

Secular Nation

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Editor's Note



Dear members,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 25th edition of *Secular Nation*, the Atheist Alliance's of America's (AAoA) official magazine.

There is no doubt that we are experiencing changing times. We live in the age of information, where humanity managed to connect itself through the Internet and fundamentally change the way people communicate with each other.

Living in the age of information means that almost any piece of information we want to access is available to us from our own home via the click of a few buttons.

Over the past twenty years, and with the rapid expansion of Internet use across

the globe, humanity was witnessed unprecedented changes in how it accesses, shares, and handles information.

One could argue that an immense amount of information has fallen into the hands of one of the Great Apes, *homo sapiens*, too fast without allowing humans to adjust to it, resulting in the topical phenomenon of fake news and the spread of misinformation.

Although humanity could have never prepare itself for the Internet, there is one aspect for the era of information which has certainly benefited human societies: the fight against religious superstition and religious dogma.

The Internet has allowed science as a discipline to become publicly available through the work of science communicators, bloggers, YouTubers. Because of the Internet and the fast and easy spread of knowledge, the world has become more scientifically literate.

Scientific literation creates societies which follow reason,

rationality, and logic, over belief, faith and superstition.

Young people in most countries around the world, especially in the West, are becoming less and less religious. At the same time, societies, on a global scale, are becoming increasingly educated, more ethical, and stand against discriminatory practices and beliefs, such as sexism, racism, and homophobia.

As religion, throughout history, has been a source of abuse and discrimination, there is no doubt that the turn away from religion is connected to our societies becoming more equal, safe, and healthy.

The 25th edition of *Secular Nation* is another example of how the Internet brings together people to spread and promote rationality and reason.

I hope you enjoy this issue and I look forward to all the discussions that its articles will provoke.

Angelos Sofocleous
Editor



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On the national level, and through our local affiliates across the U.S., we encourage and assist in civic and charitable activities at the local level. Please visit our website to find a local affiliate of AAoA. If you can't find a local group, contact us for help in starting one.

OUR VISION
AAoA's vision is to transform society into one that values reason, rationality, honesty, clarity, and kindness.

OUR MISSION
To develop and provide educational, humanitarian, advocacy, and community-building programs for the atheist community that assist towards fulfilling our vision.

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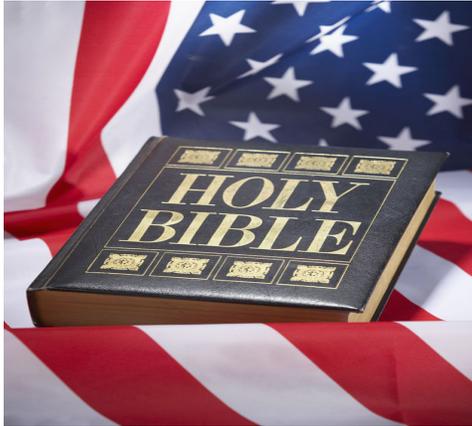
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Max Humana

The Religious Takeover of America

By Richard Lawrence



“For hundreds and hundreds of years, the human struggle for freedom was against the worst kind of dictatorship of all: the theocracy, the one that claims it has God on its side. I believe that totalitarian temptation has to be resisted. What I’m inviting you to do is to consider emancipating yourselves from the idea that you, selfishly, are the sole object of all the wonders of the cosmos and of nature - because that’s not a humble idea at all, it’s a very arrogant one and there’s no evidence for it. And then, again, the second emancipation - to think of yourselves as free citizens who are not enthralled to any supernatural-eternal authority; which you will always find is interpreted for you by other mammals who claim to have access to this authority - that gives them special power over you. Don’t allow yourselves to have your lives run like that.”

- Christopher Hitchens

The implicit idea in Christopher Hitchens’s wonderful quote is that we have a choice when it comes to the religious having any say at all as to how we run our lives. We are rapidly coming to the point here in America when the religious will be,

to quote Hitchens again, “making an offer that no one can refuse.” I do not say this lightly. These are people who revel in the idea of ripping children from their parents and letting them die in cages.

In fact, if given the opportunity they would lock *you* in cages. Speaking in front of members of Latinos for Trump at a recent rally in Miami, Florida, Vice President Mike Pence drank deeply from the well of hate while ginning up the crowd against the Democrats. He spoke of their support for abortion and infanticide while the listeners chanted “lock them in cages!”

Again, this chant was not directed at the usual scapegoats of immigrants and minorities. Rather, it was directed at fellow Americans who have differing views on what values our society should espouse. In other words, fellow Americans who think differently should be locked in cages for committing thought crimes. This reeks of fascism and totalitarianism which are synonyms for religious fundamentalism and it is the religious fundamentalists that are now cementing their hold on the reins of power in this country.

Step One – Takeover of the Judicial System

While much has been made of Republican obstruction in the Senate (as of this writing over 151 bills are sitting in limbo in the Senate queue) that doesn’t mean the Senate has not been busy appointing far-right judges. These judges have passed muster with the Federalist Society and other radical religious

groups. While the Federalist Society claims four per cent of this country’s lawyers as members, they represent over eighty per cent of those nominated by the Trump administration to appellate court seats.

Leonard Leo, the driving force behind the Federalist Society as well as the Judicial Crisis Network, the organization that led the opposition to President Obama’s appointment of Merrick Garland, has an impressive track record of getting the judges he wants nominated and appointed. “Leonard Leo was a visionary,” said Tom Carter, who served as Leo’s media relations director when he was chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

“He figured out twenty years ago that conservatives had lost the culture war. Abortion, gay rights, contraception—conservatives didn’t have a chance if public opinion prevailed. So they needed to stack the courts”, wrote Jay Michaelson, legal affairs columnist at the Daily Beast.

Thus far, four Supreme Court justices, Alito, Roberts, Gorsuch, and Kavanaugh have been placed on the bench because of the work done behind the scenes by these conservative Catholic organizations.

Step Two – Overturn Precedents

In June the Supreme Court issued its opinion in the American Legion v. American Humanist Association case, commonly known as the Bladensburg Peace Cross case. While this should have not even made it to the Supreme Court, once

there, decades of precedent were ignored. We have a 40-foot Latin cross which the legal system acknowledges as the “preeminent symbol of Christianity” on public land and maintained at public expense. Ignoring the Lemon test formulated by Chief Justice Warren Burger (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 411 U.S. 192 (U.S. 1973)) the court’s opinion was that a 40 foot cross is now a secular symbol and, as such, does not violate the separation of Church and state.



Nicolas Little, the Legal Director of the Center for Inquiry, based out of Washington, D.C. opined in the June 26, 2019 newsletter of the Center for Inquiry, “The religious right majority on the Court could have, but didn’t, rule that observers have no standing to challenge government religious displays.

They could have, but didn’t, rule that putting up new religious war memorials was constitutional. And they could have, but didn’t, officially overturn the Lemon test that has long played a role in determining Establishment Clause cases. They didn’t do any of these, but, to be perfectly honest, they probably will in future cases.”

Will they? Let’s see what the Justices themselves are now saying. Justice Clarence Thomas recently said, “When faced with a demon-

strably erroneous precedent, my rule is simple: We should not follow it,” noting that lower federal courts should also disregard poor precedents.”

Lest you think this is just Thomas giving his personal opinion, it is, in fact, causing concern among the other justices. Justice Kagan had this to say about the Supreme Court decision in *Franchise Tax Board of California v. Hyatt*, “When a theory requires declaring precedent after precedent wrong, that’s a sign the theory itself may be wrong. The majority’s theory is just that.”

It seems that the long-standing legal doctrine called “stare decisis” is now in jeopardy. I find it extremely ironic that Justice Thomas would be so flippant vis-à-vis precedent; anti-miscegenation laws were struck down in 1967 by the Supreme Court ruling in the landmark *Loving v. Virginia* case. Prior to that, his current marriage would have been against the law. Stare decisis keeps his marriage legal. The court would never hear a challenge to that opinion...or would it? Is there anyone in this day and age that would be opposed to that on religious grounds?

“I’m a Christian and my Christian beliefs are you don’t do interracial marriage. That’s the way I was brought up and that’s the way I believe,” he said. “I have black friends, I hired black people. But when it comes to all this stuff you see on TV, when you see blacks and whites together, it makes my blood boil because that’s just not the way a Christian is supposed to live.” – Georgia Councilman Jim Cleveland, May 06, 2019, quoted in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

It seems there are. Justice Thomas

would do well to make sure that he isn’t sharpening the knife that will cut his throat.

Step Three – Blasphemy Laws

When you open your favorite news site or newspaper one day and find that Blasphemy Laws are now on the books, then you will know that the takeover of the United States is complete. All the freedoms enumerated in the Constitution will now have an asterisk next to them.

The explanation to which will say, “Does not apply to religions. Criticism, verbal or written, or anything that may be interpreted as criticism against religion is not protected by the US Constitution and will be considered a capital crime punishable by death.” Once these judges were in place, draconian abortion laws were passed all having death provisions. Had an abortion? Death. Pick up sticks on the Sabbath? Death. Here it is, God’s word on the page. Question them on this? Blasphemy! Death.

“I have met some highly intelligent believers, but history has no record to say that [s]he knew or understood the mind of God. Yet this is precisely the qualification which the godly must claim—so modestly and so humbly—to possess. It is time to withdraw our ‘respect’ from such fantastic claims, all of them aimed at the exertion of power over other humans in the real and material world.”

– Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*

Meanderings From a Hyper-Observant Skeptic

By Steven Scarborough

A couple of friends of mine have recently posted updates with their takes on certain important issues that have been circulating in the social media universe. Personally, I choose to keep silent for the most part simply due to the fact that my mouth gets me into quite a bit of trouble.

Even more so, if half the people I am yelling at could actually hear me, but I digress. There isn't just one particular aspect that has the tendency to really light my already shortened fuse, but here lately it's been a combination of the nonsense of evangelical zealots, and the intolerance to let people, most importantly women, to be literally free. Free to do as they please so long as they don't cause any harm or commit any crime as mandated by our judicial system.

It seems to me that our culture and government seems only geared toward a figurative freedom. I'm fairly certain that if it were written on a contract agreement, the word itself would have an asterisk beside it and a myriad of different "conditions" of its definition listed in the fine print.

I'm almost terrified as to what future lies ahead for the state of our "Union". One of my aforementioned friends put up a statistic that sank my heart. 73 countries on this planet will punish you for being openly homosexual. 11 of which will put you to death.

Why is it so difficult for people to accept the differences that are more likely to occur in a species than to try and make them ad-

here to insipid and useless guidelines superimposed upon society by those who are so insecure with their own sexuality under a thinly veiled guise of morality?

My friend also stated that humanity should have the right to enter into any kind of relationship they so choose. *including* that of a non-procreative nature.

Since my departure from the cult of religion, I have often surmised that it shouldn't ever matter who does what behind their own closed doors and is no one else's business but their own.

The next thing I would like to mention is the fact that there seems to be no call, no legitimate reason to sequester and incarcerate people just because they crossed an imaginary line in search for a better life for themselves and their families.

Considering the fact that we all came to this continent in search of a better life for ourselves, it doesn't stand to reason that we would deny that to others.

An article I read recently from an Indiana mayor stating that people who are okay with putting people in concentration camps (let's just face the music here and call those ICE detention camps what they really are) cannot be brazen enough to cite their reasoning based on religious practices. The very act itself is severely hypocritical at its core.

Why are we allowing people to run rough shot and literally shred our constitution to bits on some self-righteous bent?

Why haven't the men and women

in the ICE division taken a stand against something they know isn't right?

Why are we continuing to allow this to be the norm or just the way it is?

A confession I am reticent to put down on paper is the fact that it is becoming more and more difficult with each passing year, not just in politics, but for a myriad of different reasons altogether, to consider myself a "proud" American.

Every time I see something on the internet or in the news media that I know is going against our nation's core values, and even the Religious Reich's own biblical principals, it's literally like a punch to the gut. A blow so devastating that it is all I can do to keep from doubling over in pain. We, the people, are seriously overdue for an age of accountability. Honestly, it should have started 40 years ago, but we have let charlatans and corrupt agendas to be in control.

I really hope that we can turn back from this nonsense that is a plague on our way of life.

I really hope that those men and women who work for such a trivial and insipid organization will soon wake up from this trance that I only assume they are under to keep myself from completely losing my mind.

I really hope that we will soon shake free from this tyrannical grip of bigotry and pseudopatriotism.

"

'Physical Reality' is a Meaningless Notion

By Jason Fields

In debates concerning the supernatural, I have often (and unwittingly) conceded one of the most common and vital points of discussion. I have allowed the phrase “physical reality” to slide through the conversation unchallenged. And it’s not really my fault. The phrase “physical reality” is in such common usage that we never stop to think of how absurd the concept is. And it’s this very phrase that should be abolished from the skeptic’s vocabulary. Why is it so problematic? What’s the objection? Because I truly have no idea what it means.



I’m not trying to be difficult; I really don’t know what the phrase is talking about. More specifically, I don’t know what the phrase is trying to separate itself from. I know what the word ‘physical’ means. Especially when I use it to denote something that is empirical rather than conceptual. I also understand the term reality as a way of expressing the medium through which the properties of things can be experienced. But when the two words combine, they try to describe a type of

reality. But how many types are there? How many do we currently know of? I like what the MLA Style Writing Guide has to say about writing outlines. If you haven’t thought about outlines since high school English class, I apologize for bringing it up. But I think it’s perfectly analogous here. When you write a topic or heading, each level or heading needs to have at least two points. The levels represent the divisions of distinct topics or points. How can you divide a single topic only once? How can that logically be called a division?

If a younger, less wise version of myself were writing an essay about reality, then the outline would start like this:

1. Introduction to Reality
 - a. Physical Reality
 - b. Non-Physical Reality

But wait, I don’t know what non-physical reality even is. I’m only aware and have evidence for the reality in which we experience things – the so-called physical one. So really, the outline should start like this:

1. Introduction to Reality

That’s it.

Sub-heading (b) falls away since there’s no evidence for it – which only leaves sub-heading (a). But according to our style guide, that’s a meaningless distinction. So, it falls away also, leaving us only the main heading. And before I can accept that there is another type of reality that doesn’t have any of the physical properties of the only

reality I’m familiar with, then that needs to be demonstrated – not given a free pass into the conversation.



When I discuss this definitional problem with supernaturalistic apologists, they often have a hard time understanding my objection. I love to tell them one of my favorite stories about early scientists and their discoveries. The astronomer William Herschel made an amazing discovery in the year 1800. He was observing sunlight through different colored filters and wanted to know why different colors passed different amounts of heat.

His hypothesis was that the heat was carried by the different colors of light itself. So, he devised an experiment to test for the heat of the different colors of light. Sunlight was passed through a prism and broken up into the familiar spectrum. He took several thermometers and painted the bulbs black as a way of maximizing heat absorption. As he measured the temperature of the colors starting from violet through red, he noticed that the amount of heat energy increased linearly.

That is to say, the colors on the blue side had a lower temperature than the colors on the red side. And red light had the most heat energy of them all. But as a control, he used one of the thermometers to measure the temperature just past the red area where there was no light. And he found that area having an even higher temperature. After a few experiments, he discovered that these “calorific rays” had the same properties as sunlight.

They could be reflected, refracted, absorbed, and transmitted – just like regular light. In the year 1800, he became the first person to understand that there was another type of light that was not visible to the human eye. Now you might start to see where this analogy is headed. Before Herschel, there was no reason to use the phrase “visible light”. The very word “light” was defined by having the property that it allowed us to see things (see Samuel Johnson’s “A Dictionary of the English Language”, 1755).

If you tried using the phrase visible light with anyone before 1800, they would have thought your phrasing was rather odd. “Of course light is visible”, they would say. It’s the only kind with which we have any experience. If someone were to say that there was an invisible light that no one could see, people would reject that notion. That would need to be demonstrated.

Any apologists today will be happy to point out, “Aha! But there really was an invisible light. And just because they couldn’t detect it doesn’t mean that it wasn’t there!” To that, I agree. But I’m more interested in beliefs that have a strong, rational

justification. And in this analogy, any pre-Herschelian would be rationally justified in accepting that there was only the kind of light that is seen. They would have been justified in rejecting any talk of an “unseen light” before they had the rational reasoning to warrant belief. And the reason to accept a claim of invisible light didn’t come with Herschel’s experiment.



It was only after Herschel published his now-famous experiments and after those experiments were replicated by others and then were shown impervious to falsification and when other competing hypotheses weren’t sufficient – it was then, after the rigors of the scientific method were used, that people were justified in accepting that there was non-visible light in our universe.

And we should require the same level of evidence before we accept any claim of a non-physical reality. And yet it baffles me that we use this phrase with frequency as though it has any descriptive power!

Oh, and on a side note – just one year later in 1801, Johann Wilhelm Ritter hypothesized that if non-visible light existed beyond the red end of

the spectrum, there could be a similar type beyond the blue. His experiments with silver chloride (a chemical which turns black when exposed to sunlight) showed that the reaction took place fastest of all when placed just outside of the violet area of the spectrum. And again, those “chemical rays” (ultraviolet light) had the same properties of visible light – reflection, refraction, etc.

So how does this work in a discussion or debate? Well, don’t give anyone a free pass for the phrase “physical reality” without being challenged. Ask, “What do you mean by that? I know about reality. But I only know about all the things and stuff around me. I also know about forces and energy. So what other kind of reality is there other than physical?”

If they answer by describing a thing that has no property of energy or physical matter, then how can it be said to even exist? How can anything non-physical exist? How does the word exist apply to the concept of a thing that has neither matter nor energy?

And this is what I mean by the title of this article: the phrase in question is a meaningless distinction that doesn’t map to anything coherent. I’ve had many discussions with people who believe in the supernatural and I’ve not met anyone who can coherently define what the supernatural is without fumbling over the conceptual roadblock that is the word non-physical. So I challenge you to challenge concepts, especially the ones you’ve always taken for granted.

What Does History's Most Atheist Generation Actually Believe?

By Elliot Leavy

In 2018, I wrote a piece on how a study from Pew Research Center discovered that most Americans believed it was not necessary to believe in God in order to have good morals. This was good news but was sadly overshadowed by another, less blessed finding that more than half of young adults in the U.S. believed that astrology was a science.

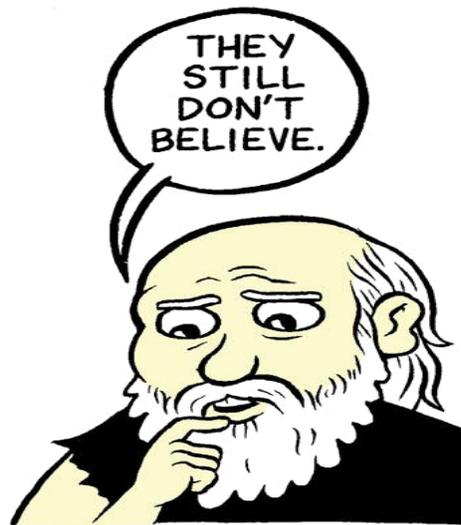
How in the year 2018 we witnessed a resurgence in such nonsense was worrying and was clearly bad news. Even so, this trend seems to still be going the way of Legion, infiltrating the American consciousness as time goes on. Further Pew Research conducted that year discovered that a majority of American adults (six in ten) also held what are sometimes characterized as 'New Age' beliefs – including belief in reincarnation, astrology, psychics, and the presence of spiritual energy in physical objects like mountains or trees.

Notice this is describing all American adults: theists and atheists alike bathing themselves in hogwash. The study found that unaffiliated Americans (those who say their religion is atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”) are about as likely as Christians to hold New Age beliefs, with atheists less likely to believe in any of the four New Age beliefs (maybe there is a god after all). 22% of atheists believe in at least one of four New age beliefs, compared with 56% of agnostics and eight in ten among those whose religion is “nothing in particular”. Science be damned.

In 2014, Pew also identified that the

most atheist groups were both the younger and older millennials cohorts: what this means is that the world's most educated generation is also dabbling in nonsense such as astrology.

So, who is to blame? As I previously reported, one of these beliefs seems to be getting a bit more love than the other gobbledegook and is still widely advertised across



many publications: astrology. Vice Magazine's Broadly has run horoscopes since its launch in 2015 – with one of its senior editors stating that traffic for the site's horoscopes “has grown really exponentially” over the past years. In 2019, Broadly renewed its commitment to false information, and launched its first astrology app in May. Another blog, Autostraddle, the popular blog for young queer women, has an in-house Tarot columnist. New Zealand's The Cut has also seen its horoscope posts gain 150 per cent more traffic in 2017 than the year before.

So why the retrograde regression? Is there a logical explanation? Or is

my generation simply hungry for a piece of Potter's hocus pocus penis? Have we become so infantilised that we are beginning to revert to wish-upon-a-star nonsense, Pinocchio style? The stars most certainly don't know or care, but maybe we should.

As with the existence of God, astrology has no scientific grounding, and its methodology has been widely debunked over and over again by an array of academic authorities. Worryingly still, in 2008, some 342,000 people identified themselves as Wiccan, up from 134,000 in 2001 and up significantly from 8,000 in 1990, according to the American Religious Identification Survey, one of the largest surveys on religion in the U.S.

This is not people whacking it on the census just for the hell of it – many it turns out are putting their money where their mouth is. The psychic services industry for example — which includes astrology, aura reading, mediumship, tarot-card reading and palmistry, among other metaphysical services — grew 2% between 2011 and 2016 and is now worth \$2 billion annually. Danielle Ayoka, the founder of spiritual subscription service Mystic Lipstick, said her customer base is growing exponentially. “When I started my journey in 2010, I was the weirdo,” she said. I wholeheartedly agree, but this is where the communion of our ideas ends.

The success of tarot reading is astonishing, but at least explicable. In 1949, the psychologist Bertram Forer explained the complicity of participants in tarot reading by asking his students to fill out what he had led them to believe was a

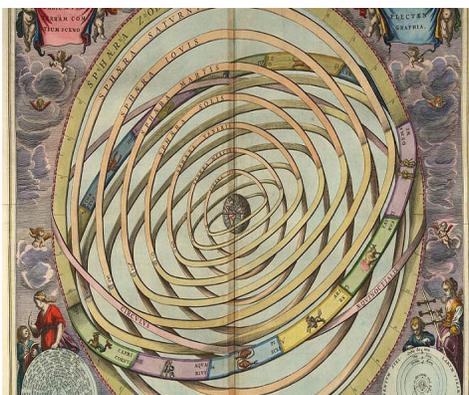
personality test. He then told his students that the results were based on the said tests when they were not.

In fact, Forer had cobbled together 13 sweeping statements from published horoscopes: ‘You have a tendency to be critical of yourself.’ reads one, ‘At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing.’ reads another. Christopher French, who researches paranormal beliefs at Goldsmiths, University of London, noted that most of the 13 personality descriptions in Forer’s original test are “two-headed statements that describe the human condition – and that’s why they resonate so much” [...] “If they don’t describe you, French delightedly tells his own students, ‘you’re probably a psychopath’. Well, at least there’s that.

Every student was asked to assess the test’s accuracy on a scale of 0 to 5, where 5 indicated perfection. Their average score was 4.26. This means that although these broad, baseless and obtuse statements were exactly that, they were being taken as highly personalised, astute and individualised ones. Confirmation bias is also at work, as we always prefer our existing beliefs confirmed – the arrogant creatures we are – and selectively pay attention to statements that remind us that we are right.

When a reading is inaccurate, we ignore or forget it. When it is bang on the money, we cash it in as a success. Onto other occurrences of the occult: Witchcraft is at an all-time high. Witchcraft makes a bit more sense as a phenomenon as it has its roots in the reclaiming of the word ‘witch’ as a word of empowerment rather than a word synonymous with being burnt alive. “To reclaim the word witch is to reclaim our right, as women, to be powerful,” wrote Starhawk, the feminist neopaganist writer in her

seminal 1979 book, *The Spiral Dance*. But that was almost 40 years ago. Is this still happening? Kristin J. Sollee seems to think so, and argues in her book; *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* that the treatment of women in the past reflects that of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential Campaign. “Witches, sluts, and feminists are the trifecta of terror for the patriarchy”, she writes. I don’t know anyone who is scared of witches, over the age of 5 anyway, which is what makes this spike in the occult all the more worrying – it is fantastical and not grounded in anything, even a child could tell you that.



Sollee also fails to address the fact that, by all accounts, Hillary Clinton lampooned herself in that election – no amount of monthly curse gatherings for Trump will undo that. We shouldn’t be dragging ourselves back into the dark ages – not much progress happened then.

It is undoubtedly true that many of the world’s faiths have had a problem with women from the get-go, and that over the years many have gotten better only for their own selfish sake and survival. Others still, have yet to progress, and you only need to glance at the lives of women in the most religious countries to see that this is the case. But replacing patriarchal belief systems with matriarchal ones seems to me just more of the same. To quote that old pervert Gandhi, an eye for an eye makes the world blind. The founding

Wiccan tenant of ‘An it harm none, do what ye will’ doesn’t really cut it either.

Jesus preached peace and we had the crusades, Muhammad was a feminist, according to the Huffington Post, and – well, I’ll don’t think I have to add any more to that. Burn them all, I say.

When Nietzsche claimed that God is dead he spoke of the loss of an absolute basis for morality, the nursing of nihilism and its eventual reign. In the century that followed, we saw cults of all shapes and sizes fill such a void, many with a side of Kool-Aid. Is the rise of witchcraft and astrology just a lust for meaning in today’s world? It is usually those who are down on their luck who are vulnerable enough to become possessed by religiosity – perhaps this is just another symptom of that. Others suggest it is a reaction against the norm and failing systems, ‘breaking the mould’ so to speak.

This fails to account for the fact that many of the practices of these beliefs are integral aspects of other religions. Hinduism, the world’s third largest religion, for example, is steeped in wishy-washy astrology and crystal-reading bull. At a time that is seeing a rise of accusations of witchcraft all across the developing world, in places where education is happenstance at best, it might be a good idea if we sat out the next seance and found a better way to feel good about ourselves. Tarot cards may be beautiful little pieces of art which tap into our nostalgia of the trading card game days of old, but they can’t tell us anything. We can look up to the stars all we want to try and escape the meaninglessness of existence, but they won’t tell us anything either. Whatever we get from these backward practices comes from within, we shouldn’t insult ourselves by believing anything different.

Original article: <http://bit.ly/2QdbyA0>

Adoption and Fundamentalist Christianity - A Dangerous mix

By M. Dzhali Maier

Every once in a while, another story in a long line of particularly shocking stories will flash across our TV screens: Breaking news from somewhere in America! Investigations reveal children being denied access to the bathroom, living in filth and squalor, being denied access to bathroom or food, while some show signs of physical abuse. Parents tell authorities their Christian faith inspired them to adopt children. Sounds familiar?

Ever since the book *To Train*



Up a Child by Michael and Debi Pearl first hit the shelves in 1994, literature on Biblically-inspired childrearing has found a tidy home in bookstores across the US. It has been snapped up by Fundamentalist Christians looking to literally train their children the way the Bible commands them to. *To Train Up A Child* advocates using a rod to whip and spank children into “instant and unquestioning obedience”.

Parents must “use whatever force

necessary to bring [the child] to bay” and are instructed to “sit on [the child] and spank him... and hold him there until he has surrendered. Defeat him totally.”

This book has since generated backlash after its instructions were implicated in the deaths-by-discipline of three children, but this childrearing philosophy escapes scrutiny and legislation through a horrible loophole: adopted children. If *To Train Up a Child* advocates beating biological children to the point of unquestioning obedience, what would parents do to children who do not know them and might not trust them or want anything to do with them?

If you guessed “up the ante”, you would be right - an increase in intensity rationalized by the pernicious medicalization of adopted kids. Only a ramped-up version of *To Train Up A Child* can cure an adopted child’s “pathology”. The basic idea is this: adopted children have suffered so many adverse experiences in their young lives that their brains have literally become diseased.

An excess of stress hormones has twisted their brains into a reliance on survival mechanisms that wreak havoc on civilized society. These children were neglected or treated inconsistently, and thus they have learned not to trust people. They have no emotional attachments to

adults and, as a result, they are perpetually “unsafe” to themselves and society at large. Fundamentalist Christian adoptive



parents often compare their young charges to Ted Bundy and other psychopathic serial killers; charming, superficial, manipulating, and dangerous. The Devil incarnate. These kiddos (as they are often called) have Attachment Disorder. Not the Reactive Attachment Disorder that shows in the DSM-IV as a very rare and prohibitively specific disorder, but the Attachment Disorder made-up by those that have a vested interest in it existing.

Indeed, the symptoms of “Attachment Disorder” (also called Developmental Trauma Disorder, in a stunning case of euphemism treadmill) include just about every normal childhood behavior - from having “feelings of being unique” to “lacking morals, values, and spiritual faith”.

“Identifying with Satan” is a symptom, as is a child

FEEL THE SPIN

A provocative story about science, faith, and social upheaval following America's Civil War

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Feel the Spin
a novel
by Marshall Moskow



By Angelos Sofocleous

Stendhal, the 19th-century French literary realist writer, once said: "A good book is an event in my life." Reading Marshall Moskow's book *Feel the Spin*, Stendhal's words came to mind and put it in the list of books I consider an 'event in my life'.

In this historical drama, Moskow presents the conflict between science and religion during Reconstruction, through the eyes of Thomas Walters, a professor of natural philosophy and astronomy who joins the faculty of Tideland College in 1875. Walters immediately faces challenges in an institution which still holds itself in the past and in which Walters feels that he is the 'black sheep' amongst his peers for being rational and scientifically literate.

Moskow's mastery invites the reader to have a first-hand experience of post-Civil-War America and experience the battle between freethinkers, who oppose the shackles that religion puts onto society and promote science and rational thinking, and traditionalists, who choose the myth and faith of religion over the logic and reason of science.

Through the eyes of professor Walters, Moskow demonstrates how religion is also used to promote immoral and anachronistic views about women's rights, slavery, and social equality.

Moskow shows his superb writing and story-telling abilities by skilfully interlinking gender, race, the natural sciences, and

philosophy with religion, showing how religion can infiltrate and infect political and civic life.

Despite it being a historical novel, *Feel the Spin* does not fail to be historically accurate and succeeds in accurately depicting the atmosphere and temper of post-Civil-War America.

Feel the Spin, although set in the 1870s America, is worryingly and alarmingly topical. In an America which still struggles to free itself from religious dogma and superstition, and in which religion becomes increasingly involved in education and politics, Americans must all become Thomas Walters and raise their voices against religious domination to establish a world where freedom from religion is respected as a human right.

My Doctor lied to me

By Erin Louis



“How long has that been there?” the doctor said to my husband. He replied that he just recently noticed it, but it hadn’t concerned him much. A few years ago, he had a benign growth removed that was no big deal, so it made sense that this one was no big deal either. The doctor ordered a biopsy just the same. He’s just being thorough, so I wasn’t concerned either. Until of course the results came back: He had thyroid cancer. Now we were concerned.

Before the diagnosis, we had been discussing our future and whether we were planning on any more kids. I was 30 and he was 35, and with one son who was quite the handful, we were confident that our family was complete. This decision was a few years in the making; we had many conversations on the subject. With looming cancer surgery followed by radiation treatment, we decided

I should speak with my doctor about permanent contraception. I made an appointment with my gynaecologist.

I hadn’t been to this doctor before, as we had just moved to the area, but she seemed nice. I noticed an odd look on her face when I told her that I wanted permanent contraception. Both of my sisters had it done after their 3rd child, and I was familiar with the procedure, I told her.

Trying to understand the stern expression on her face, I went on and explained that my husband and I had come to this decision and were confident with it. Still the odd look, so I went on. I further explained my husband’s upcoming cancer treatment and explained that his doctor had warned us about getting pregnant. He was told that the radiation would cause extensive damage to his sperm and a pregnancy would likely be seriously compromised. The doctor then asked me my age, which I thought was really weird - wasn’t that in my chart? I told her anyway. To which she replied:

“You’re much too young to make that decision. You could change your mind. Even if you were certain, at your age we aren’t legally

allowed to perform that procedure on someone so young.”

Now that the expression on her face was finally explained I was compelled to ask why my sisters who were both under 30 at the time, had been allowed the procedure? She said that they shouldn’t have been, even after 3 kids. I left the appointment disappointed and confused. I really didn’t want any more kids and I was also done taking my birth control pill. I was disappointed, but what could I do? I trusted my doctor. I went to culinary school, who I was to question a highly educated professional? I had to trust that not only did she know what she was talking about, but also had my best interests in mind.

Cancer treatment, even with insurance, is expensive. Copays combined with time off work, make for a difficult financial situation. Our son was considered special needs, and I stayed home to care for him. With my husband providing our only income, I made the difficult decision to discontinue my health coverage to save money.

We were very concerned about an accidental pregnancy, so I went to my local Planned Parenthood to get my birth control pills. At that

appointment, I decided to ask about permanent contraception, making sure to preempt the question with my reasons. She did mention that I was a little young, but said she understood why I wanted it done and said that it may be a good option under the situation. She then talked to me about my options, both permanent and semi-permanent. Our conversation lasted 30 minutes and ended with her providing me with written information to bring to my husband along with a referral to a doctor who could perform the procedure.

When I got to my car, it occurred to me that this appointment was vastly different than the last. I kicked myself for not asking why she hadn't told me the same thing as the last doctor. I was confused, but I went home, discussed the information with my husband and made the appointment for the procedure.

At the next appointment, this doctor also checked with me and let me know that it would not be reversible. I was well informed at this point and I told him I was ready. Grateful that this would be one less thing to worry about when I had so much to worry about right then. He was kind and understanding, and I remembered just in time to ask about my first inquiry about the procedure. He immediately asked

me what medical group that doctor belonged to, I told him. He too got an odd expression on his face, but I didn't have to wonder why for long.

The medical group was Catholic, and what I asked for was not illegal, he told me. Until then, I had assumed that Catholic-affiliated meant that they had a chapel in their hospitals. I was raised Catholic and although I had never been a believer, I did find a measure of comfort in the symbolism. If only because it held a certain nostalgia for me, not because I had any faith in the religion. It was a family tradition. It absolutely never occurred to me that a medical group or hospital would give or make medical decisions or advice based on religion. I trusted the doctor to tell me the truth, but she lied to me.



In a time of extreme stress, one of the hardest times in not just my life, but also the lives of my son and husband, my doctor lied to me. She

could've simply told me her beliefs and opinions and referred me elsewhere. Instead, she lied. She could have provided information and let me know her position, but, instead, she made the conscious decision to lie to me. She knew and understood that a pregnancy could lead to life-threatening circumstances for not just me but also the fetus, and she still lied to me. When I came to her for help, my doctor lied to me. When she knew I trusted her, my doctor lied to me. When my doctor had a choice between my health and her religion, she chose her religion, and lied to me.

I had the procedure, my husband recovered, and our son is doing great. Suspicion and skepticism have permanently replaced my trust in doctors, however. Where I had confidence, I now have doubt. In my time of need the person I went to for help, chose her god over me.

My doctor lied to me.

On Religious Indoctrination

By Shane Esplin

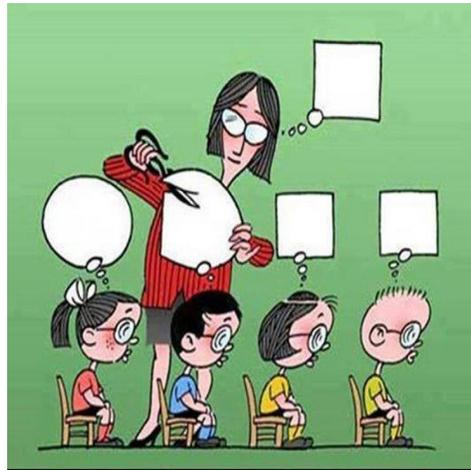
The lynchpin of any religion is recruitment, but what is the purpose? Was the purpose of religion to learn the truth and seek out some sort of deity? Is it about learning where we come from and our place in the universe? Or could it be that we as humans need something bigger than ourselves to strive for?

Whatever the reason it has left a dark spot in our history and many of our lives. First and foremost, I want to say that religion certainly had a reason for existing. Many history scholars and palaeontologist believe it was a natural part of human evolution. This tarnished spot in our journey as a human race had a purpose as it tried to explain the questions of the universe with the only evidence the people had.

Now, I don't blame them for that, you can only make do with what you have at the time. The issues I harbor are not for the past; they are for the present. We have a far better understanding of our world. So, with this knowledge why does religion persist to darken our doorways? Religions are focused on that very question.

Whether they admit it openly or not, it doesn't matter. They are all focused on one thing in this technological age: survival. If a religion isn't growing, it's dying. The two things every religion

pushes more than almost any other abuse is indoctrinating the young and missionary work. When they get them young enough or desperate enough they can teach them whatever they want.



To sum it up in a quote. "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take anyone at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors." — John B. Watson, Behaviorism (1930)

Of course, religions have other ways of collecting followers. A lot of cults (religions are all cults of different levels) offer to pay for universities and colleges. Some even have their own schools to further the cult teachings and strengthen the obligation. Many even offer to

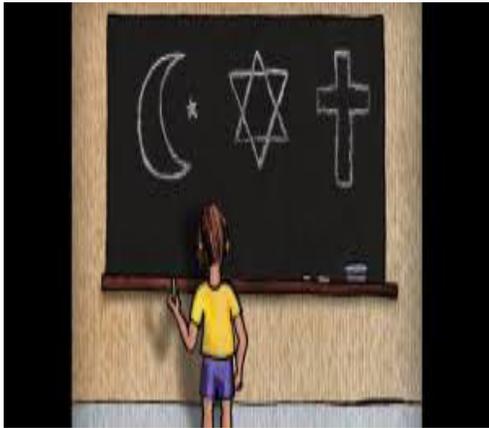
pay for it, if you pay them back with interest of course. The Church of Ladder Day Saints (Mormons) have what's called the Perpetual Education Fund.

This is essentially a student loan where you must make payments while you attend school. They can't wait until you graduate and get a job before needing their money. You have five years to pay the loan back no matter the amount borrowed and can only use it for trade or vocational learnings. I find this to be brilliant, in a Pinky and the Brain sort of way. Many religions offer this same scheme to keep people obligated. Sure, you could see these as a good and kindhearted gesture, or you could look at it as what it is: a marketing tool.

Every business knows you don't sell the product, you sell the brand. So how are these cultish corporations selling "the brand." On LDS.org seminary website, the Church's objective is described as follows: "Our purpose is to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven." It goes on to say. "We must raise our sights. We must keep the goals we have always had: enrollment, regular attendance, graduation, knowledge of the scriptures, the

experience of feeling the Holy Ghost confirm truth.”

The Saint Mary’s Seminary and University website has an entire tab devoted to the followings of Jesus Christ. On the “About” section it says at the bottom of the page: “I offer these same words as welcome to St. Mary’s and to our website, and as a touchstone for what I hope our ministry here will continue to be: a conduit for Christ’s peace to enter more profoundly into the lives of those who live and work and who are formed here, into your life, and into our world.”



On the Suffa Islamic Seminary website it states that its purpose is to “continue the long tradition of Islamic education by training and developing morally sound and intellectually creative scholars, leaders and imams through an integrated study of classical Islamic texts and modern social theories so that they will serve, guide and advance Muslim communities.”

And according to the Islamic Association of North Texas their mission statement is “To educate on the virtues of Islam and practice it.”

The American Buddhist Seminary’s mission statement is “to develop and enhance the spiritual growth of the rapidly expanding Theravada Buddhist community of North America.”

The website for the Zen Buddhist Temple states, “The first is the growing need in North America for qualified Buddhist clergy. We don’t have enough, and while many stepping in to fill this void may have sincere hearts, they often lack the formal training needed to build a lasting Sangha with spiritual services that can be shared with the public.”

It took some looking, but eventually I found the mission statement for the end of times church, The Seventh-day Adventists. It reads as follows. “The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the three angels’ messages (Revelation 14:6-12), and to prepare the world for Christ’s soon return.”

Even the website for Center for Global Education on Asian religions has in big bold letters at the top. “Teaching for Global Competence. Transform Teaching. Transform Learning. Transform the World.”

Call me a skeptic but when I see these things being so proudly stated all I picture a bald man in a spinning chair holding a white cat. The proof is in the pudding as this small example states

on all these websites. They all exist to push their own cultish agenda. Now to put it as frankly as my wife does. “The main goal is the indoctrination of the young or simple minded to grow their brand for profit”.



Essentially, the more sheep the flock has the more sheep show up and what is the most effective way to milk a sheep? With tithing or a collection plate on Sunday.

Perfectly stated in “The God Delusion” by Richard Dawkins, “Do not indoctrinate your children. Teach them how to think for themselves, how to evaluate evidence, and how to disagree with you.”

While we are indoctrinating our future generations, we are collaring our race to a single spot instead of moving forward in progress. When we allow the naturally curious to think freely and wonder, we push our race forward. It is imperative, that we push forward.

That, my fellow thinkers, is how to free the world from the plague of religion.

Atheists Have the Freedom to be Irreligious Because of Religious Freedom

By Steven Waldman



For most of American history, fights over religious liberty involved clashes between religions – especially between Protestants and Catholics.

But how does the nature of religious freedom change now that, according to a new study, 23 per cent of Americans claim no affiliation, about as many as say they are Catholic or Evangelical protestant?

At first blush, this would seem to call for a re-assessment of the various ways that America privileges religion over irreligion. We still do pledge allegiance under God and that's just the start of it.

Religious broadcasters have 42% of TV licenses. Religious organizations have significant protections in the tax codes. And most importantly, laws are increasingly not allowed to infringe on religious practice. Seventh-day Adventists cannot

be forced to work Saturdays and Catholic hospitals cannot be forced to dispense birth control.

Now that the largest religious group is “none,” should America move to an officially secularist model like France rather than this religious pluralism that leads to aggressive religiosity permeating the culture?

But the truth is, secularists are among the biggest beneficiaries of America's unusual approach to religious freedom – not the bastardized version often thrown around but the actual model that has developed, slowly, over hundreds of years.

It is true that most of the Founding Fathers wanted religion to flourish but the system they created has been uniquely positioned to allow for secularists and other “freethinkers” as they were called in the 18th century.

On a basic level, this is straightforward: a system that allows people the freedom to believe also allows them the freedom to disbelieve or not believe.

It's no accident that the nations that discriminate against minority religions also persecute or harass atheists. In Saudi Arabia, a court sentenced a twenty-eight-year-old man to ten years in prison and two thousand

lashes because he had tweeted in favor of atheism. Saudi regulations make it a crime to “call . . . for atheist thought in any form,” demonstrating that nonbelievers and believers have a common interest in a robust system of religious freedom.

Those who want the state to push secularism as the official approach should be wary.



Consider France. With its doctrine of *laïcité*, or secularism, the state embraces separation of church and state but without the additional American commitment to making special accommodations for religious practice. In 2004, it passed a law banning the wearing of religious clothing, including hijabs and other religious symbols in schools. In 2010, France banned full-face veils. Many experts believe that ardent secularism contributed to the tendency of French Muslims to feel more ghettoized and militant than in the United States.

More recently, it became clear that if secularism becomes a way of subduing unpopular religious minorities it will eventually become co-opted



by the religious majority. The right-wing political leader Marie LePen declared, "If French Muslims wish to practice their faith, they need to accept the fact that they are doing so on soil that is culturally Christian. This means that they cannot have the same rank as the Christian religion."

The American model works relatively well for non-believers in part because of a misunderstood component. James Madison believed that the key to religious freedom was not so much the First Amendment – he derided the efficacy of "parchment barriers" – but the presence of a "multiplicity of sects." The more different approaches present, the less likely one would come to dominate. In such a system, non-believers act as another belief system, helpfully fragmenting the religious landscape and benefiting from the chaos.

Those who created the American

model were quite aware that many of their compatriots were not religious. The attention given to the Puritans and others makes colonial America seem like a land of regular churchgoers, but by the time of the Revolution, a huge percentage of the population was not practicing.

The religious adherence rate was only 17 per cent in 1776, by one estimate. So while most of the founders believed religion to be essential to this great new project, they also were aware that their passion for piety was not shared by many of their compatriots. Our current system reflects that.



Personally, I think secular people should be broad-minded in supporting this model. Just as religionists should not impose their vision on secular people, the "nones" – people not affiliated with a religion - should accept that religious language and symbolism must exist outside the walls of the church or home. Religion needs some space too. Religious people need the freedom not only to

worship privately but also to express themselves publicly and to associate with like-minded Americans. Just as mainstream Christians had to accept the unorthodox views of Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, secularists should not attempt to criminalize religious beliefs they find repugnant. For instance, labelling anti-gay statements as hate speech, and then attempting to ban such speech, would violate the First Amendment and endanger the very system that protects secular people as well as religious minorities.

Non-believers benefit from the American style of pluralism. They should support it, even if it means they have to tolerate an occasional "In God We Trust" here or there. The alternatives are much worse.

Steven Waldman is the author of Sacred Liberty: America's Long, Bloody and Ongoing Fight for Religious Freedom, and co-founder of Report for America.

Promoting Secular Education

By *Kyosi Edward*

I'm a bonafide citizen of Uganda who has an understanding of how religion has impacted the whole world in a negative way.

Uganda is supposed to be a free secular nation right from its inception as an independent country. However, the evangelicals have totally failed to acknowledge the seriousness of that fact and always pushing very hard to Christianize everyone and the Muslims are also struggling in the same direction. This comes from that fact that "for God and my country", was sustained as the national motto.



Therefore, Uganda is regarded as a God-fearing nation and this resulting in the mushrooming of many churches, mosques and other faiths made in Uganda like the faith of unity, founded by Owobusobozi Bisaka.

Today, most of the media

houses in Uganda are owned by religious leaders and they are starting to control people's minds on presumptuous truths about life and death according to their own standards. More young people are interested in opening up churches as the only means to the end, and the truth is that they have greatly gained wealth out of the church businesses schemes. Everyone is enticed by the thought of playing holy and with the right answer to solve human challenges, some young people will be like, "You went to school why don't you start up a church, people are getting rich out of it. If uneducated people can run churches, why not you?", and my sincere answer is always, "I did not get an education to mentally imprison others, but to try as much as possible to free them".

The nature of the situation is such that most of the people don't acknowledge the seriousness of the fact that misleading humanity should be verily condemned, but instead it has been enhanced as a mere way of life, and thousands of people are unsuspecting.

The religious groups have organized a body in which they stand with one accord regarding the national issues and this is called "Inter-religious council

of Uganda", which came up with the idea of a national prayer day where all the religious leaders meet the president and breakfast is served on the poor taxpayers' money.

I have never seen anything rewarding from those national prayer days. Maybe the priests love it because they are recognized by the State officials who work with them during elective campaigns, it is quite saddening to see that it is most of the political leaders who are mostly behind the construction of gigantic cathedrals and mosques using taxpayers' money. It is not very easy to separate the religious leaders with the people working with the state.

Personally, I must say that it's been a very courageous move for me to be identifying myself as a non-theist and I have found it to be very liberating. Part of my mission is to see a strong secular build up in my country. I would like to take it back to its original natural state because my country and Africa in general has not registered any kind of growth as result of religion's stronghold on the people for they have become poorer and less critical, always waiting on god and other supernatural moves to change their current stagnant poor state. We have all been victims and it

took us long to recover from it, the reason being that atheists are not very many due to an education system that was driven by the religious class and never encouraged critical thinking skills, science education, and the creative process, which are much needed in this modern world,

It is a very rare to the education system in Uganda, many of the constructed schools are either church-based or have Islamic foundations. In all these schools, what is expected is only indoctrination. It is not very easy to find a well-balanced adult after school. I would like to call upon the atheists in the developed world to support education in Uganda,

I would like to see schools with a balanced type of education growing up everywhere in Uganda. It is true that some atheist organizations have supported some schools in Uganda, but more schools are needed to help reverse the effects of religion, for the magnitude of religious enslavement to most of our families is very horrible and wounding.

I would like to see people move on from the religious bigotries and be able to find solutions to their own challenges.

Africa can grow higher and

higher without religions, and as a non-theist, I'm trying all I can to push for a free secular Uganda, but it is difficult task without support from other secularists, therefore, we need non-religious people all over the world to come and work with us for a secular free Uganda.



Then people will be able to develop a new system of thinking that encourages the awakening of their human potentials without regard to the supernatural and the priests, but themselves recognizing that they are the keys to their personal and communal development.

The idea that people can not do anything without the mercy of a god needs to be phased out of their minds, but these will require an appropriate type of education from kindergarten to the highest levels of learning.

I'm just lucky to be one of non-theists because I did not just read the Bible or listened to preachers.

I often visited the library and read most of the important books about evolution which have really proved to me that the story of Adam and Eve is false and cannot be trusted and that, because of that same story, the story of Jesus dying on the cross is also not true, and the same applies to Islam, it being an Abrahamic faith-based religion.

Therefore, all atheists should always stand proud of who they are, everywhere in the world. We believed the lies for too long, but it is time we start liberating others from this mental slavery by supporting educational projects in Uganda and Africa in general that will allow free open debates and allow critical thinking abilities to blossom. Then, more people will better understand the world around them.

Recently, I was talking to my friend who happens to be a preacher about tough questions concerning the world. We talked about a wide range of issues from sex education to environmental protection. To my surprise, he acknowledged that they have not done enough to teach the young ones about sex education resulting into early pregnancies and he also told me that most preachers have not received good education.

He said that they don't talk about the most pertinent

issues affecting our lives like how to protect the environment and that they only think about heaven.

They do not care about the kind of environment that future children will face.

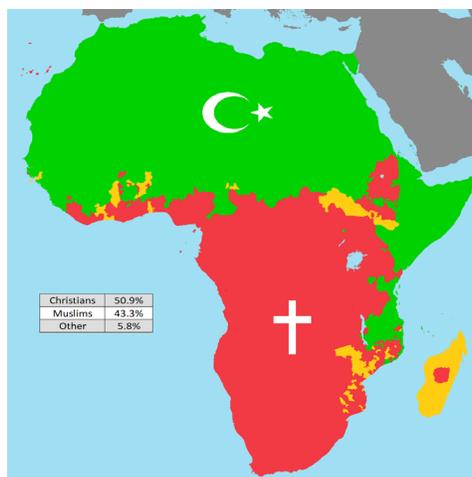
Now, it is understood that heaven and earth cannot be mixed together. Most of the people lack understanding of that difference; they love to live in that world of fantasy, but somehow religious leaders pretend that they are sleeping, yet they know the truth.

This preacher supports education for girls and children from marginalized groups, but he confessed to me that most of the money he uses to support education comes from secular organizations and people.

I could see that deep inside his heart, he knows and believes that secularists are good people with helping hands, but the only problem is that he is still locked in his world of superstitions and fairy tales because that is his biggest source of income.

Despite that, many young people work with churches, and many of the young people in Africa are coming to the truth. Most of them understand that all religions are business-oriented, but the idea of an existence of a god is still

intact. They believe in a god due to family pressure. To most people, it is impossible to have a legal marriage outside religious circles. I think you can see how hard an atheist's family life will become if every potential spouse you meet would love you to be more religious as if it is the only ticket to a happy marriage. It is not very easy to convince anyone that church is not the monopoly of a proper moral code of conduct.



In most cases, I have been mistaken for being a religious person because they think I'm so sweet to be irreligious, but I feel so sorry for them because historically most religions have spread havoc among humans, and the divide even amongst the modern Africans is still high.

Some tribes in Africa who describe themselves as very religious and 'chosen by God' always take the lion's share of the national political cake and the truth is that people are more intolerant of others, as they believe others are

suffering god's curses, but I call it ignorance and selfishness as motivated by the belief in a god.

Religion has done more harm than good to the African countries and we need to be helped to change people's mindset to be able to embrace science as the only truth left for the survival of humanity.

As atheists, sceptics, agnostics, free thinkers and humanists, we have a big role to play to change the world. Religions have dominated the world based on lies, but the people need to be freed from those lies and therefore we need to get practical and work as a collective to solve challenges of illiteracy, poverty, health, human rights, environmental protection impact, water and sanitation.

In the end, people will begin to understand our mission of making the world a better place for the whole of humanity.

As a Ugandan atheist, I'm determined to press forward, and I will not be deterred by fear of criticism from the religious zealots until I see fruits from my efforts and see a secular Uganda and the African continent in general.

I wish you good luck in everything that you do too!

What to do Instead of Going to Church

By Max Humana

“Pray, *verb* To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled in behalf of a single petitioner, confessedly unworthy.”

“Faith, *noun* Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel.”

— Ambrose Bierce, from *The Unabridged Devil’s Dictionary*



People pray when they go to church, despite the fact that prayer is probably one of the least productive things humans do.

Prayer, in the spirit in which Ambrose Bierce describes it in the first quote above, is usually just wishing that an imaginary being will magically do something that you ought to damn well do yourself, or that it will magically tell you what to do when you damn well ought to figure it out for yourself.

At other times, prayer is just wishing that this magical being will stop something from happening that you yourself damn well ought to stop from happening. Yet other times, as in the case of

healing an extremely sick family member or stopping a religious zealot from carting you off to the rack or the stake, it is wishing that this being will intervene in the real world in a way that it has never actually done before in the entire history of the world.

The rock-rolling Sisyphus actually gets more out of his eternally fruitless endeavor than all the people who pray get out of their wishful thinking, because at least he’s getting in a good workout while the prayerful are merely engaged in a mindless and pointless escapist copout.

But since people don’t go to church only to pray, we have to replace both the act of praying in public and the other things people get out of going to church. So what do people actually get out of church, whether they admit it or not?

There are several things. One is, of course, the prayer and fire and brimstone which used to be all the rage but which has generally quieted down somewhat.

Another is having someone outside your family tell you once or twice a week how screwed up you are, re-tell the cautionary tales of all those who have screwed up before you and how badly they were punished, and how you can avoid this punishment if you do what the preacher says and give him some money.

There is more in this vein to be had, but the main reason many people go to church is the herd instinct. People like to be around other

people like them, and they enjoy the groupthink reinforcement which they get from a bunch of people committed to the same wacky ideas. They also like the social aspect of it, in which they have an excuse to get together outside the home and workplace.

For many people, going to church is less a god-and-prayer experience than a social one. They still do the god stuff, of course, and many actually believe it, but the social and herd reinforcement aspects are much of the draw.

With all this in mind, we can quite definitely redirect the faithful from their houses of worship to other venues or even the same venue once it has been repurposed for different and infinitely more practical activities.

Since social engagements, groupthink and mutual reinforcement are what the religious need to be happy, let’s replace them with far more positive activities.

I’ve listed just a few suggestions below in no particular order, but of course anyone can add others that suit the local people, culture and situations.

1. If people still want to get together, they can meet at their former house of worship after its conversion into a community support center outfitted with tools, games, books and other useful items.

Groups can volunteer to take some of these tools, books and useful items to people

and places which need them and can get to work.

Possible activities could include visiting the elderly and doing difficult chores or tasks for them while giving them some companionship, teaching the elderly about how to use modern technology, setting up and distributing food to the needy, doing highway cleanups, reading to underprivileged and/or poor children, volunteering to teach classes on useful subjects to anyone who wants to attend the training, doing neighborhood cleanups, helping people recover from natural disasters, power-washing homes, doing painting jobs, cleaning gutters and clearing brush and leaves from high roofs, repairing vehicles and/or appliances, delivering food or just spending time with lonely people.

These are all great activities, very socially productive and they increase the well-being of the performer as well as the recipient of the service. They also do a hell of a lot more for the community in the spirit of the liberal community servant and community organizer aspect of Jesus than does sitting around in a church talking about how great Jesus was and how much better the faithful think things would be if their holy book became law.

2. Donating time to perform some pro bono legal or minor medical work, or at least dispensing professionally-informed legal or medical advice.

3. Spending time in large or small groups talking about issues of the day or just things of interest to the people in the community.

Talk about what makes people happy, tips on how to be a good mother / father / son/

daughter / friend / citizen, how to do a garden, how to cook or create or do art, how to use or apply the latest scientific discovery, or even how to be more moral and ethical.



4. Call or visit your parents, or your children if they have grown up and have left the home. Or both! Make sure to tell them you love them and find a way to prove it.

5. Play with or spend time with your kids if they are still at home. Teach them something. Make sure to tell them you love them, and find a way to prove it.

6. Relook your life to see if you have been doing the right things, and if not, put down a list of goals for doing better. Start making those goals happen.

7. Exercise, preferably with family. Also, take your pets for a walk, preferably with family.

8. See if your elderly neighbors need anything.

9. Put down social media for a day and do constructive things with actual people.

10. Learn something new and interesting. Feel free to share it with like-minded people.

11. Try to put yourself in other people's shoes and truly see the world from their perspective.

This includes people who are not at all like you. Imagine the world from the eyes of those who have been oppressed or are in unfortunate circumstances. Imagine you are a female in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Imagine you were a slave under the lash in pre-Civil War America. Imagine yourself as a poor black atheist lesbian non-English-speaking immigrant from a Muslim-majority country in the uber-xenophobic and increasingly bigoted America.

Imagine yourself as any of these people and many more, and consider how other people would treat you. Use this exercise to inform how you interact with other people no matter what they look like or sound like, where they come from or any other harmless characteristic. Learn to judge people by their words and deeds, not superficialities.

12. Be thankful and appreciative for the abilities you have, the people you have and for the comforts you enjoy, but don't ever thank any god for it.

What if Women had Written the Bible?

By Max Humana

We need to make one thing very clear upfront: women would never, ever have written the Christian bible or either of the other two monotheistic disasters that keep being passed off as so-called holy books.

This unholy trinity of ancient Mediterranean snuff fiction could only have been written by people devoid of morality and conscience and bursting with ignorance, aggression and way too much testosterone. And being 98% genetically identical to the murderous chimpanzee and living in societies which reward the most aggressive groups was a permanently active catalyst in the generation and sustainment of so much evil nonsense.



These books were solely the products of angry and jealous male humans who wrote tales about gods which were hyperamplified versions of

themselves with infinitely higher levels of anger, jealousy and power, unachievable by mere mortal males.

And it isn't just because of the rampant misogyny which monotheisms and many other faiths simply can't seem to do without. Women comprise only a microscopic fraction of the war criminals, murderers and torturers throughout history. Due to their nature and society structure, women have had to be more focused on the production, protection and maintenance of their offspring, their families, their clans and themselves, often in that order.

Women don't go out on raiding expeditions, don't burn villages and their inhabitants, and don't commit massacres, rapes and tortures. Women may argue but they don't usually kill other people unless they are essentially forced to do it. There are far fewer female than male psychopaths, and they do not often engage in the physical violence that male psychopaths enjoy and inflict.

Women have not been the torturers or the ones who commit evil acts; they have been the victims. They have preserved life, not taken it. They have saved lives, not snuffed them out. They have created lives, not ended

them. Women have investments in life that men can only imagine.

These are general statements with the inevitable exceptions but the rule stands. The male writers and founders of religions and religious stories often have all of these unpleasant characteristics and many others.

If women had written the Bible, there would be no childish, ignorant lunacy like ostracizing them because of a simple biological act like menstruating.

Women would not be stoned for adultery, suspected or otherwise.

Women would not be treated as property of their husbands.

Women would not be used as sex slaves after the conquest of their villages and the murder of their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons.

Men would not be praised for having hundreds of concubines and/or wives.

Women would not be able to be sold, either as a slave girl or to the male who raped her.

Women would not be told to shut the hell up and don't talk to men just because they were female.

If women had written the Bible, it wouldn't be full of killing, rape, murder, conquest and evil. It would have much more practicality in it, and it would focus more on cooperation, mutual support and problem-solving. It would talk about the actual important necessities of life, such as how to cure diseases and have family and social harmony.

It would discuss how to have plenty of safe food and clean water, bits on personal hygiene, safety, child-rearing and things to teach these children. It would not contain details on how they should invade other people's lands, kill people, sacrifice animals, oppress people or chop parts off of their children's genitalia. It would be more "Hints from Heloise" as opposed to "Mein Kampf".

Indeed all of the monotheist books keep women down with or below the sheep and the goats, and in general treat women as frequently unclean housekeepers and laborers, sexual outlets and a necessary part of making sons. We can do a quick comparison and list what these religions say about women versus what secular humanism says about women.

There is no question which is infinitely more moral and better for all women of any time and in any place. The Bible verses below came from the King James

version; the Quranic notes came from the Ahmed Ali translation.

On the importance of critical thinking, acceptance of reality and interaction with other people.

- Secular humanism: She should learn critical thinking, how to analyze ideas on their own merit and accept or reject them on this basis. Facts and evidence are the only real basis for understanding and acting in the real world.



Mere differences of opinion, particularly on imaginary gods, are no reason for violence of any kind, much less murder. Initial respect for others is always expected.

- Biblical: Following a 2000-year-old book of fairy tales is more important than using reason and common sense. If a woman tries to convert anyone out of the faith she should be killed, even by a close family member (Deuteronomy 13:6-10).
- Quranic: Faith trumps facts and

evidence. Unbelievers will burn in hell (Surah 3:10). Failure to believe in Islam will be severely punished "...both in this world and the next..." (Surah 3:56).

Do not believe anyone who does not follow your religion (Surah 3:73).

On treating women with dignity and respect, or not.

• Secular humanism: She is slave to no one and is the equal of a man. She should be taught how to be an independent and proud person.

• Biblical: She is sex slave "booty" for victors in war (Numbers 31:17-18). Women should shut the hell up and always defer to men (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

• Quranic: Women are inferior to men (Surah 2:228). Women only get to inherit half of what their brothers inherit (Surah 4:11). Women should be punished more harshly for the same offense (Surah 4:15-16).

On human sexuality, marriage and treatment of wives.

• Secular humanism: Sex is normal, necessary and nothing to be ashamed of. Sex is best kept within the confines of a committed relationship, for psychological and physical reasons. Love and sex are very important to the human being and should be cherished and

once begun, kept healthy.

·Biblical: If she has sex before marriage, she should be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:20). If she has sex before marriage and her father is a clergyman, she should be burned to death (Leviticus 21:9).

·Quranic: No matter how many wives you have, everybody knows you can't treat them all equally well (Surah 4:129). Women need to be submissive, cover up and guard their private parts (Surah 24:31).

On the response to sexual assault.

·Secular humanism: She should learn how to defend herself, but if she is unable to, she will be protected by her family, police or other people. If she is raped, there will be severe consequences for her rapist through the criminal justice system, and she will be taken care of by her family and friends and helped to heal.

·Biblical: If an unbetrothed virgin girl is raped, she has to marry the rapist (Deuteronomy 22:28-29).

·Quranic: Men are not allowed to sleep with married women unless the women are war booty (Surah 4:24).

The above was just a microscopic sampling of the disgusting misogyny within the Abrahamic

holy books. You could write volumes on this subject and not come close to covering how badly the alleged creators of the universe and their male minions on earth want to treat women.

These religions and books treat women like garbage. Why? Because unbelievably ignorant, woman-fearing and woman-hating men wrote these books. Christians throughout history, and particularly today, constantly praise themselves for their alleged morality and praise their god and his holy book for how wonderful they are, while ignoring how this god and his books treat half of our species. It is impossible to understand



how any actually moral human being can read such passages as the above, and the thousands of others not included, and not practically retch in disgust at such evil. These are not just random words in a random book; these words were and in many cases still are taken as holy gospel and acted upon in real life.

Far too many women have been raped, abused, ostracized,

tortured, attacked, maimed, burned and killed because of them. Words matter a great deal when humans use them to justify acts of pure evil.

No, women didn't author a single word of the Christian or Islamic holy book, but they and their children have unwillingly written much of the history of that book with their innocent blood. If women had written the Bible, it's for damn sure it would be nothing like the anti-female travesty currently poisoning morality across the world.

The only path to a truly moral existence for women in our world is to burn every single so-called holy book and start from scratch, using reason, science, equality and compassion as the foundation for a true moral code.

And this time, women need to write the whole damn thing.

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National Organizations

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www.atheists.org

American Humanist Association
www.americanhumanist.org

Association of Mindfulness Meditation and Secular Buddhism
www.ammsb.org

Atheist Alliance International
www.atheistalliance.org

Atheist Republic
www.atheistrepublic.com

Camp Quest
www.campquest.org

Ex-Muslim Council of North America
www.exmna.org

Foundation Beyond Belief
www.foundationbeyondbelief.org

Freedom From Religion Foundation
www.ffrf.org

Freethought Society
www.ftsociety.org

Kazimierz Lyszczyński Foundation
www.lyszczynski.com.pl

Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers
www.militaryatheists.org

Secular Coalition for America
www.secular.org

Secular Student Alliance
www.secularstudents.org



ATHEIST ALLIANCE OF AMERICA

Atheist Alliance of America is an incubator for secular activists and community organizations. We also work to normalize atheism, unify atheist organizations and provide humanitarian aid. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization started in 1992. This makes us one of the oldest atheist organizations in the United States.

Our Vision

AAoA's vision is to transform society into one that values reason, rationality, honesty, clarity, and kindness. We actively promote atheism, naturalism, and the separation of church and state. We envision ourselves as colleagues, not competitors, in a rich network of secular organizations that seek to increase wellbeing and help people make better decisions. We look forward to forging alliances as we equip members, affiliates, and the community with the tools needed to bring about human flourishing.

Our Mission

To develop and provide educational, advocacy, and community-building programs for atheists and atheist organizations located throughout the nation, as well as humanitarian programs for all people. AAoA and the leadership of our group hereby pledge our time and resources to further our movement, normalize atheism and unify atheist organizations.

Our Values

Reason: Reason and cooperation are essential to meeting the challenges that confront humankind.

Compassion: Human compassion and empathy are crucial to improving the human condition.

Purpose: The life that all creatures have is precious and has value, as this life is the only life we know we will have.

Empiricism: Our ethics and values are evidence-based. We rely on what we can sense and measure in the natural world. We make our conclusions based on the best evidence, and change our conclusions accordingly as new evidence becomes known.

Science: Science is the best tool we have for seeking truth and understanding our world.

Knowledge: We value knowledge and hold the endeavor to increase it as best we can in order to pursue the truths about our world to be one of the noblest efforts one can make; and any and all efforts to stifle or denigrate knowledge and learning to be immoral.

Progress: We believe in modernity and progress and the ability of humankind to develop a better world based on reason.

Freedom: We hold that all people have the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and that all people are entitled to freedom of conscience. We support the values outlined in the International Convention of Human Rights as inalienable human rights.

Ethics: We believe that ethics and morality evolve over time as we better understand our world and the consequences we cause in it. Do not intentionally hurt other beings except in self-defense.

Responsibility: We are responsible for humane interaction with other people, other animals and for the preservation of our habitable planet.

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