperature. It's tied up with vacuum: if there are particles, they will be vibrating — that's heat. Even the walls of the container you try to make a vacuum in are made of particles that will be vibrating — giving off heat.

*cont. on page 8*



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***Absolutes are only in the Conceptual Realm.***

Proof, math and logic are all in the Conceptual Realm. We can imagine lines that have length but no width, and points that have location but no area, and so we can produce geometrical proofs. The reality is that nothing is actually like that, so those certainties don't exist in nature. Every measurement is just an approximation that could be taken to a more accurate level by adding more numbers after the decimal point. So nature doesn't offer proof, we have to make do with evidence.

***Proof is not superior to evidence.***

And that leads us to the next vagueness: what counts as evidence? I've debated many believers who support their position by citing stories, appeals to authority, personal testimony, records of witnesses, popularity, durability, even poetry and songs! Doesn't all that remind you of

*advertising?* All of their offerings are just claims or irrelevancies and, for them to carry the necessary weight, evidence must be indisputable. That eliminates everything except Repeatable Shareable Observations (RSOs). RSOs are as close as it's possible to get to objective information. Once you have cast aside all the 'pretenders to evidence' and the unrealistic expectation of absolute proof and eternal truth, you have to accept the rational view that unfalsified evidential information is the best source of an understanding of the natural realm.

***Evidence is king.***

The next complaint that is levied is that the justice system accepts witness statements and authoritative opinions so why is that not good enough for believers? Well, the justice system is a human fabrication that does not even claim to produce truth. It merely makes judgments to settle disputes, and it does so on one of two principles: either 'the balance of probability' or

'beyond all reasonable doubt'. If courts produced reliable outcomes, we would not need appeal courts, and we would not need to compensate the wrongfully convicted.

***Do not hold up the justice system as a role model for establishing an understanding of nature.***

Few people comprehend that what science does is make models and test them for a match with nature — even the models that offer good explanations for what we observe are only thoughts. Yes, our best models (Scientific Theories) *have* enabled us to to achieve many things by manipulating the elements and forces that we find ourselves living amongst, but we should never forget that they are just thought-up models.

***Nothing is certain. Get used to it!***

**John Richards**

# Applying Logic to the God Proposition

*The second article in the series  
by ancient historian Dr. Richard Carrier*



## **Arguments from Design: Fine Tuning and Biogenesis.**

Even if we grant that fine-tuning exists, there are two ways it can have happened: chance accident or intelligent design. What theists don't want to admit is that all the evidence actually points to chance accident.

If God designed the universe we should expect to observe different things than if God did *not* design the universe. The only way we could exist without a God is by an extremely improbable chemical accident, and the only way an extremely improbable chemical accident is likely to occur is in a universe that's *vastly old and vastly large*. So, atheism predicts a vastly old and large universe, while theism does not.

If an omni-benevolent God designed the universe, we would expect it to be perfectly suited to life. In fact, most of the universe is extremely hostile to life, so in reality it's *barely conducive* to life. Design predicts exactly the opposite to what we actually find.

Of all the possible universes that can be chosen at random, *barely conducive universes* exceed *perfectly suited universes* by countless trillions to one. There are vastly more ways to get the universe that we actually

observe by chance selection than to get a universe perfectly suited to life. So, the observed evidence is *probable* if God does *not* exist and *improbable* if God *does* exist. That argues *against* God, not *for* God.

Similarly, the only way we could exist without a God is by an extremely *long process of evolution* beginning from a single molecule, through hundreds of millions of years of single cells, through hundreds of millions of years of co-operating cells, and further hundreds of millions of years of multicellular organisms. Atheism predicts this, while theism does not.

Lo and behold, an extremely old and vast universe that's barely conducive to life with a record of evolution having occurred over millions of years is *exactly what we do observe*. Yet we would *not* expect to observe those things if a God had designed the universe.

Quite simply, the observed universe and its history is 100% expected to look the way it does if chance accident caused it, but not at all probable if it was designed.

Up to now we've only ever found natural and chance causes of anything. So, the *prior odds* strongly support atheism *and*, from the evidence of life and the cosmos,

the Bayes Factor *also* strongly establishes atheism.

All of this is a far better argument for multiverse theory than for monotheism.

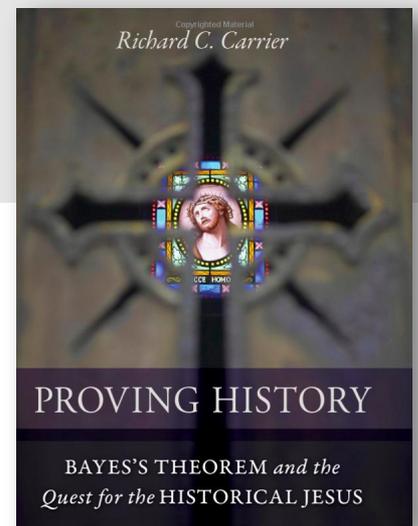
This series of articles is adapted from *Proving History* by Richard Carrier, with his authorization.

Buy the book [here](#):

[www.tinyurl.com/ybuq2bnc](http://www.tinyurl.com/ybuq2bnc)

For an interview with Dr. Richard Carrier go [here](#):

[www.youtube/yUq6j8ieayQ](http://www.youtube/yUq6j8ieayQ)





# SCIENCE LAB

On the 28th of May 2012, a decision was made by a consortium of countries to locate the \$2.5 billion Square Kilometer Array (SKA) — the biggest infrastructure in the history of science — beside the village of Carnarvon in South Africa. The project's primary objectives are to confirm the origins of the universe and find life within it. With more churches than ATMs, Carnarvon is Bible country. You can, no doubt, spot the drama about to erupt.

## It's Dover all over.

As part of its social conscience initiative, the SKA is pumping vast resources into local infrastructure and education, particularly the science curriculum at Carnarvon's high school. The god-fearing locals consider this to be a threat. The decade-long construction phase of the SKA begins this year, 2018. Like Hubble before it, over the next two decades and more, the SKA is destined to become a household name, not simply famous for its anticipated discoveries, but for the breakthroughs in data handling, technology and engineering it will

force on scientists as they ramp up to the challenge.

Expect to witness a dazzling cascade of 'blue-sky' benefits to mankind flowing out of the project into our ordinary consumer lives. Precisely what those benefits might be is impossible to reckon.

One reasonable area for a guess is medical breakthroughs as a result of the big data storage and analysis that is the cornerstone on which the project is built, it will produce 1-exabyte of data (100 times the amount of the Large Hadron Collider) 1,000,000,000,000,000 bytes or the equivalent of 10 days worth of internet traffic every day.

The fleetingly insubstantial ghosts of information about one or another aspect of our universe's birth that the SKA must tease from the noise of the cosmos are strongly akin to the molecular-level deviations at the cellular level deep within the human body.

When the SKA achieves its goal in looking outward at the fine details, it is inevitable that the same

technology, turned inward, will consign our current functional MRI and similar analysis equipment to museum pieces. The cancers and other ailments of advancing age may be spotted and targeted long before they can make their first twitch in the macro world of internal medicine.

The SKA will be at the forefront of the Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence, having the ability to tune in to galaxies far-far away (and long-long ago) to hear any noise of sophisticated life out there.

For all astronomers, the inverse square law is the enemy. As one moves away from a source (of light/heat/microwave/gravity) the intensity dramatically reduces — double the distance and the signal strength is reduced by 75% to just 25%. To detect, say, a TV broadcast at twice the distance, you need an antenna 4 times the size, and this is exactly what the SKA will do for the SETI Institute (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence).

*cont. on page 11*



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Until now, SETI could not 'see' further than the closest stars. But the SKA will do for twenty-first century man what Galileo did when he put a telescope to his eye. In Galileo's case he increased resolution 10-fold over the naked eye. But the SKA will do quite a bit better than that. With a collecting surface (aggregated out of thousands of independent connected antennas) of 1-million square metres, it will increase our ability to observe by 10,000 times.

Even with the nasty square-inverse law trying to play hide and seek with us, we'll still penetrate the fog of distance and include in it some very interesting candidates: stars with exo-planets in the Goldilocks zone.

With our military, television and radio-pumping emissions into space for the past century, humans are a pretty noisy bunch, yet if a similarly vocal civilization were hanging out near our closest star, Proxima

Centauri, 4.2 light years away, our pre-SKA detection technology would barely be able to detect a peep of it.

The SKA is being built in phases – even its first test phase will push that boundary from 4 to perhaps 60 light years. When complete, the shell of visibility could conceivably detect ET from nearly 10-times that distance.

On the exciting day we flip on the telly and see *"BREAKING NEWS—INTELLIGENT ALIEN LIFE CONFIRMED"*, how will the religions of the world react?

Howls of "Armageddon" are sure to dominate. Evangelicals will find biblical passages that they'll claim predicted it all along, the Catholics will double-time to convert the aliens while the Mormons will have bags packed, ready to beat them to it.

Denialist sects will certainly splinter away, claiming it all to be a conspiracy aimed at undermining the Bible due to its failure to mention alien life. In the final

analysis, though, we'll probably see 'more of the same'.

If history has taught us anything, it has shown that, three hundred years into this age of reason and rising tide of mystery-neutralizing knowledge, religious zealots will find opportunities on the back of alien discovery to fleece their flock in a gazillion creative and contradictory new ways.

**Michael Smorenburg**  
South Africa Correspondent



Buy Michael's excellent novel,

A Trojan Affair

by clicking [here](#).

# Human Progress: Leaving Religion Behind



Age of Religion



Age of Science

Almost daily, in the USA, the news features gun massacres, terror attacks, job losses, drug overdoses and other 'evils'.

In reality, human life is getting better, safer, healthier, more prosperous and more educated all the time, according to one of America's top scholars.

Harvard psychologist, Steven Pinker, shows in his latest book, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress*, that war, murder, rape, poverty, crime, disease, famines and many other agonies have dwindled enormously during the past couple of centuries. Pinker says a "steady drumbeat of doom" in the news makes people think today is worse, but "This bleak assessment of the state of the world is wrong. And not just a little wrong — wrong, wrong, flat-earth wrong, couldn't be more wrong."

He attributes the improvement to the Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, which began in the 1700s and transformed Western civilization. Kings and clerics lost their power over society. Democracy flowered. Science, intelligence and human cooperation became driving forces to uplift people's lives. Snowballing progress has ensued ever since.

Part of this advancement was caused by downgrading supernatural religion that once dominated Western civilization. Dr. Pinker says, "Our ancestors replaced dogma, tradition and authority with reason, debate and institutions of truth-seeking. They replaced superstition and magic with science."

**Educated modern westerners, he says, no longer "need to believe in magic, a father in the sky."**

Today's folks enjoy blessings once unimaginable: "Newborns who will live more than eight decades, markets overflowing with food, clean water that appears with a flick of a finger, and waste that disappears with another, pills that erase a painful infection...critics of the powerful who are not jailed or shot, the world's knowledge and culture available in a shirt pocket." Dr. Pinker points out, "In the middle of the 18th century, life expectancy for the world as a whole was 29 years of age." Today it's around 80, thanks mostly to medical science, better nutrition, clean water and more safety. Pinker wrote, "Since yesterday, 180,000 people have escaped extreme poverty,"

"At the turn of the 20th century, women could vote in just one country; today they can vote in every country where men can vote save

one (Vatican City)."

"Two centuries ago, 12 percent of the world could read and write; today 85 percent can. Literacy and education will soon be universal, for girls as well as for boys."

"The proportion of people killed annually in wars is about a quarter of what it was in the mid-1980s, a sixth of what it was in the early 1970s, and a sixteenth of what it was in the early 1950s."

"In 1988, the world had just 45 democracies, embracing 2 billion people; today it has 103, embracing 4.1 billion." The history-minded psychologist says racism, sexism, homophobia and bullying once prevailed in most cultures, but now they're no-nos.

Cyber billionaire Bill Gates says *Enlightenment Now* is "my new favorite book of all time." I can see why.

**James Haught**  
USA Correspondent





# Escape from Faith

## ***A disabled US Army veteran and former Pastor tells the story of his escape from Christianity.***

I was raised in a Southern Baptist household. My family was rather typical in most respects, but I was introduced to the Gospel at six years old, being told that Jesus died for me because I was born a sinner and that one day if I did not accept him I would go to Hell and not be with my loved ones in the afterlife. This filled me with some dread as I surely didn't want to go to Hell, and I also didn't want to be separated from my loved ones in the afterlife.

Oddly, my family weren't big church-goers, but I was constantly reminded that I was nothing without Jesus. This also affected my personal outlook on life. I found myself, at 11 years old, being so scared by a sermon on Hell that I walked down the aisle and said the Sinner's Prayer and asked Jesus to come into my heart and later got baptized. I read my Bible regularly but lived a rather normal life thinking I was safe.

But then at 17 years old I was conflicted whether or not I was truly saved, and rededicated my life to Jesus. I was baptized this time in a Charismatic Church.

This was all due to the influence of one of my Martial Art teachers who was the pastor of the Charismatic Church, and who convinced me that I had to be 'born again'. One of the ways that the pastor convinced me of this was giving me the book *More Than A Carpenter* by Josh McDowell, and later *Evidences That Demand A Verdict*. I was so influenced by the books that I decided that I would dedicate my life to becoming an Apologist and doing ministry. I was involved in Street Preaching, Youth Ministry, and Homeless Ministry and devoted every spare minute I had to becoming as educated as I could in the field of Theology and Apologetics. I eventually moved away from the Charismatic beliefs, returned to my Southern Baptist roots and ended up enrolling in Liberty University (LU) Correspondence Courses in Theology and Apologetics.

Everything seemed to make sense until I encountered the Problem of Evil (PoE). After much thinking and researching I found that the *Free Will Defense* that I previously held regarding the PoE had some major problems. How could I square the reality of suffering/evil in the world with an omni-benevolent,

omnipotent god?

It took me several years to think things over, but eventually I came to see that the omni-characteristics of the Christian god didn't square up with the PoE. I was deeply affected by this information, and, although I continued ministry, I so desired to answer this problem that I even began to read non-Christian sources. I eventually began to see that the PoE was an insurmountable problem, and that it had not been sufficiently addressed by Christian apologists and philosophers. I began to doubt whether I had sufficient reasons to believe in the Gospels. I soon discovered the writings of Robert G. Ingersoll and George H. Smith. I tried to wrestle against their reason but eventually had come to see that they were in fact correct regarding their summations about Christianity.

During this time I tried to speak with other ministers and even wrote to my Professors at LU. All I got were stock answers, and not one of them convinced me that they were anywhere near correct or logically sound. I really tried to hold on to Christianity and didn't want to depart from doing the good things I did in the ministry such as taking care of the homeless and visiting the sick and elderly. But, I also could no

*cont. on page 14*

cont. from page 13

longer live a lie. I no longer believed in the supernatural claims of Christianity and after much heartbreak and rejection from almost all my friends and some family members I left the ministry and told my church that I was no longer a believer.

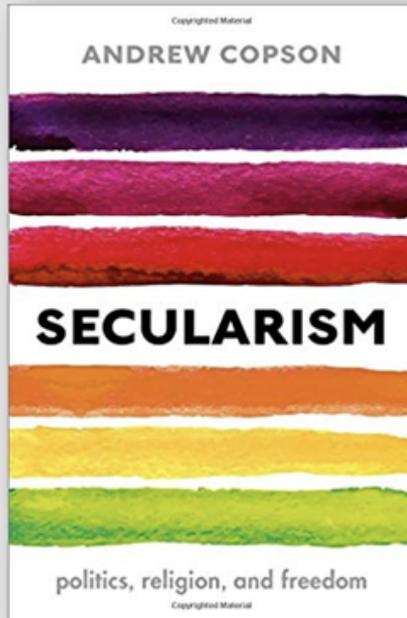
I tried to hold to a weak version of Deism until I read Michael Martin's book *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* in 1991. It was then I admitted that I was an atheist. I remained rather quiet about my unbelief until after 9/11 when I was introduced to the work of Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens. Eventually, in 2011 I found *The Atheist Experience* on YouTube and built up my knowledge and methodology until, in 2013, I decided to openly discuss atheism and also my love for Science, Humanism, Critical Thinking, and Skepticism on my personal Facebook page. I was met with great displeasure by friends and family members, but I decided this was who I was and I was going to continue despite their displeasure. In 2017, I decided to start a Twitter account @apetivist and got a quick following. I dedicate a few hours daily to maintaining my Twitter account and keeping up with the latest theistic arguments.

*Please follow me on Twitter, and if you have any questions feel free to ask.*

**Jonathan E. Kiser**  
and his wife Susan



# secularworld RECOMMENDS...



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[www.tinyurl.com/y9x6t2bq](http://www.tinyurl.com/y9x6t2bq):

But, from the eighteenth century onwards, some European states began to set up their political order on a different basis. Not religion, but the rule of law through non-religious values embedded in constitutions became the foundation of some states — a movement we now call secularism.

Until the modern period, the integration of church (or other religion) and state (or political life) had been taken for granted. The political order was always tied to an official religion in Christian Europe, pre-Christian Europe, and in the Arabic world.

For a video interview with Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK and President of Humanists International, click [here](#) or copy and paste this URL:  
<https://youtu.be/hspJndJdsw4>

January 2018 Hijri 1439			February 2018 Hijri 1439			March 2018 Hijri 1439								
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## FUN FACT

**14:39** The time according to my watch.

**1439** The time according to the Islamic calendar.

# Argument to the Best Explanation

## *Sherlock Holmes' Method: Abduction*

***We're amazingly prone to 'see' things that are not really there.***

Take the resurrection of Jesus, for example. Typically, this is argued for using *argument to the best explanation*. We are told Biblical scholars agree on certain facts: that Jesus' tomb was empty, that Jesus was seen afterwards by several different witnesses and so on. Then, it's suggested that a risen Christ is the best available explanation for these reports — a better explanation than that all the witnesses were lying or deluded, or that Jesus had not really died, etc. So, what is wrong with this sort of justification for belief in 9/11 conspiracy, alien visitors, ghosts, fairies and the resurrection?

One of my favorite examples involves a strange object seen over the building site of a new U.S. nuclear plant back in 1967. Police arrived. One officer confirmed that "It was about half the size of the moon, and it just hung there over the plant. Must have been there nearly two hours." The County magistrate said he saw "a rectangular object about the size of a football field". There was even a rogue radar blip reported by air

traffic control! What on earth could this amazing object be?

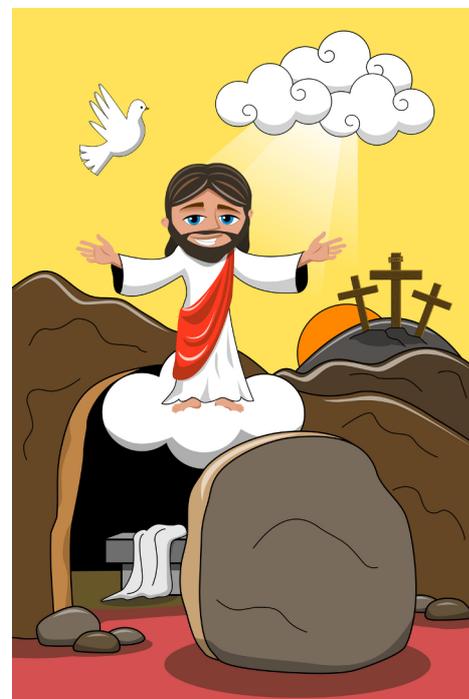
Journalists arrived on the scene, were shown the object, and chased it in their car. They found they couldn't approach it. Finally, they looked at it through a long lens and saw it was Venus. That radar blip was just a coincidence.

### ***What does this show?***

Every year there are countless amazing reports of religious miracles, alien abductions, ghosts, and so on. In most cases, it's easy to come up with plausible, mundane explanations for them. But not all. Some remain deeply baffling. So, given this hard core of 'unexplained cases', should we believe in such things, then?

No, for as my UFO story illustrates, we know that reasonable explanations for very hard-to-explain reports of miracles, flying saucers and so on will likely show up, given time. That 1967 example could easily have been a baffling case if the journalists had not investigated and found the truth. It could easily have gone down in the annals of UFOlogy as one of the great 'unexplained' cases. UFO enthusiasts would have said, "That is hardly likely to be an hallucination, or a lie, or just a normal aircraft, surely? The best explanation is that there really was an extraordinary object in the sky,"

So when people say, "The best available explanation of these amazing reports is that witnesses really *did* see an alien spacecraft (or a resurrection, or miracle, or angel, etc.), because it's just implausible that they could have all been hallucinating, or tricked by an illusion (then what explains that



radar blip?), or are lying (after all, they're police officers, a magistrate, independent witnesses, etc.)".

You should point out that cases like this crop up every now and then, even if there aren't any alien spaceships visiting us, or no resurrections, etc. Such reports are not evidence for the existence of alien craft.

**We shouldn't conclude that there probably was an alien spacecraft or a resurrection solely because we are unable to come up with a more plausible explanation.**

**Stephen Law**

*Reader in Philosophy,  
Heythrop College, London University,*



Buy Stephen's books [here](#)

# Pseudoscience

## being taught in British Creationist Schools

**Students at Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) schools don't graduate with GCSEs or A levels — they complete the International Certificate of Christian Education.**

ACE schools have been operating in the UK since the early 1980s; in 2010 the BBC reported that there were 60 of them. At these schools, pupils spend half of every school day alone in a cubicle working silently through PACE (Packets of Accelerated Christian Education) workbooks that incorporate religious instruction into every academic subject. They teach that evolution is a hoax, for example.

Jonny Scaramanga was sent to an Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) school from 11 years old until he left in 1999, aged 14. Then, in 2012, Jonny was accepted by the Institute of Education to do a PhD researching the ACE system. He discovered that little has changed.

He has campaigned against ACE, with some success. Consequently, Former Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt has described ACE schools' stance on homosexuality as "dangerous" and "backwards", the Advertising Standards Authority ruled that some ACE schools were mis-selling their qualifications, and the press finally noticed they were teaching that wives must submit to their husbands.

Despite this, little attention has been paid to the pseudoscience that ACE passes off as education. The PACEs sometimes get basic science wrong, but more importantly they demonstrate that ACE can't tell the difference between science and nonsense obscured with long words!

For example, ACE's Science 1087 (aimed at students in year 9) suggests it might be possible to generate electricity from snow! Here is a quote from a PACE workbook:

*"Scientists have known for years that snowflakes are shaped in six-sided, or hexagonal patterns. But why is this? Some scientists have theorized that the electrons within a water molecule follow three orbital paths that are positioned at 60° angles to one another. Since a circle contains 360°, this electronic relationship causes the water molecule to have six 'spokes' radiating from a hub (the nucleus). When water vapor freezes in the air, many water molecules link up to form the distinctive six-sided snowflakes and the hexagonal pattern is quite evident.*

*Snowflakes also contain small air pockets between their spokes. These air pockets have a higher oxygen content than does normal air. Magnetism has a stronger attraction for oxygen than for other gases. Consequently, some scientists have concluded that a relationship exists between a snowflake's attraction to oxygen and magnetism's attraction to oxygen.*

*Job 38:22, 23 states, 'Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?' Considering this scripture, some scientists believe that a tremendous power resides untapped within the water molecules from which snowflakes and hailstones are made. How can this scripture, along with these observations about snowflakes, show us a physical truth? Scientists at Virginia Tech have produced electricity more efficiently from permanent*

*magnets, which have their lines of force related to each other at sixty-degree angles, than from previous methods of extracting electricity from magnetism. Other research along this line may reveal a way to tap electric current directly from snow, eliminating the need for costly, heavy, and complex equipment now needed to generate electricity."*

Jonny asked Professor Paul Braterman, a chemist at Glasgow University and a committee member of the anti-creationist British Centre for Science Education, what he thought. "Bullshit on stilts" came his reply in a brusque email pointing out that snow has no magnetic properties. The prospect of generating free electricity from snow, he added, "bears no relationship to reality".

It's difficult to see how ACE has been able to get away with calling this 'science' ever since the PACE was written in 1986. But this text demonstrates the way creationists go about doing science. To Christian creationists, the Bible is the 'Word of God' and is free from error. So, unless it's clear that a verse is intended metaphorically, creationists take it literally. That is the starting point for creationist 'science'. They 'know' the Bible is true, so they unscientifically go and look for confirmation of what it says. If the evidence contradicts the Bible, they consider either the data is wrong or it has been misinterpreted. Whichever, they go back and try again until they 'confirm' the truth of the 'Word of God'.

Adapted from an article by  
**Dr Jonny Scaramanga**





## Free Will?

***Christianity is in dire straits if free will is an illusion...***

Christians' business model depends entirely on the notion that humans are born with 'original sin' for which we must accept individual responsibility. They tell us that this *congenital normality (!)* condemns us to 'burning in hell' for eternity when we die, unless we seek forgiveness. Following a suitably groveling 'atonement', 'salvation' can be provided by submission to Jesus through his earthly representatives, the Christian clergy (who will humbly accept donations!). Only then, can we be guaranteed an 'afterlife' of 'eternal' bliss in 'heaven'.

Leaving aside the fact that such claims are obviously palpable nonsense\*, the operative words in my opening paragraph are 'individual responsibility'. If free will does not exist, we can't be held responsible for our actions because we are not in control of them.

### **What do we mean by 'free will'?**

The simplest definition of free will is 'the ability to have done otherwise' and we all 'feel like' we could have made different choices in the past, but *could* we have in reality? We can't revisit the past and test the veracity of that feeling. Even if we could, is it reasonable to expect that all the conditions would be the same as they were the first time we made the choice? Since everything is dynamic and the arrow of time is forwards, is it likely that we can recapture the previous conditions with all the quarks having the exact

same spin as before? That would be improbability on stilts.

For the sake of discussion, let's assume we *can* go back to the moment when we opted for one choice over another on the menu that was being offered at the time. How did we choose on the original occasion? We just did what we wanted, that's how. Were we in charge of that process of wanting? Could we have gone against our want, whatever it was? Can we make ourselves 'unwant' something and 'want' the opposite? Is there any measure of personal control?

The answer seems to be "No". Desires seem to emerge from the melee that is a mind *unbidden*. Some sort of noisy, random, fickle, uncontrollable process seems to generate them.

So, if we *could* recreate the past instant when we carried out the action that we now wish we had done differently *and* all the conditions were, improbably, the same on this second visit, we might randomly make the same choice...

### **Is that 'free will'?**

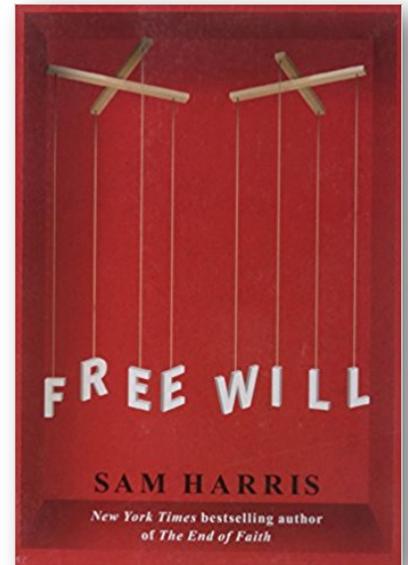
The implications for Christianity are seismic. If free will is an illusion, nobody can be held responsible for their actions; nobody can be blamed for their 'sin' and nobody can be deemed to deserve punishment in 'hell'.

**So, nobody will require 'salvation' and the clergy will be out of a job!**

**The Editor**

secularworld

RECOMMENDS...



**A BELIEF IN FREE WILL** touches nearly everything that human beings value. It is difficult to think about law, politics, religion, public policy, intimate relationships, morality — as well as feelings of remorse or personal achievement — without first imagining that every person is the true source of his or her thoughts and actions. And yet, the facts tell us that free will is an illusion.

In this enlightening book, Sam Harris argues that this truth about the human mind does not undermine morality or diminish the importance of social and political freedom, but it can and should change the way we think about some of the most important questions in life.

Buy the book [here](http://www.tinyurl.com/y97r4awq):  
[www.tinyurl.com/y97r4awq](http://www.tinyurl.com/y97r4awq)

\* There is no evidence for 'sin', 'hell', 'heaven', 'afterlife' or 'eternality'.

## Leo Igwe

*Nigerian human rights advocate  
and humanist.*

Leo Igwe is a former Western and Southern African Representative of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, who has specialized in campaigning against and documenting the impacts of child witchcraft accusations. He holds a Ph.D from the Bayreuth International School of African Studies at the University of Bayreuth in Germany, having earned a graduate degree in Philosophy from the University of Calabar in Nigeria.

Igwe's human rights advocacy has brought him into conflict with high-profile witchcraft believers, such as Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries, because of his criticism of what he describes as their role in the violence and child abandonment that sometimes result from accusations of witchcraft. His human rights fieldwork has led to his arrest on several occasions in Nigeria.

Igwe has held leadership roles in the Nigerian Humanist Movement, Atheist Alliance International, and the Center For Inquiry—Nigeria. In 2012, Igwe was appointed as a Research Fellow of the James Randi Educational Foundation. In 2014, Igwe was chosen as a laureate of the International Academy of Humanism, and in 2017 he received the Distinguished Services to Humanism Award from the International Humanist and Ethical



Photo credit: B D Engler

Union.

In a Fall 2000 article in the quarterly journal *Free Inquiry*, Leo enumerated different ways in which religious extremists in Nigeria have co-opted the local government and used it to enforce religious codes of law, hindering the upholding of human rights in those areas. Igwe wrote in 2004 that in his own country of Nigeria, contemporary belief in witchcraft leads to ritual killing and human sacrifice, noting that women and children are more likely to be said to possess or practice "negative" witchcraft abilities, while men are more often depicted as possessing benign witchcraft abilities.

In 2008, a BBC documentary, *Saving Africa's Witch Children*, featured an appearance by Igwe, as one of the primary subjects was "witch hunter Helen Ukpabio." The documentary reported many abuses committed against children accused of witchcraft and premiered as an HBO feature in 2010. In 2009, Igwe represented the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul, Gambia, where he spoke out on the IHEU's behalf against

caste-based discrimination in Africa.

In 2010, according to a release by the European Humanist Federation (EHF), Igwe's home was invaded by soldiers and police officers "following a fictitious murder charge," which was allegedly brought on by a man that Igwe had attempted to have prosecuted for allegedly committing sexual crimes against a 10-year-old girl in 2006. According to the report, Igwe had been arrested three times since beginning work on the rape case as a result of allegedly malicious petitions, prompting David Pollock of the EHF to write to then Vice-President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, on Igwe's behalf.

According to the EHF, later in August 2010 Igwe's home and family were attacked when two unidentified men assaulted and blindfolded Igwe's father, causing "extensive injuries to his face and head," and resulting in the elder Igwe having to have his eye surgically removed. This case has been taken up by Amnesty International, after police reportedly refused to open an investigation.

On January 11, 2011, while attempting to rescue two children who were victims of a witchcraft accusation in Uyo Akwa State in Southern Nigeria, Igwe was "imprisoned and beaten by police," according to Sahara Reporters, New York City, in an effort by the state governor, Godswill Akpabio, to begin "clamping down on activists involved in the rescue of children accused of witchcraft." Igwe was later released without charge, according to Gary Foxcroft of Stepping Stones Nigeria.

On February 11, 2014, Igwe was chosen as a laureate of the International Academy of Humanism, and in 2017 he was given the Distinguished Services to Humanism Award from the International Humanist and Ethical Union General Assembly. Upon receiving the award, Igwe dedicated it **"to all humanists at risk around the globe"**.



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