

Bill of Rights*



*** for the Nones**

**Join our campaign for a
Universal Declaration
of Atheist Rights**

In this issue:

<i>Editorial</i>	2	<i>Does Islam Preach Jihad?</i>	10-11
<i>President's Letter</i>	3	<i>Agnostics Creed</i>	12
<i>How many 'Nones'?</i>	4	<i>Things Theists Say</i>	13
<i>Science Lab: Sex and Gender</i>	5-6	<i>Secular World Recommends</i>	14
<i>Applying Logic to the God Proposition</i>	7	<i>Escape from Faith</i>	15
<i>A Poor Way to Engage with Atheists</i>	8	<i>Ministers or Monsters?</i>	16-17
<i>Conferences: New Zealand and Uganda</i>	9	<i>Atheist on an Alpha Course</i>	18
		<i>AAI's Freethinking Hero</i>	19



Editorial

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is okay, *as far as it goes*. Religions, however, are hostile to the very Equalities and Freedoms that the UDHR proposes, yet little is done to curb their controlling tendencies. The UDHR sets out to ensure that we all have the Right to practice any religion, but it makes no attempt to enshrine the Right to have No Faith. That's odd, since 'none' is the condition we are all born in.

Even the Right to Body Integrity is sometimes denied by the induction of babies in a ceremony that includes genital mutilation, before they can voice an opinion! Is 'atheism' just for adults? When is the age of self-determination? Why do we permit the division of humanity into disagreeable factions based on myths? Aren't we just storing up bogus reasons for future conflict?

While they are still young and impressionable, the children of Christians in particular, are told they were born 'sinful' and are threatened with burning in 'hell' for eternity if they don't 'repent'. It's an education designed to cause mental anguish, to destroy self-esteem and to

enforce submission to the control of religious leaders who coerce their flock into making donations to the church for their entire lifetime. Some religious groups go beyond merely causing psychological damage by inflicting cruel corporal punishments. Whatever happened to Freedom from Fear?

A few forward-thinking countries have recognized these attempts by the devout to deny the Freedom to Disbelieve and have outlawed the teaching of religion in state schools but, particularly in theocracies, government and faith sponsored indoctrination continues. Shouldn't we have the Right to a Faith-free Education? To learn about evidence-based information and how to think critically?

Medieval laws of blasphemy, heresy and apostasy, which do nothing for the security, social cohesion or the regulation of peaceful communities, but rather support the continued privileged status of a faith, are on statute books everywhere. The intention is to deny people the Right to Leave the Faith that they were, accidentally, born into.

Another group of victims is the clergy themselves; junior members are subjected to despotic

leadership. They may be denied the Right to a Relationship and can lose their job and home at the whim of a higher ranking individual, just for speaking their minds. The cartoon above (by Sebastian) depicts the sacking of Rev. Anthony Freeman by the Bishop of Chichester in 1994. Again, the intention is to deny a person the Right to Speak his own mind, to renounce religion and to become an atheist. Are we supposed to be content with Freedom of Speech *except in matters of religion*?

Shouldn't we have the Freedom to remain in the Atheism that we were born into, or to leave the faith that we had inflicted upon us early in life? Is the UDHR fit-for-purpose or does it need strengthening? It is against this backdrop that AAI is proposing a Universal Declaration of Atheist Rights. Copy this url into your browser for more information:

<https://tinyurl.com/y8qc5a6o>

John Richards
AAI Publications
Director





President's Letter

Well, we did it! We launched our revitalized website, and we've been showered with compliments!

Yes, we've received some admiring reactions, membership is growing, local groups are affiliating and donations are coming in. Atheist Alliance International update two is on its way!

According to responders to the relaunched website and to *AAI Insider*, our monthly supporters newsletter, there is definitely a need for our organization.

With that out of the way, except for constant provision of new content and other maintenance matters, we can turn the whole of our attention to the real business — our international campaigns.

In this letter, I want to focus on Uganda. For a while last century, it

was a country held back by the eccentric President, Idi Amin, but it has been making better progress more recently. For example, the 'Kill the Gays Bill' fomented by three Christians from the USA to make homosexuality a capital offense, was toned down to life in prison.

AAI has two ongoing projects in this East African developing country. Together with the Brighter Brains Institute and Humanists Canada, we support Kasesi Humanist School (pictured above). The school has been taking children from 3 - 14 years old and has grown to three campuses since it started in 2011.

In 2016, construction began on a Secondary School and funds are needed to complete and equip it. So Kasesi's Director of Education is working on a new fundraising video with our Publications Director. You will see that on our website soon.

Atheist Alliance International is also working with the Brighter Brains Institute to start a vanilla bean farm in Uganda for older students. The farm is a project of Pearl Vocational Academy which teaches working

skills to older students. Many of these students are women who were forced to stop their education to get married at an early age. The Academy is based on Humanist principles and critical thinking is part of their curriculum. Although not as valuable as it was back in the days of sailing ships, vanilla is still a highly desirable commodity so the vanilla bean farm will provide a source of income as well as enabling students to learn agricultural skills. Students have cleared the bush and built a fence. Now they need to start growing the vanilla beans...

Meanwhile, our freedom from religion campaign, UDAR, is getting off the ground. We are starting with asking you, our members and supporters, to give us your opinion on what Rights you think non-believers should be entitled to.

Gail Miller

President, Atheist Alliance International



Check out the AAI revitalized website!

[CLICK HERE](#)



How many 'nones'?

It's difficult to quantify religious affiliation or non-affiliation

Pre-lingual babies get 'inducted' into the religion of their parents. Later in life, when they can express an opinion, they are under threat and peer pressure to conform by declaring themselves to belong to the faith group they happen to have been born into.

This meant that, before the age of cheap mass transport, religions spread out from an epicenter like a plague, but only as fast as a man could walk. Of course, the jumbo jet altered that and we are now mixed up with pockets of assorted religions in many cities that were exclusively 'the one true faith' before

(whichever faith it was).

Naturally, religious leaders make exaggerated claims for the size of their membership - Christians brag about 2 million, Muslims boast of 1.7 million. However, meaningful figures cannot be obtained. Do these people practice their religion? Do they regularly attend services? Do they follow the principles and taboos? Or is it merely what they declare on forms?

The worst cases are those countries that have a compulsory state religion where you don't even get to fill in your own form! A Kurdish acquaintance of mine revealed that he didn't know he was a Muslim until he applied for a passport and read what the officials had put! (See cartoon above.)

Commonly, where surveys on faith are conducted, most forms assume that everyone has a faith - there is no 'None' box to tick. Many countries, including the USA, do not even ask about religion in a census

because campaigners have asserted that their faith is not the government's business. I suspect that believers would rather the truth not be known.

People have been taking things into their own hands: the "Knights of the Jedi" religion is gaining momentum in the Czech Republic.

More than 15,000 people listed themselves as followers of the Star Wars-inspired faith in a recent census. The biggest proportion of respondents claiming the religion live in the country's capital, Prague. Nearly half of the country's population chose not to identify themselves with any organized religion in the census, but those who did single themselves out as Jedi Knights, did so by writing in their preference.

A spokesman for the office remarked, "We included this option (in the census form) despite a fierce debate over whether it's serious or not. But it's not up to the statisticians to say what is or is not a religion." (From the CzechPosition website.)

Twenty-one thousand Canadians affiliated themselves with the Jedi religion in a 2001 census, and more than 53,000 people also did that in New Zealand in the same year. A recent poll in the UK showed that 53% of the general population describe themselves as having no religion. This rises to almost 75% in the 18 to 24 years age group.

Australia is one of the more enlightened nations. In 2016, their census form offered the option to tick 'No religion', and 30% of the population checked that box.

It can be done, then...

John Richards

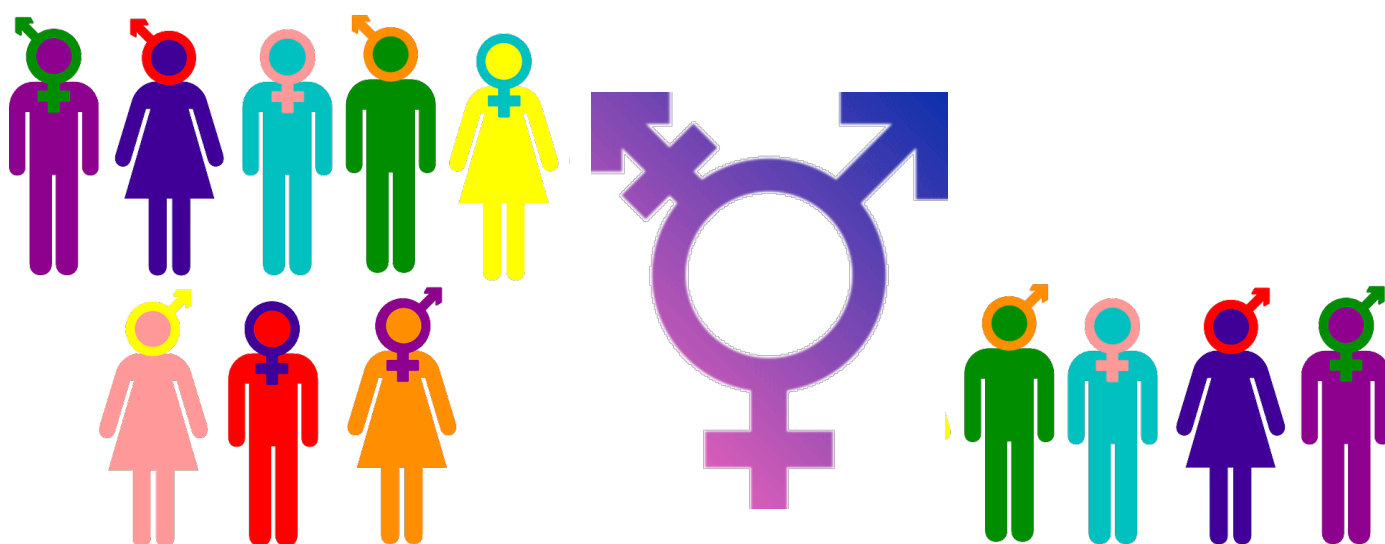
AAI Publications Director

What is your religion?

Tick one box only.



NONE



SCIENCE LAB : Sex and Gender

One of the ways that atheism can be shown to have a positive impact on society is the support of equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons. The opposition to LGBTQ rights is, exclusively, derived from religious ideologies.

Many religions start off with a false dichotomy through their stories of creation and how god created man and woman. People are primed to this idea that men and women are the two (binary) options from early indoctrination. This binary thinking is reinforced in various themes through religious texts, such as the fight between good and evil, believers and non-believers; it has a symmetry that makes the concept both appealing and understandable. As much as theists want to believe that science/reality agrees with their religious texts, it simply does not, but religions have a long history of ignoring science in favor of their preferred dogmatic conclusion.

There are two words of primary confusion to understand: sex and

gender. Sex is a biological construct that encapsulates the anatomical, physiological, genetic and hormonal variations that exist in a species. Biologically it is not even as clear cut as the simplified genomic descriptors of XX (women) and XY (men), as there are a variety of other chromosomal configurations that are rare but possible.

Gender is a multidimensional construct that refers to roles, responsibilities, limitations and experiences provided to an individual based on their presenting sex. In other words, gender is how we develop masculine and feminine attributes. Gender is psychological or cultural rather than biological.

This is why we call it 'gender roles' or 'gender relations' or 'gender identity'; it is rooted in social structure and largely expressed through social norms. In this regard, I have seen the argument made that transgender persons simply suffer from a psychological disorder of gender dysmorphia. That in itself is an attempt to misrepresent scientific research, because it is an appeal to

the psychological research of the 19th and 20th century.

Categorizing oneself as a woman or a man does not have a uniform, unvarying meaning. Developmentally, children's understanding of gender changes as they age. The complex and fluid dynamics of gender are solidified as we become more aware of social interactions and roles in society. Gender identity crystallizes along with understanding of other gender constructs, including gender stereotypical attributes and the ascription of these attributes to the self. Essentially these are nurture attributes—how we are raised.

The initial problem with studying the biological drivers of gender is the complexity of our biology. Genetics and proteomics are areas of research being conducted to ascertain the biological roots of gender identity. We know that like cisgender people, most transgender people have XX or XY chromosomes, though a number of chromosomal variations are possible beyond the binary.

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Hormones are really the key factor in our development and different hormones kick in at different times during our development so variations in these affect our outward appearance. The target of the majority of current research relates to the effects of hormones on the developing fetus.

Many people seem to be confused about how a person cannot be sure what their gender is or how people can identify with another gender. When you are born, hormones cause us to develop; they turn on and off at different stages, as well as drive the sexual development. As an example hypothetical scenario, during development an enzyme that helps conversion of testosterone does not work properly and it causes a decrease in masculinization of genitalia with those with XY chromosomes (men). Children with this faulty enzyme are often identified as a third sex due to a non-differentiation of their identity.

Now before anyone gets ahead of me and thinks that transgender people have a genetic disorder that makes them, let's be clear that enzyme malfunctions can happen naturally and do not always result in some 'disorder'; there are hundreds of ways that enzymes may not function optimally. The point I am trying to make here is that hormones are important for sexual differentiation into Male/Female, and sometimes there are things that may not work in our body and, in the case of transgender people, it can cause some gender/sexual development to be unclear. This is why it is not a black and white binary issue. Since sex differentiation or identity does not happen right away but in stages, we can see how there might be confusion over what gender a person might identify as.



Physically derived attributes from our genetics can develop differently from our psychological development; this is the nature vs nurture component of this issue.

Genetics and proteomics are a roll of the dice and probability is never confined to 50/50 when we have 24,000 genes and 75,000 enzymes in our body. We should not try to distort what science says to conform to our beliefs, there is no clear-cut black and white when it comes to human development.

Biological diversity is one of the amazing aspects of nature and the sooner we embrace this, the easier it will be to realize that there are people living among us who deserve the same rights as to everyone else.

Sam Jennsen

Humanist Heisenberg



Sweet Tweets

I have so far experienced no problems with any god. My concerns regard theists only.

Marc O'Brien

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*Some Christians say their religion must be true because it's been going on for two thousand years.*

*Well, if age corresponds to truth then the Old Testament must be more true than the New Testament.*

*And, the even more ancient Hindu Vedas must be truer than the whole Bible!*

**John Richards**

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Science doesn't know everything. Religion doesn't know anything.

Aron Ra

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# Applying Logic to the God Proposition

The third article in the series.



## The Argument from Consciousness

A favorite theist's argument is: 'Things we don't understand are evidence for god'. That is: "We dunno therefore godunnit".

They either haven't noticed, or prefer to deliberately ignore, the fact that the need for a 'godunnit explanation' has been diminishing as science brings better solutions to the table. We no longer have to invoke Thor to explain thunder. Gods are losing their jobs as Sebastian's cartoon shows us!

Theists like to focus on the fact that consciousness is weird and not yet scientifically explained, "Therefore", they say, "God is the best explanation for it". That's a non sequitur.

Ignorance is not evidence. When we don't know the answer to a question, the likely explanation will be the one that was most successful on previous occasions when we encountered something that puzzled us. That's always turned out to be physics, not God.

Prior odds thus strongly favor physics, not theism, for anything as yet unexplained. We need evidence to conclude otherwise. That's where theists try to ignore all the pertinent evidence. When we bring all that

ignored evidence back in, atheism, not theism, ends up most likely.

For example, the need for brains to generate conscious phenomena is quite unexpected if God exists. Because if God does exist, disembodied minds should also exist, and they would be the best minds to have, therefore we should have disembodied minds; wouldn't God have given his children the best? Indeed, there is no reason why it would occur to a god to make our minds out of brains at all.

Whereas if God does not exist, the only way minds could exist is as the output of a complex physical machine that evolved slowly by natural selection over hundreds of millions of years, from ultra-simple worm-brains to fish-brains, lizard-brains, mammal-brains, monkey-brains, ape-brains, hominid-brains, and eventually human brains. Just as we observe.

The fact is, thought is dependent on complex evolved brains: physical machines that inefficiently consume oxygen and energy and which place us in needless risk of injury, death or intellectual malfunction due to their vulnerability and badly organized structure. That's exactly what we should expect if there is no God, but not at all what we should expect if there is.

So, the Bayes Factor once again supports atheism, not theism. I detail this argument in Bayesian terms in *The Empty Tomb*. [TEC](#) (pp. 298-302).

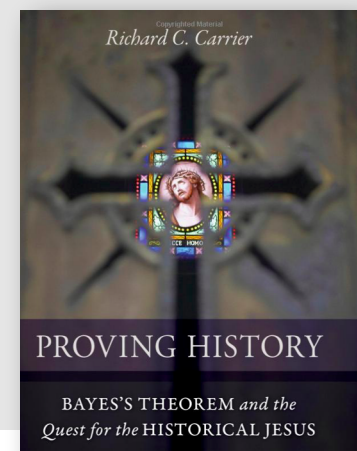
Dr. Richard Carrier  
Historian



This series of articles is adapted from *Proving History* by Richard Carrier.

Buy the book by clicking [here](#).

To view an interview with Dr. Richard Carrier, click [here](#).



# A Poor Way to Engage with Atheists

With permission from [Stephen Law's blog](#).  
June 25th 2018

Many religious folk insist on presenting the debate over the existence of their very specific worship- and gratitude-worthy God as a debate about theism vs naturalism. That's a false narrative — do not accept it.

'Naturalism or theism' is a false dilemma - there are many other options on the table (you find non-naturalists about maths, modals, and morals who are not theists, for example; there are also all sorts of theisms to consider other than the \*particularly\* implausible omnipotent omnibenevolent Judeo-Christian God).

Most folks who reject religious monotheism do not reject it because they're wedded to scientism, naturalism, or some other philosophical or metaphysicalism, but for much the same reasons they're skeptical about fairies, ghosts, and a flat earth - they think there's little evidence for and a great deal of evidence against (e.g. the evidential problem of evil, the problem of divine hiddenness). They also think there are good grounds for being skeptical about religious (fairy/ghostly) experiences.

If this is where your atheist is coming from, refuting naturalism, scientism, etc., it's unlikely to make

them look much more favorably on religious theism, no more than it's likely to make them look much more favorably on the existence of fairies and ghosts. From their perspective, in each case, arguments about the truth of naturalism and scientism are a largely irrelevant side-show.

In any case, it's probably not atheists who are the main intended audience for theistic arguments targeting naturalism and scientism. The intended target is *other theists*, who will likely reassure themselves that their worldview can't be so unreasonable because, after all, naturalism (scientism, etc.) has supposedly been refuted or shown to be deeply suspect by their fellows.

In other words, framing the God debate in such terms is often a smoke screen device.

PS. I should add that those atheists who insist on framing the debate over the existence of a worship- and gratitude-worthy God in terms of theism vs naturalism are creating an unnecessary hostage to fortune.

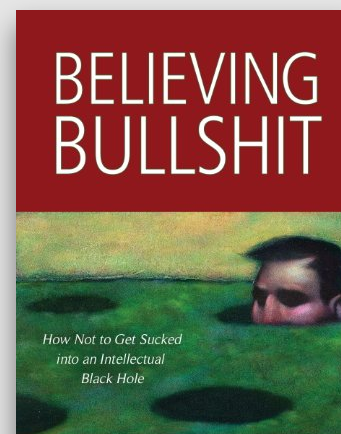
An equally likely image is 'Evil God', our omnipotent, omni-malevolent creator. There's no point kissing his behind or praising him to the heavens — he's going to torture you anyway!



**Stephen Law**

Reader in philosophy at Heythrop College, University of London; editor of the Royal Institute of Philosophy journal *THINK*.

Buy a copy of Stephen Law's book, *Believing Bullshit*, by clicking [here](#).



STEPHEN LAW





## Catholics for Choice Event: An African Enlightenment

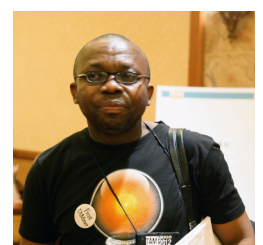
Ugandan Catholics staged an event in Kampala to promote the idea that Africa needs an Enlightenment. To their credit, they acknowledge the advantage that The Enlightenment conferred on the Western nations but, oddly, they don't seem to have picked up on the damaging effect it had on the Catholic church! This delegate did his best to inform them!

My address included the following. *"As was the case in Europe, an African Enlightenment project would be linked to religious reformation and to dislodging the hegemonic sway of religious faith. Religion wields an overbearing influence on all aspects of the African society, its politics, economics, laws, ethos and norms. Religion holds the African intellect and mindset hostage in a way that has no precedence in history.*

*In 18th century Europe, the Age of Light involved challenging the absolute and totalitarian influence of Christianity, but the African City of Light will have to contend with a more complicated process: the convoluted schemes of the various faith traditions; indigenous, Christian and Islamic. These beliefs tyrannize the lives of Africans. African countries are official or unofficial religious nations: Islamic republics, Christian and voodoo states. Religions compete and they try to dictate how Africans conduct their personal as well as public lives, community and state affairs."*

**Leo Igwe**

*Africa Correspondent*



# Conferences: New Zealand & Uganda

## Humanists International Assemble in Auckland

New Zealand Humanists hosted this year's General Assembly of Humanists International (formerly the International Humanist and Ethical Union IHEU) at the Heritage Hotel in Auckland (see picture).

Two other events preceded the General Assembly. First, there was a function at the Houses of Parliament in Wellington. A member of the Parliament of New Zealand, Hon. Grant Robertson, hosted the event.

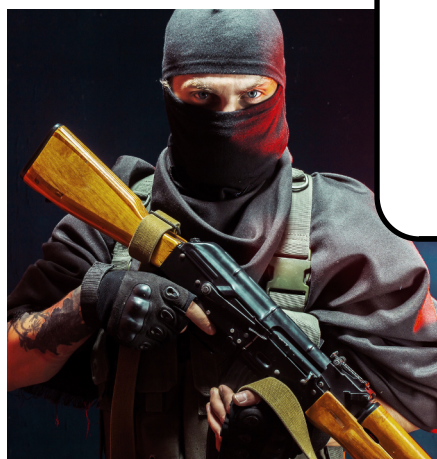
The Nigerian representative, Leo Igwe, used the occasion to highlight the persecution of humanists in various countries around the globe. This is a political issue and governments ought to address it.

In countries such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Nigeria,



Bangladesh, Egypt, and Mauritania those who renounce their faith or hold views that are critical of religion are attacked, imprisoned or killed.

Humanists International is leading an unprecedented global campaign to protect all humanists at risk and to end persecution and discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or non-belief. Humanists are looking to countries such as New Zealand for help in furthering this critical campaign.



Radical

YOU are not a true Muslim!



Moderate

# Does Islam Preach Jihad?

## The 'No True Scotsman' Fallacy

Many so-called moderate Muslims, both in academia and outside of it, assert that their counterparts in organizations like al-Qaeda, the Taliban and ISIS who commit Jihadist terrorist acts, have absolutely nothing to do with Islam.

### Can a Muslim Jihadist legitimize his/her actions by referring to Islamic teachings?

The easiest way to answer this question is to refer to the Qur'an, Sira and the Hadiths. The text of the Qur'an is the most important. Not only are there verses in the Quran recommending Muslims to do Jihad, but there are direct orders from Allah in the verses revealed to Muhammad when he was living in Madinah.

Let's take a look at Surah Al-Tawba: "And when the sacred

months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful." [9:5]

According to the Qur'an, there is no doubt that Jihad is one of the important pillars of Islam. The Sira and Hadiths also confirm this. After the migration from Mecca to Madina, Muhammad began looting pagan caravans and promised entry to Jannah (heaven) for those killed in Allah's cause. Wars, looting pagans, killing infidels and taking their women as slaves turned out to be Muhammad's permanent activity in Madina. Muhammad is the role model for good amongst Muslims and if Muhammad has done it, Muslims have every right to do it.

### A religion of peace?

One of the funniest justifications given by some moderate academic Muslims, when they want to take advantage of the ignorance of the West about Islam, is that Jihad means to 'strive in the cause of Allah' not to go to war; they forget that the Qur'an, Hadiths and Sira are in complete denial with such a proposition.

Others claim that Muhammad's fighting, looting and banditries had a defensive aspect. Of course, this is a lie and Muhammad's wars, except the Ahzab war, were all aggressive. There is no way to justify all those wars, especially Khaibar war, by claiming that they had a defensive aspect.

The third largest of the authoritative Islamic sources, Hadiths, insists on Jihad and fighting

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the infidels and looting and taking their wives as slaves. In these narratives, the best rewarded and highest deed a Muslim can accomplish in the eyes of Allah is to do Jihad and, if killed during Jihad, he/she is called a martyr while if survived, he/she is called a Ghazi. Both are promised the greatest pleasure in Jannah (Paradise).



The most authentic of the Hadith narrators, Sahih Al-Bukhari, says, The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Nobody who dies and finds good from Allah (in the Hereafter) would wish to come back to this world even if he were given the whole world and whatever is in it, except the martyr who, on seeing the superiority of

martyrdom, would like to come back to the world and get killed again (in Allah's Cause)." Vol. 4, Book 52, Hadith 53

When you go through all the verses from the Quran and narrations from the Hadiths, there can be no doubt that Islamic sources legitimize, justify and even consider it a duty to do Jihad in Allah's cause. When you consider all these sources, saying that Islam is a religion of peace, or that wars conducted by Muhammad had a defensive aspect is just a joke.

Does this mean that the Jihad being carried out today by ISIS, the Taliban or other terror groups in the name of Islam and Allah is as legitimate as Muhammad used to carry out?

Looking into the details, there are several things in common: looting, killing infidels, taking slave girls, burnings and beheadings. These actions are being done by terror groups today in the same way that Muhammad did back in the 7th Century. In the eyes of ISIS, even Shias are thought to be infidels that need to be wiped off the face of the earth. Technological terror caused by suicide attacks were not possible at that time, but if bomb-belts had



been available, no doubt they would have happily used them.

The conclusion is that ISIS can easily justify their activities based on Islamic scriptures and they will continue doing Jihad till the whole world becomes Muslim, as commanded in the Qur'an and Hadiths. However, some ISIS barbaric acts such as suicide attacks, killing of captives, are not directly comparable by reference to the actions and sayings of Muhammad but, if the general doctrine of doing Jihad is to form an Islamic state, then ISIS is doing a great job based exactly on Allah's and Muhammad's teachings.

**Immensum A Gul**  
Afghanistan Correspondent



# Agnostics Creed

*Here we stand, flickers of life in an infinite universe.*

*Standing alone, beyond the shadow of all Gods preached by all prophets, whether ancient or modern.*

*We do not praise, beseech or worship divine beings. We find human worth, shorn of any exaggeration.*

*We make and change our laws ourselves, aware of their imperfections.*

*We do not thank a Supreme One, who neither needs nor offers thanks in return.*

*We are not God-fearing of One who should have no need to strike fear.*

*Neither will we put fear into the hearts of others in his/her/its name.*

*We please no jealous One, whose perfection allows no sharing with us of any sense of pleasure or displeasure, surprise or dismay.*

*Gods, it seems have no need to cry, to be cheered up, or to laugh. We do.*

*We do not divide our ways between the sacred and the profane. Between those saved and those lost.*

*Those sanctified and those excommunicated. Those exalted and those cast down.*

*Not fully knowing how we know, or why, we wish to love.*

*Being uncertain as to how it is we have come to be. Those limits make us humble and in awe.*

*For proud and pitiable as we are, from within and between ourselves we find the power to love and forgive, to wonder and to hope, to protect and to comfort, to reconcile, to rescue and redeem.*

*A limited power to understand and the power to live with the limited power to understand.*

**By Bryan Tully**

*Taken from "Raising the Human Spirit" Humanist Voice 2016*



**"Science is permeated by unprovable assumptions."**

Let me explain scientific method: it starts with making an assumption. That is an essential part of hypothesizing: which is conceptualizing what might be the explanation for a mystery. A hypothesis must include an assumption to lead to a testable prediction: if *this* is the cause, then *that* should be the effect.

Following the conceiving of a hypothesis, we carry out an investigation to discover whether the assumption is reasonable or not.

This principle can be applied at two levels – the micro-level is where we design an investigation to test a small detail that is hypothesized to explain some particular mystery. Observations are then gathered, the investigation is repeated to eliminate fluke results, and the outcome either matches the prediction or not. So, the hypothetical assumption is either falsified or not. In pharmaceuticals this is known as a Randomized Controlled Trial.

The macro-level is where the aggregate of all the investigations so far conducted using scientific method is examined to falsify, or not falsify, the assumptions on which scientific method itself is founded.

In medical terms this would be called Epidemiology.

The main assumption on which science is founded is that of materialism (the assumption that there is nothing immaterial). We've been conducting scientific investigations for more than 300 years and, so far, materialism has not been falsified and a very great deal of unchallenged information has been discovered on the back of that assumption. Not only that, but a great deal of clever technology has been constructed on what we have learned, like this laptop.

**Science works!**

The use of the word 'unprovable' in the theist's statement reveals another misconception about science: the belief that science can prove things. Proof requires absoluteness, which doesn't exist in Nature because of time – everything changes so everything is relative. Proof is merely conceptual and science has to make do with evidence. However, we do know this: God is not only an unevidenced, unprovable assumption, but She is also untestable.

**John Richards**  
AAI Publications Director

# secularworld Recommends

## FEEL THE SPIN

*is fiction for freethinkers*

A young science professor who can ride, rope, and shoot faces off against ignorance and bigotry ten years after America's Civil War.

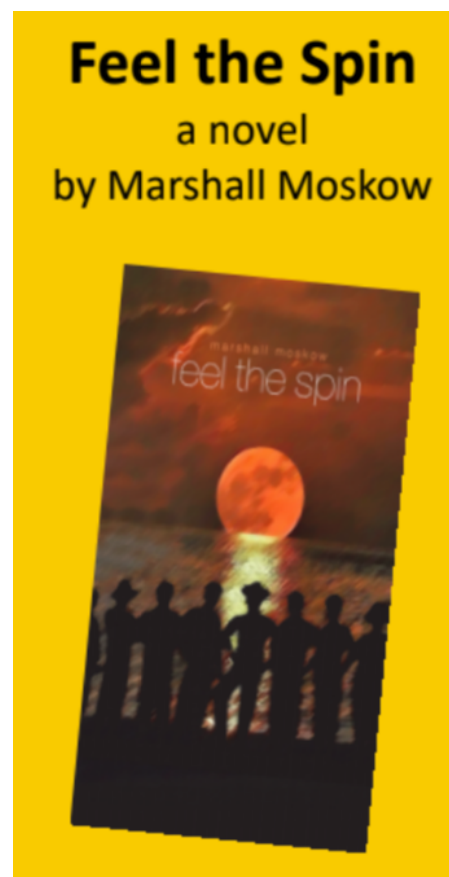
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*The Magic of Reality*, by Richard Dawkins, with its explanations of space, time, evolution and more, will inspire and amaze readers of all ages – young adults, adults, children, octogenarians.

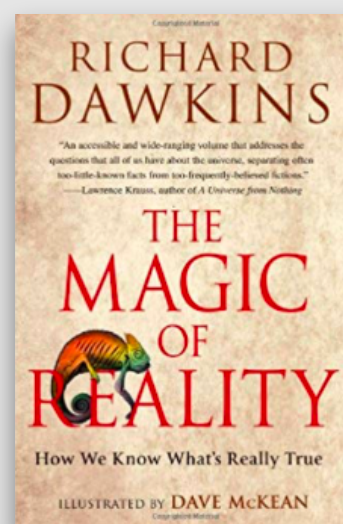
What are things made of? What is the sun? Why is there night and day, winter and summer? Why do bad things happen? Are we alone? Teaming up with the renowned illustrator Dave McKean, Richard Dawkins answers all these questions and many more.

*The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True* by Richard Dawkins is published by Waterstones.

Buy the book by clicking [here](#) or in your local Waterstone's store.

Find your nearest store in the UK and Europe [here](#).

Watch a video of Richard Dawkins talking about the book [here](#).





John Loftus



Dan Barker



Jerry de Witt



Bruce Gerencser

# ESCAPE FROM FAITH

## Ex-ministers Make a Courageous Move

Bruce Gerencser, 61, lives in rural Northwest Ohio with his wife of 40 years. They have six grown children and twelve grandchildren. Bruce pastored Evangelical churches for twenty-five years in Ohio, Texas, and Michigan. He left the ministry in 2005, and in 2008 he left Christianity. Bruce is now a humanist and atheist.

It might be surprising to some to hear that many pastors don't believe everything (or anything) they preach. Sometimes it's small theological differences, so they continue to toe the line because it's easier and doesn't seem like a big deal. However, other times, the pastor no longer believes in any Christian Orthodoxy and might not even believe in god. The simple advice would be to resign. However, for someone who has been a pastor their entire adult life, probably getting ordained after spending much time and money in seminary, leaving is a complex proposition.

The title of "pastor" encompasses the entire spectrum —

from an independent, self-taught, self-ordained person, to a denominationally affiliated individual with many higher education degrees and an official ordination and license.

There are two main reasons to sustain an external religious behavior that isn't the same as the internal belief, to pretend, to act the part. One is monetary. The other is relational. Sometimes, the monetary reason is exploitative greed and the person fakes it all along. But sometimes the person loses his or her faith along the way and walking away is a very complex proposition.

Even when an income isn't on the line, it's very difficult to come out, especially when you're seen as a leader in the faith community. There is also the matter of personal identity. Being an independent pastor of a small community often comes as a result of great sacrifice and loss.

***Realizing so much of your life was wasted is a damaging blow.***

Pastors who lead larger, established, and/or more institutional churches have much

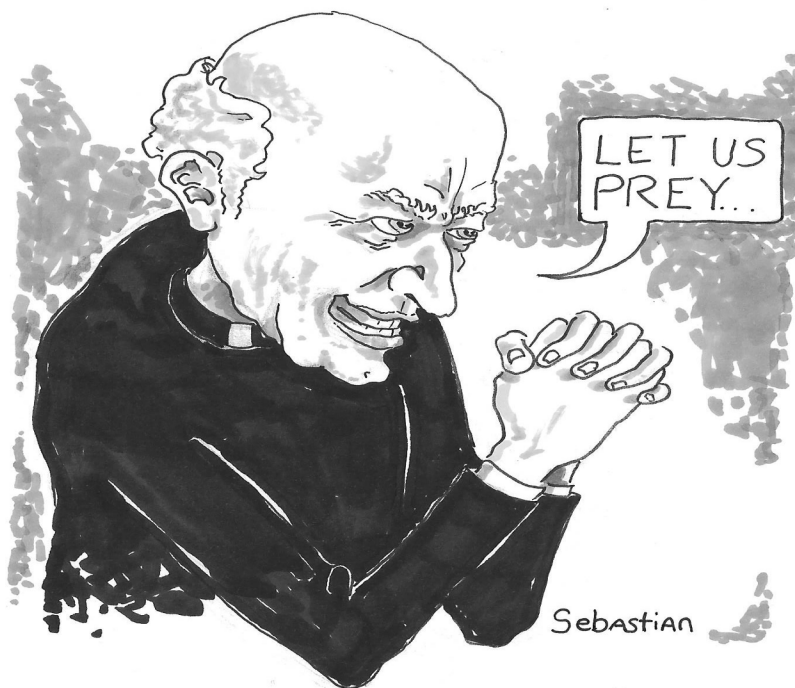
more to lose in a material sense in addition to the existential concerns. They often have homes owned by the church, pensions, a good salary, an established reputation in the community, relationships with leaders of other churches, and more.

***It's much harder — logistically and emotionally — to leave, than it is to stay and fake it.***

Many children in religious communities determine at some point that they don't believe any or all of what they've been taught, but continue to act as if they do, because to out themselves as agnostic or atheist would have detrimental, far-reaching consequences. It's obviously virtually impossible to know how many people in religious communities don't actually believe, but it's no secret to anyone in the religious world that these people exist, and in no small number.

The internet is now providing a way for people who are closeted nonbelievers to find community and support. There is even an online community for pastors called The Clergy Project, and ex-pastors are starting to write books about leaving the ministry.

# Ministers or Monsters?



## Stars on the Walk of Shame

*(Reprint of an article in The Humanist, 1999. Has much changed?)*

Pentecostal evangelist Mario Leyva of Columbus, Ga., sodomized more than 100 church boys. He was sentenced to 20 years in federal prison in 1989. Two assistant pastors got 15 and 12 years for transporting the boys state-to-state for orgies.

The Rev. Roy Yanke of Beverly Hills, Mich., pleaded guilty in 1991 to robbing 14 banks of \$47,000 to pay for his daily use of prostitutes. He got seven years in prison.

Some 400 U.S. Catholic priests have been charged with child-molesting in the past decade, and the church has paid an estimated \$400 million in damages and costs. One priest, James Porter, is accused of abusing perhaps 100 victims in three states -- including a boy in a full body cast who couldn't move to resist.

Born-again con-artist Michael

Douglas of Antioch, Ill., who specialized in investments for wealthy fundamentalists, got a 12-year sentence in 1991 for swindling 131 people out of \$31 million.

Army chaplain aide Steven Ritchie of Fort Lewis, Wash., was sentenced to 26 years in prison in 1990 for raping a six-week-old baby girl.

Radio evangelist Willie Winters of Kalamazoo, Mich., already serving two life terms for a shooting spree, was indicted again in 1992 on charges of killing his brother-in-law for \$22,000 insurance money.

The Rev. Jerry Wilson of Monticello, Ind., who said his preaching came "from God Himself," had a sexual affair with his secretary at the Bible Tabernacle Church and planted a bomb to kill her husband. In 1992, Wilson was sentenced to 108 years in prison.

I'm a newspaper editor. Day after day I watch the carnival of life via the news wires. To me, the most fascinating oddities in the show are those self-righteous men who say God called them to cleanse impurities from others. I'm leery of people who talk to invisible beings --

but at least some in the praying set are kind and tolerant. The unkind ones demand laws to use the police power of the state to make everyone obey their taboos. They hate sex, and they're relentless in demanding censorship of movies and magazines, condemning unwed mothers and homosexuals, denouncing sex education and birth control programs.

They attained a pinnacle at the 1992 republican convention when millionaire evangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell hailed the GOP's endorsement of their agenda. Right-winger Patrick Buchanan was correct when he told the Republican delegates: "There is a religious war going on in this country for the soul of America." Endlessly, the issue is whether all Americans will be forced to live by the strictures of those who think they are morally superior.

Evangelist Don McCary of Chattanooga, Tenn., drew a 72-year prison sentence in 1992 for sodomizing four boys. His twin brother, Christian comedian Ron McCary, is in prison for raping a 6-year-old boy. Their older brother,

*cont. on page 17*



cont. from page 16

the Rev. Richard McCary, previously was imprisoned for child-molesting.

The Rev. Richard Snipstead of Minnesota, president of a fundamentalist Lutheran group which denounces homosexuals, confessed in 1992 that he's had 20 years of gay relationships, that he carries the AIDS virus, and that he gave the disease to his wife.

Catholic priest William Joffe of Milwaukee was jailed in 1992 for embezzling \$264,000 from his parish.

Fountain of Life evangelist Jim Whittington of Greenville, N.C., was indicted in 1992 on charges of swindling a paraplegic woman out of \$900,000. He called the federal charge an attack "on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Rev. Duane Smith, who operated a born-again Christian school in LaPorte, Ind., got a 12-year prison term in 1991 for molesting pupils.

The Rev. James Weller of Redwood, Cal., was convicted in 1990 of 27 forcible sex crimes against children, some only 10 years old. He drew 46 years in prison.

Church deacon Henry Meinholtz, 53, of Kingston, Mass., was convicted in 1991 of raping and suffocating a 13-year-old girl.

Many years ago, when I was a young thinker and knew practically everything, it seemed clear to me that magical, moralistic, moronic religion soon would disappear, because people were becoming too educated for such superstition. So much for young thinkers.

The opposite occurred. Puritanical fundamentalism not only survived, it rose to dominance in America. Mainline Protestant churches with university-educated clergy are dying, losing members by millions. But the born-again realm is booming.

(Think of the farce at the GOP convention: The President and the ruling party respectfully listened to evangelist Robertson, who claims that his prayers can deflect hurricanes -- whose newest book says President Bush's Gulf War was part of a satanic plot to establish "the New World Order of the Antichrist" -- and who wrote that the equal rights movement "encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians."

Loonies like this aren't taken seriously in other modern nations.

America has an unwritten rule that all religion must be "respected" -- never subjected to public scoffing. But an ugly tide of sex offenses and other crimes by ministers is eroding this code of silence.

Los Angeles Times religion columnist Russell Chandler did research in 1990 and found 2,000 cases of sex molestation by clergy

pending in the courts. John Cleary, general counsel of Church Mutual Insurance Co., which covers ministers, said: "Today, the number of credible sexual abuse and misconduct cases is astounding." Some of these men are among the moralizers seeking to jail sellers of sexy videos and books, halt Medicaid abortions for poor girls, and impose state-mandated prayer upon school children. The hypocrisy is galling.

I live in the Appalachian Bible Belt, where politicians are nearly as holy as evangelists. A yearly feature in West Virginia is the state government prayer breakfast, where elected officials attest their piety. At a recent breakfast, the leading supplicants were Gov. Arch Moore, Senate President Dan Tonkovich and visiting congressman Patrick Swindall of Georgia, a darling of the fundamentalist New Right. A couple of years later, all three -- Moore, Tonkovich and Swindall -- were in federal prison for corruption.

Religion is having a heyday in America. Its champions seek to dictate behavior rules for all of us -- to take away our freedom to make choices for ourselves. We must fight back. We should look at Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker and the rest, and say the obvious:

These scumbags are not morally superior to us. In fact, they are inferior, and it is insulting for them to tell us how to live.

We will not allow it.

**James Haught**  
USA Correspondent



# Atheist on an Alpha Course



## Philosophical impact

We often assume, because no change of position is admitted during a debate, that there is no impact at all. This view is overly binary. After 40 years of evangelicalism it took me five-years to leave, and I can tell you the process is iterative.

To convert people to rationalism my advice is to keep the aims modest. The people you're likely to encounter will think you're insulting them if you refer to their statements as "arguments from ignorance".

### Stick to:

- **Establishing that truth matters, or should, to all of us.**
- **Helping your theist friends to understand the burden of proof**
- **Asking how the believers have concluded that their claims are true, while other religious claims are not.**

Throughout, address the ideas and not the people who hold them – although the extent to which believers weave their beliefs into their identities makes it impossible to avoid all awkwardness.

## Human Impact

Whether it's the changing of minds, working for secular neutrality in government policy, or mitigating unfair discrimination against secularists in overwhelmingly religious societies, persuasion is

crucial. People are not persuaded by someone who triggers their defensive responses.

By the time I attended the last course meeting, it was tinged with a hint of mutual sadness. It had been genuinely lovely getting to know these folks. They said they had come to look forward to our meetings and were sad when I'd had to miss one. Yet I'd been nothing if not direct with them. Like saying that I regard myself as more moral than their god, that faith itself is often misogynistic, that magical thinking is harmful and original sin is perverse, among many other things.

## Personal Catharsis

This was the first time I'd been in a church environment since I left Christianity, and the ability to express myself assertively and without reservations was invigorating and liberating. But the real victory was not the one you might expect.

Rather than convincing anyone of anything outright, effectively and logically demolishing their beliefs, it seems I managed to present the folks there with the human face of an atheist. They thanked me for being kind and respectful of their persons, even when I disrespected their beliefs. They said they could relate to a lot of the personal struggles that I had shared with them. They offered me a spot in a tent at the church's men's camp the following weekend (I politely

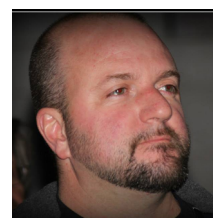
declined) and the most vociferous and least open among them said that I had shattered her preconceptions about what atheists are like.

In the end, I just saw good people at my table and I told them so. I tried, always, to be sincerely curious about my questioning, and appeal to humanist morality and basic principles in addressing the immorality of beliefs – not the people who hold them. I sense that some of what I said still made them deeply uncomfortable, but it is conceivable that we could meet socially in the future. Whether we do or don't, the point is that the mutual human empathy to be able to do so has been established.

I suspect that at least five of the people who were at my table might question someone in future who generalizes about the "immorality of atheists". Given my personal experience of attitudes towards atheists here in SA, plus research in places like the USA, and the fact that we still face the death penalty in many parts of the world, I regard my modest shattering of their preconceptions as a massive victory.

**Charles Webster**

*South Africa Correspondent*



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# Narendra Nayak

## Critical Thinking Teacher



Since 2004, Professor Narendra Nayak has made it his job to expose charlatans. He travels the villages of India holding workshops at his own expense, showing how the tricks are done, how to detect fraudsters, and how to think critically, all presented with his trademark sense of humor.

He has a very well-rehearsed presentation to woo his audience with scientific explanations of common deceptions. His events follow a routine. After some local dance and music performances by volunteers to gain the attention of the students, the professor asks a simple question – how does one measure scientific excellence? Someone from the audience suggests, "By achievements, such as a Nobel prize". Nayak then asks the audience how many Nobel prizes India has won.

The disappointing answer is just one in the last century. As a

biochemist himself, Narendra expresses his dismay at how the world has not recognized Yellapragada Subbarow, a pioneering scientist from India, who discovered the function of ATP (the energy source in cells), who helped to develop methotrexate for the treatment of cancer, the antibiotics, Aureomycin and Tetracycline, and who also identified the role of Folic acid as an essential vitamin required during pregnancy, Subbarow's work has saved millions of lives.

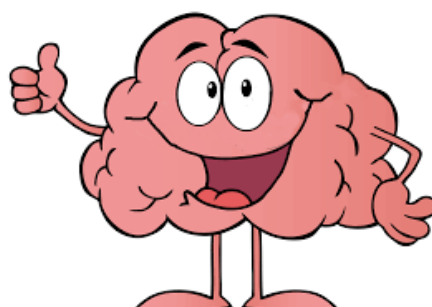
At this point in his lesson, Narendra Nayak asks the audience why India has failed to produce any Nobel prize winning scientists for decades? He selects a raised hand from the audience, but surprisingly, before the student can answer, Nayak sharply barks at him, "You dare to question me, someone more than twice your age? Shut up and sit down and don't ask such stupid

questions again!"

Immediately, Nayak explains this is the typical response to questions students get from their teachers—thus killing a child's creativity in the process. After making sure the child understands he was acting, he goes on to explain the concept of preconceived notions and how they hamper rational decision-making.

The professor ends by saying we must apply skepticism to even the most ordinary situations if we want to avoid being tricked. While saying this, he casually takes off his glasses and then pokes his fingers through the frames! The spectacles he had been wearing had no glass in them all along!

Now, at the age of 67, after conducting well over 2,000 workshops, Narendra is thinking about handing the reins over to a younger man.



**Secular World wishes Mr. Nayak a long, happy and well-deserved retirement!**



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