



HUMANIST VOICES: COLLECTION V

SCOTT DOUGLAS JACOBSEN

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Scott

Humanist Voices

Women's Expectations and Uni. Culture

Phoebe Davies-Owen and Scott Douglas Jacobsen

January 23, 2018

Expectations of Women, and Myths

One myth about women which is slowly becoming outdated is the presentation of them sat around talking about their weddings. The day they can't wait for. Who will they invite? Where will it be? How will they plan it? This is presented in films, T.V. shows, books — it is commonplace and to an extent establishes women's behaviour at a certain age and attitude about this at a certain age.

For women in the West, this isn't such an immediate concern these days. Societal expectations and monitoring of their behaviour is diminished, the age that women have children has risen in recent decades as more of them are pursuing careers. In the same vein, this isn't reflected in women from the East.

This is because traditionally, they are expected to go away to Western countries/universities and receive a first-class education — they then return to their native countries, settle down with a man of their own ethnicity and bear his children.

They may work before marriage, but it's more common than not for them to resign from work once they are married. It can even be discouraged if they are thinking about meeting the expectations of family and tradition with working part-time and parenting at the same time.

It is all or nothing. Either women work in the home and submit to cultural expectations or are employed full-time in the workforce and face the alienation of the culture and family. That is in an upper class family with more disposable cash.

If in a lower class family, then the terminology would change from alienation to likely condemnation. These myths about women biding their time thinking about marriage and family comes from a groundwork of expectations in culture and family.

Culture Countering Behaviours of Women

There are some relatively benign myths about women, at least now. These myths revolved around the desire to become married and focused on family and children as an obsessive preoccupation through adolescence and young adulthood.

It's true the number of women ranking marriage as a priority in their lives has gone up while for men it has gone down, but the percent change even over the last decade is relatively marginal. And it's not an obsession. It's an option. As Rebecca Traister has noted, modern women have options. That's the key distinction.

To be able to have those choices actualized, you require finances, and the access to more monetary resources, money, comes from the provision of advanced or rarefied skills in the work environment, which many women are working on acquiring or have already acquired.

Women dominate the universities. Their long-term options with advanced skills continue to increase because they are making the more conscientious choices about a long-term future for finances, and so options to make flexible choices about fulfillment and direction in life.

The Empress's New Clothes (and Attitude)

In my (Phoebe's) experience, while myths continue to be spun, non-Western women at universities in the UK have changed attitudes to the expectations placed on them from their families and societies.

In their last year of university, rather than asking each other if or how they've planned out their wedding, they're instead trying to put up hurdles to prevent them from going home.

This is through securing a corporate job (which secures their financial independence) or a Masters degree (giving them more independence and time to really decide what it is they want to do with their lives), and I have seen first hand how much pressure both avenues put on the student.

The application process for corporate firms is intensely competitive and rigorous, and while the requirements needed for Masters programmes aren't to the same degree they are still strenuous to applicants.

These activities are what students I personally know, would rather go through than return to their homes, lose their independence (as they've been studying abroad for so long without familial support) and come back under the umbrella of societal expectations.

While this is seen in a university setting, it's a waiting game to see if this will be reflected on a wider margin in countries where there are stricter expectations on women. Of course, it is easier for those female international students who are of a higher class to go home and stick to their independent lifestyles.

These questions of "Who will they invite to the wedding? Where will it be? How will they plan it?" might just remain on the minds of the parents of these women, for those who are fortunate enough to go away to study, and those who don't have the opportunity.

An Interview with Kevin Bolling — Executive Director, Secular Student Alliance — Session 2

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 10, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you find the Secular Student Alliance?

Kevin Bolling: I was called by a recruiter. So one, I had worked with them before. Joe called me or sent me an email and said, “Hey, I have a job you might be interested in. Take a look at it.” That started it off.

So, I worked in college. I was involved in student activities. I was on the program board. I was an orientation leader for summers. I was an RA in housing. So I did a lot. I did a lot of student activities, student affairs stuff in college.

Then when I realized that I could do this as a job. I thought that it was fun. So, I went to grad school at the University of South Carolina. My master’s degree is in education in student personnel services; so, specifically to work in colleges and universities where student activities, student organizations, student leadership, I worked in higher education for 15 years. I absolutely loved it.

College is a pivotal time where human developments take place during that time for students, working with students is fantastic. Part of that is a gift. The chance to be able to work with college students again was clearly an interest of mine.

Going back to one of my passions, something that I truly enjoy. Then a mission of the organization is to provide an open and welcoming place for secular students to be able to be themselves, find a community, and then put their values into action to make the world a better place, especially nowadays looking at our political situation.

What I call the “blurred line” between religion and politics, that strong, white, far-right influence into our society right now. For many students, it is a great place for them to have a conversation about religion and to figure out where they may be if they’re having questions about that.

So, our conversation could be that they decide religion is enjoyable and right for them while others may decide that it is not. I believe that SSA has provided that ground, where people can have that dialogue and other areas, may not be safe places to do that.

Jacobsen: Now, you are the executive director of the Secular Student Alliance. Arguably, it is one of the biggest if not the biggest secular student organization. So, what tasks and responsibilities come with the position?

Bolling: You’re asking big questions. Yes, I have been the executive director in nonprofit management for about 20 years. So, I have had a lot of experience with non-profits. Being in a nonprofit world has always been important to me, it is important to me that what I do and what I work every day makes a difference in someone else’s life.

I have a professional past, but that’s the one condition of every job I have taken. I was in the corporate world for three months and decided that was enough for me. It wasn’t that feel good when you went home; that you did something good.

But for SSA, being the executive director of this organization is different than any other; so, the tasks and responsibilities are clearly administrative and board related. Those are two things. But the heart of this organization is the mission and programmatic value of working with the various student organizations across the country and making sure they have the resources and support.

That they're making the jewel that impacts on their own campuses. So for SSA, depending what region you're in the United States, those are going to be different things that the organization needs and their different impacts on the campuses.

So, our organization needs to be supportive and agile enough to be able to work with different student organizations is important.

An Interview with Kevin Bolling — Executive Director, Secular Student Alliance — Session 3

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 12, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Why is the Secular Student Alliance important for the advancement of secular values in campus life?

Kevin Bolling: I do think it is definitely important. August Brunsman was executive director for the last 16 years. The staff has done a great job in building the organization to where it is, so that it has that dominance and precedence. So with chapters across the country, for the secular movement, it is interesting.

The students that are coming in: one, it is finding a place for them to get involved in the secular movement. For a good number of people, this may be the first place where they had that direct involvement.

Hopefully, they're developing leadership skills to be able to continue on with the movement. For being involved, my first event as the executive director, where the SSA was the Secular Coalition of America in their lobby days.

It was a real chance for me to meet many different people in the other organizations within the secular movement. Clearly, the SSA was the only student organization there. But with almost every organization I met, there was an SSA alum who was currently working in one of those organizations.

So for the rest of the organizations in the secular movement, we are providing some of those future leaders, but I also think we're the second movement as a whole. We're providing an experience where those students can develop leadership skills, where they become, my term, "activists" within the secular movement.

Then they can move on and become the future leaders of the secular movement and the future leaders of the country. If we can help instill some of those values and skills to help that be as successful as possible, that's a great place for us to be.

Jacobsen: Taking one step back, you were the executive director for the California Thoroughbred Horseman's Foundation. What was it? How did it help, looking back, with your current position?

Bolling: The California Thoroughbred Horseman's Foundation, it is niche; it is a nonprofit in the thoroughbred horse racing industry. There are multiple non-profits in that industry. So, it looks specifically at riding primarily medical and dental — so healthcare, some social services.

But for the backstretch workers, the individuals who were training and taking care of the horses; throughout there was thoroughbred racing in the state of California. So in California there are two, there is a northern and southern cycle, which run concurrently with each other.

So in northern and southern California, we were operating all year around depending on what race tracks or county fairs or training centers were in operation at the time. So first, there is the practical experience of working with a nonprofit and being an executive director, for 10 years.

It was a changing landscape because of the changes within the racing industry. So it is looking at what service we're providing, how we provide the services, and the provider of those services. Then it is matching those with the needs of the community that we're serving as the budgeting concerns of the organization.

So, lots of practical experience of running a nonprofit in California, which will clearly be important in this position with a large social mission. So, we were providing health care, which I know is extremely important.

You can call it a right, if you will, within our society. For largely low socioeconomic and largely immigrant Latino population, for many of the people who were our clients, this was one of the only ways that they were going to be able to get affordable healthcare, even in the state of California which is fairly progressive on its views on healthcare.

Also, we were saving the state a tremendous amount of money because we were doing a lot of preventative healthcare in commute. We were keeping people. There was 5,000 licensed workers as other family members were taken care of on an annual basis.

We were treating them as far as their primary care, such as preventative care, and also keeping them out of emergency rooms. Those are things which are one of the most expensive ways for the state and the taxpayers to pick up the bill.

We were also, of course, at that time at the racing industry, which is a tremendous moneymaker for the state. So, while that's a monetary focus, there is a real reality there as what we were doing to save the taxpayer's money too.

In Conversation with Agomo Atambire — Organizing Secretary, Humanist Association of Ghana

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 13, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As the Organizing Secretary, Humanist Association of Ghana, what is involved in your work with them? How did you find them?

Agomo Atambire: I had found these interesting people online when I was searching for irreligious groups in Ghana. I saw the Freethought Ghana Facebook page and liked it. Later I was contacted by Graham Knight asking me where I was, whether I was irreligious or not. I told him I was in Tamale, irreligious and in school and that I'd be in Accra during recess. He was eager to meet and the feeling was mutual on my end. I was excited when I attended the first meeting. For the first time in my life, I was in the company of people who shared my world view and I didn't feel isolated anymore. We became friends and have been till date. We met regularly every month where we had great discussions on varied topics, from social issues to the political, scientific matters and philosophy. On one such meeting, Graham Knight brought up the possibility of forming a Humanist group in Ghana since our worldview was without doubt humanist in nature. We went along with it, agreed and the Humanist Association was founded.

Jacobsen: Why did you become a humanist?

Atambire: Humanist principles have guided my life for as long as I can remember though I hadn't put a label on it. Irreligiosity in itself was not enough of a foundation to live one's life, for that something in addition was needed. This prior thinking ensured that when the suggestion came that we form a Humanist Association, there was no reason to object, this is what I already felt but now I had a label; Humanism.

Jacobsen: What is its more appealing set of values?

Atambire: To pick what would be its most appealing value to me is frankly hard to do but I would attempt to mention a few if pushed to single them out. The need for empathy is very important to me. It is so because using critical thinking without empathy to keep rational thought in check can be dangerous. I say this because of my scientific background. As a scientist, that keeps me check in whatever I do. Reason or rational and critical enquiry might make us things like Nuclear weapons but it takes empathy to make sure we don't go over the edge with such knowledge.

Jacobsen: What is the state of religion in Ghana at the moment?

Atambire: Religion literally is the Life of Ghanaians. You cannot describe Ghanaian society without religion and one cannot understand Ghanaians without understand religion. Christianity being the dominant religion followed by Islam and Traditional African Religion. It is not uncommon to have a blend between Christianity and Traditional religions and same goes for Islam. It is taken for granted how religious fluidity is in Ghana. An individual who professes to be Christian might be at a Traditional African Religion shrine on Saturday and on Sunday be in Church too. This fluidity has created an atmosphere where Religious tolerance in Ghana is quite high and this has helped to foster peace between the various faiths. However, this tolerance is not extended towards those who don't profess any religion. A family would tolerate a child

converting from Christianity to Islam but if that child professes irreligion, he/she could be cut off from the family, psychologically and socially. This tolerance for other faiths is not without problems though. Given the pervasiveness of religion, even problems that can be explained materially are given spiritual connotations. If there's erratic rainfall, people are asked to pray for rain. If the economy is doing poorly, it is blamed on mystical dwarfs. The critical thinking minds of children are stunted in school by teachers who prefer to teach superstitious answers over scientific ones. The churches are very powerful and they use that power to influence policy decisions and social attitudes.

Jacobsen: How do you work as a team to move the humanist movement forward?

Atambire: The structure of the Humanist group is very interesting; we do have elected leaders alright but in practice it is a non-hierarchical organization. Decisions are taken by the whole group and acted upon by all. Since we are a volunteer organization, we depend entirely on our members volunteering their time, energy and resources to get our activities going.

Jacobsen: Who have been the better allies in working for irreligion in Ghana?

Atambire: Our situation here has ensured that we tackle irreligion in a strategic manner. We have affiliated groups like Common sense Ghana who actively deal with irreligion but ironically, some of our partners have been quasi-religious bodies. We do promote critical thinking and the need for ethical living, knowing that their acceptance and application would ultimately loosen the grip of religion on people. Our activism on human rights issues for minorities like the LGBTIQ communities tackles religious dogma indirectly. We tackle religion directly a few times but much of our work circumvent the antagonism that come with challenging religion publicly by using subtle measures.

Jacobsen: Who are the major threats to the free practice of and belief in humanism in Ghana?

Atambire: The biggest stumbling block to the practice of Humanism in Ghana is clearly organized religion. One loses opportunities if they make known their irreligious position. Humanists face contempt at workplace, at school and in the home with their families. The constitution does allow for freedom of association but professing a different worldview yields and strong and serious backlash such that many wouldn't dare make their position public.

Jacobsen: What do you consider the best means by which to move humanism forward? In fact, what are some more subtle, but long-term, ways to do so too?

Atambire: Engaging the public less antagonistically by virtue of our critical thinking programs. If we open people's minds to others ways of living and demonstrate it in our lives as humanists that one can live a happy ethical life without the need to appeal to superstition or a deity, then others would learn from us and become humanists. By actively engaging with religious people to carry out social programs and activism, we are showing that Humanism is positive life stance.

Jacobsen: Any feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Atambire: I wish everyone were a Humanist but that seems too much a dream to be realized in my lifetime but I do believe there's a possibility that the future might offer this. Until such a day comes, be nice, be kind and be empathetic.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Agomo.

Conversation with Alex Zharichenko — Event Coordinator (2015), Technology Officer (2016), Cumberland Valley High School's Secular Student Alliance

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 13, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Why did you become involved in a secular group on campus?

Alex Zharichenko: This came from after watching the Bill Nye and Ken Ham debate my freshman year. I have in previous years declared myself as an atheist but never thought too much of it then I just don't believe. After watching that debate I found other videos discussing the silly ideas of creationism and from there spark me to become more involved into atheism. I was a bit radical at first wanting to debate everyone, but I eventually formed my values and mellowed out. Eventually, I wanted to actually start a secular student alliance at my school which led me to discover there was already other students trying to do this, so I joined them and got involved.

Jacobsen: What makes these particularly important student groups to form on campuses for activism and community?

Zharichenko: Driven people that want to make a community. The environment that was made by Stephen Hoover was a wonderful one where various students can be very open. For some reason being an atheist, agnostic, secularist, etc. we use that as a point of similarity between each other and from there we all share other common interests the go beyond just religion. Like the community that this club cultivates is incredible, we all are getting along and discussing many various topics. Because of this club me and the original leader, Stephen Hoover, have become really close friends discussing topics about psychology, behavior, and many other things. I think these clubs form on campuses because there were some driven people that really want to bring people together in a wonderful community.

Jacobsen: How can students become more involved earlier on to improve their student experience?

Zharichenko: By either starting clubs like the SSA in their own school or searching for clubs, conference, meetups, or local groups in their area. I know in my state of Pennsylvania we have an annual atheist conference, which I attend one year and it was fantastic. Lots of great information that I got from that conference. SSA clubs are becoming more prevalent in schools and campuses so they are becoming much easier to find. And if all else students can get involved with local groups in their area. I know in PA we have multiple of these groups such as Pennsylvania Nonbelievers, The Free Thought Society, Center for Inquiry Pittsburgh, and many others.

Jacobsen: What is the ratio of irreligious to religious student groups on campus, at least at the time?

Zharichenko: The ratio was around one to four. Now as to my knowledge there are just two religious clubs that still stand at CV (Cumberland Valley) both being for Christians.

Jacobsen: How did you found Cumberland Valley High School's Secular Student Alliance?

Zharichenko: I discovered the CV Secular Student Alliance from looking at the SSA's website. Then had a link to a Facebook page and from there I slowly became part of the club. The only reason why I went out of the way to look up if a club exists at my school was that I wanted to start a secular student alliance at CV. But thankfully there were people like Stephen Hoover who were already at it and that found a teacher to advise the club.

Jacobsen: What tasks and responsibilities came with being the president?

Zharichenko: Unfortunately, being president of the club didn't last long. The teacher we had as the adviser the previous year picked up two clubs and didn't have time for the CV SSA. I didn't want to go through the headache of finding a new adviser so I just dropped the club. I already had two other clubs to manage with the CV Computer Science Education Club being the club I focused mainly on. I'm kind of sad I didn't continue the CV SSA because it was such a wonderful club and great environment to be in. It was also great to gain a perspective that I didn't have, I never was religious in my life to hearing people how they got out of religion was fascinating to hear.

Jacobsen: What are your next steps in activism and secularism and organizing for that secular future?

Zharichenko: As of now I just entered the University of Pittsburgh as a Computer Science Major, and during my orientation week, there was a student activity fair. Right off the bat, I found my university's secular student alliance which is how I will be involved with secularism and activism for the rest of college. For the future, I might join a local group, but for now, my focus is on my studies and computer science.

Interview with Feng Chin Wen — Chairperson, Asian Working Group, IHEYO

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 13, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you grow up? Was religion part of the household? How was this a part of life? How did you leave it?

Feng Chin Wen: My parents are Baptists. It is a very conservative and Chinese-oriented sect in Taiwan, so it has huge effect on my belief and ideology. However, I believe in evolution since I was 9 years old; at that time, I started to think why Christianity can't accept evolution, a seed of skepticism had been planted.

I left Christianity when I was 17. I debated with my high school classmate who is an atheist on theology several times, and I finally agreed there is no solid evidence showing that Jesus is an ultimate truth. Meanwhile, I failed to pick up a church girl after praying hard. I totally lost my faith.

Then, all things started getting better: I became more progressive and Taiwan-oriented in my college life, and started to love people without religious sense (I consider that is fake).

Jacobsen: How do you view the world now? What seems best to explain the world in theory and practice? What ethic, for action in the world with others, seems to make the most sense to you?

Feng: As a Pastafarian, I believe that the world was created by FSM. It was drinking beer and fell on the ground to make the big bang. That's why the world is not perfect. Ethics are principles for us to maintain our livelihood and keep it in order. We should depend on the situations we humans face to determinate what rules we should follow.

Jacobsen: What is your current involvement with the international or simply local non-religious community? What do you get out of it?

Feng: I'm the chairperson of Asian working group in IHEYO and executive director of Humanistic Pastafarianism in Taiwan. Since 2015 I have started a humanist blog and college club to promote humanism locally. Then I held 2016 Asian Humanist Conference and constructed an initial community.

On the basis of that, we decided to establish the official organization of Pastafarianism in 2017. Last year we participated in the issue of LGBT rights and attended a local fair of World Human Rights Day. I dreamed that there would have an activist humanistic organization in my country and these involvements make it come true.

Jacobsen: If you could take any piece of advice or quote from people living or dead in the non-religious community, what would be that advice or quote?

Feng: "Military tactics are like unto water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downwards. So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak. Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out his victory in relation to the foe whom he is facing." Sun Tzu said in *Art of War*.

Therefore, we should “shape its course according to the nature of the ground”. Instead of against religious privileges, we become a religion then we can compete with them on an equal basis.

Jacobsen: How do you hope the non-religious community comes together and forms just that, a community, of like-minded people founded in sympathy and decency of conduct?

Feng: Never try to educate religious people but educate “nones” and empower ourselves. We shall take people’s ignorance with sense of humor and tolerance; the world is so amazing that it allows the disorder to exist, and we shouldn’t be more intolerant than the world. With these attitudes and goals, we can generate more energy to be a group, and focus on defending nones’ basic rights. It is a waste to lose the energy in changing others. We allow their ignorance but not their invasion.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Feng: Common humanism only loves human’s virtues, but mine is to love human’s vices, and to think in depth about how to use these vices to make the world better. I respect our weaknesses since it’s part of us. Does hating them count for loving humanity, or should we say it only loves ideal humanity? I’ve had enough because it’s too religious.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Feng.

An Interview with Kevin Bolling — Executive Director, Secular Student Alliance — Session 4

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 15, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: A more personal question: you were the director of philanthropy at the Gay Men's Chorus of LA. It is a major LGBTQ arts organization. Did you take part in the choir as well?

Kevin Bolling: I will say for the pleasure of everyone. I did not. No. No one wants to hear me sing. I volunteered with the chorus before I started working there. I volunteered probably at least a decade. So, I always have been volunteering with something.

I started working at their concerts, helping them fundraise money, and took over most of those responsibilities about coordinating all their volunteers for their concerts and their programs and events. Then I started working on doing different fundraising events for them.

I started working on all their social media. So, it became more and more involved. It is an organization which we love. So, I worked for the organization for two years. But a lot of people know gay and lesbian choruses in their cities, there are 140 of them around the country.

I love being involved in what they were doing to change the younger generation of our country. Again, there are some strong similarities there between what we're doing with GMCLA, with youth, and what SSA does where primarily with college students but also high school students.

So for GMCLA to have their live music project, which has been going on for a decade now, they go to middle schools and high schools and do LGBT education, anti-bullying work. So, that is outreach of 60,000 students with that.

There is a tour that goes around for a week residency in small towns all across the United States. They go into high schools and colleges; they work with politicians and leaders. It all ends with a stage performance with stories, which talk about their inclusion and diversity and anti-bullying and, of course, LGBT issues as well.

So, that is 50,000 students. 50,000 people touched with that, then one of the last things I did when I was there was integral. It was the new outreach into the youth correctional system in LA County, so literally going into youth prisons and working with the youth there on self-esteem and anti-bullying and awareness of LGBT issues.

It was and is extremely important. There is no LGBT group that we know of that is doing that work. That is the part I am proud of all the things that the course does and having impact on not only the LA community but across the United States.

Jacobsen: Also, you have been building on the work of August Brunsman, the previous executive director and the co-founder of Secular Student Alliance. What was the best advice August gave you?

Bolling: August has been fantastic in helping me on board into the organization. He's candid and honest with the history of the movement, individual politics, and how that all plays out. So for

someone coming in, you want that background in how it relates directly to the organization, who the players are, and all that stuff.

He's candid and has a tremendous background in all of this, has been involved so long with it. So to me, that is invaluable. He clearly has a passion for the organization, what the organization does.

So, him sharing some of his personal insights and those sorts of things has been great. He understands that the organization continues to grow and will grow anew in different directions. He's excited about that as well.

The first thing that came to mind when you said that. He always says, "Do not be good, be awesome." That is a great little motto that I will always keep with me from August, to guide the organization into where it is going next.

Interview with Dr. Steven Tomlins — Researcher, Canadian Atheism and Nonreligious Identities

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 16, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In your research into the nonreligious community, what were some of the bigger findings for you? How do you go about studying irreligiosity?

Dr. Steven Tomlins: Initially I did a discourse analysis of the books on religion by the New Atheists (Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, Harris), looking for similarities and differences of opinion. The media was treating them as a united entity, so I wanted to explore opinions they shared and where they disagreed. On science and secularism, they were pretty much on the same page; on morality and spirituality they had quite a few differences. Whereas Dawkins sees science as being able to “at least” match the beauty or usefulness of religion as a subject matter, for example, Harris argues that religion does something that science cannot do: religion can fulfill spiritual needs, and he goes on to explain how spirituality can be facilitated without myth. Dennett’s work was notably more scholarly in tone than the others, but overall my thesis captured a synthesis of their arguments pro-science and anti-religion, which is a snapshot of their writings in response to 9/11.

For my PhD thesis I went local: I did participant-observation with a university atheist community, interviewed the twenty most active members, and compared their answers to atheists I met around Ottawa who had no interest in joining an atheist community. I expected those who belonged to the atheist club to have had more religious upbringings (that the club would replace church) or felt discriminated against because of their atheism. While some had experiences in which they felt that atheists had a poor reputation (a co-worker saying, “I can’t believe you’re an atheist; you’re so nice!” for example), no one felt alienated from a religious society in Canada, and the religious backgrounds of most was pretty average (secular or went to church once a week as a kid). So the backgrounds matched that of the atheists I interviewed who did not belong to an atheist community. The biggest difference seemed to be that those who joined had more of an interest in reading books by atheists, talking about the plight of American atheists, and diverse religious friends. The last point is quite interesting. Having diverse religious friends, many didn’t want to ruin their friendships by being overly critical of, or even discussing, religion with them. In the atheist community they found like-minded people with whom they could discuss religion freely without fear of offending anyone. That was a unique finding I hadn’t come across in studies on American atheist communities, and the aversion to controversy and offence in polite conversation seemed quintessentially Canadian, at least how Canadians see themselves.

Jacobsen: There has been researching into attitudes about the non-religious community by Will Gervais, Ara Norenzayan, and others. The biases seem strong against the non-religious community, throughout the world. Have you looked into this research? Why is this the global trend in implicit anti-atheist biases extant — and robust?

Tomlins: I have looked into it, but mostly through the lens of comparison with Canada. In Canada it’s less surprising to ‘discover’ someone is an atheist than it is in many other countries, yet studies do show that atheists are less trusted than other groups, and the media has tended to characterize atheists as loud and obnoxious on occasion. Two headlines come to mind:

- “Dear atheists: most of us don’t care what you think” (Charles Lewis, National Post, 2010)
- “Could atheists please stop complaining?” (Michael Enright Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2013)

Yet in Canada it’s politically incorrect to wear your religious disposition on your sleeve. After Barack Obama was elected President of the US, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper tested the waters by saying “God bless Canada,” and the media mocked him. He quickly laid that idea to rest. From what I gather Scandinavia is similarly secular, so I’d be hesitant to claim either Canada or Scandinavia as having a strong bias against those who are non-religious (I also hesitate to call the non-religious a community, since it’s so varied). But globally, most countries certainly fit that description, and many have the death penalty for blasphemy or apostasy. I wouldn’t call this a trend though, because it has a long history! But it is disturbing, and it is of serious concern for those who face bias, and even risk death, for expressing their thoughts or being themselves.

One reason for this bias is that some religious people can’t fathom someone not believing in their God. To not believe in their God is to insult their God. I’ve heard it said that when someone critiques someone else’s religion it feels to the religious person like someone is calling their partner ugly. From that perspective, the nonreligious are calling your God ugly, and some cultures don’t take insult lightly. Of course, from the nonreligious perspective, they are critiquing an ideology, but from the perspective of someone who is really religious they don’t differentiate between their personhood and their religion. Those who see God as the giver of morality may see those who don’t believe in God as morally deficient, or as denying morality. I think that’s the case in the US, where there’s a sense that it doesn’t matter which religion you believe in, as long as you believe in a religion.

In ancient Greece exposing atheistic or agnostic thoughts could get you ostracized, as the community needed the gods on their side to survive war and the constant threat of war. I still think nationalism plays that role. If a nation is under God, and that God is of one religion, then those who profess differently are acting against the state. Perhaps the more multicultural a country gets the less the nation is built around a singular religion and the less threatening the nonreligious become in the eyes of the citizenry?

Jacobsen: What does your own research, or others whom you respect, say about the young non-believing community, especially in Westernized nations?

Tomlins: Speaking for Canada, I think it speaks to a sense of demanding inclusion. Communities organize debates on the existence of God with representatives from different religions. They want to have the same right to advertise their positions as do religious groups (on buses, billboards). They author articles for mainstream media outlets. Humanists provide services for life-transition ceremonies like weddings and funerals. They want a religiously neutral state. I think it’s much the same in other western countries, although they certainly receive more pushback due to a myriad of reasons. In post-communist countries atheism is associated with communism, for example. So in those countries the quest for equality comes with a greater risk of societal push-back.

Jacobsen: Western nations seem more irreligious, soft, and scientifically literate. Why are Western nations more often lacking in religion?

Tomlins: I think when the west allowed biblical criticism it opened up a door to doubt. Darwin’s theory of evolution gave doubters an intellectual argument based on science that offered a viable explanation for the origins of all species. The Scientific Revolution showed how useful science

was, so even if science occasionally pushed God into the gaps it was still well worth pursuing. When the lightning rod was invented some churches refused to utilize them, as God would protect them from lightning strikes. Following lightning strikes they eventually put lightning rods on their steeples. Plus, perhaps after centuries of religious wars and Reformation and Counter Reformation the will to fight for one's faith shifted into print rather than action. These are just some musings, but it definitely has its roots in history, the invention of the printing press, biblical criticism, stimulating scientific findings, and the use of science to prolong life. Why other nations seem more religious is the flip side of that question, although even the most religious countries have accepted science (the Vatican is certainly well read, and developing nukes, which has happened and continues to happen in the east, takes a good understanding of the scientific method!).

Jacobsen: How can your own research into the non-religious communities bolster activist efforts and community-coalition political work into the future?

Tomlins: Well, it may demystify atheism for those who have erroneous perceptions of atheists. I find explaining my research to religious people tends to do that. In fact, I was once on a cave tour in Collingwood Ontario and, while waiting to enter a cave, got into a discussion with two older Mennonite women who were touring the caves with about a dozen girls, all of whom were wearing old-fashioned dresses and the best in name-brand trail sneakers money could buy. With their embrace of digital cameras, they didn't fit the common perception of Mennonites as completely technology-adverse. When the conversation led to my thesis, they seemed really interested, and wanted to Google it later, since they previously thought of atheists in a more negative light, and now seemed more curious and open to understanding. I think part of their openness came from my recognition that they, the digital camera wielding Mennonites, are often misunderstood. So when I explained that atheists are often misunderstood, they could suddenly relate.

Other than that I'm not sure it will. Lessons can be gleaned about sticking to agenda, perhaps, but my intention was to document a period in time rather than to bolster activist efforts.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Tomlins: Thanks for the interview!

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Steven.

An Interview with Kevin Bolling — Executive Director, Secular Student Alliance — Session 5

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 17, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What does Larry Decker mean to you, from the Secular Coalition of America?

Kevin Bolling: Larry, I had a chance to meet him, at the lobby days of the Secular Student Alliance. He has been a great resource for me as well. Anyone that can wrangle all these organizations and get them going in the same direction and on the same page will always get my hat off.

Larry and I have had several conversations and we, of course, will definitely be working a lot together. Cher has also been amazing. She was at our student leadership conference and did a great presentation, talking about some of the political things coming up and ways that students can get involved.

So, we will be definitely working with SCA in easy ways to get our student organization involved in political issues that concern them, making them more aware of the political issues that are affecting the secular community and also developing easy ways for them to facilitate with that on their campus.

To create awareness for what those political issues are, two, to make sure that the students are more informed and provide them with easy ways for them to start practicing their political prowess; so, that they, in the hopes, continue with that in the future.

Again, building secular leaders and secular advocates is important to us all for this movement.

Jacobsen: What do you consider the core perennial countervailing force or wind to the secular movement, in America?

Bolling: Oh... is there one? That is a good one. I think that depends — my guess is that different organizations are going to have different answers to that. So for SSA, some of what our core is, is making sure that we are an inclusive umbrella organization for students however they identify themselves religiously or not.

So that we, yes, are in an inclusive place for them. To be able to have those conversations and to live their values, we also, for the secular community, are making sure that we are doing a good job at educating them and helping them determine what their values are and how to activate those.

So, that they can be future leaders for the movement as the nation. In this, we are in a unique time again, politically, in a society where the religious rights and the political rights are having a profound impact on the separation of church and state and religion in politics; then also how that affects various subsections within the society.

So, clearly, Muslim students, the Muslim population right now, with the whole immigration issue, the Latino community, a lot of the women's health issues right now. Again, that we have a job to make sure that we are looking at social justice equality issues.

That we are being responsible in collaborating with those individuals and recognizing that the games that we have in those areas are games for all of us and the loss that we have in those areas are losses for all of us. We clearly want to work with people and to have those be games for everybody.

Jacobsen: What is one way the secular movement at large shoots itself in the foot?

Bolling: Shoots itself in the foot. In any movement, when we have internal strife or we argue as if a family, even with all of it in love, it is still arguing. That takes away the focus of the bigger picture of where we are going.

Part of my message coming in is “I will collaborate and work with anyone who shares our values and is moving in a forward direction. It can be a win-win for that organization and our organization” and so on.

The secular movement is, in my understanding, much, much better at that collaboration. That is a great thing to always concentrate on, how we are collaborating, how we are moving forward.

An Interview with Kevin Bolling — Executive Director, Secular Student Alliance — Session 6

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 19, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What has been both the single honest biggest failure of the SSA and its single biggest success as far as you're aware?

Kevin Bolling: I would have to think on the failure one. I am not sure what that is at the moment. Not that there isn't one, that has not been a big focus of mine. For successes, the beginning of the Obama years, the post-Bush years.

At the end of that, SSA height and membership, over 400 chapters and organizations across the United States is clearly numerically a success. So, that is definitely something to be celebrated. There is going to be a resurgence in a need for students. So, we will definitely see the numbers for SSA continue to increase in similar political and societal situations. I

I also think one of the big successes more recently for the organization has been growing a lot under August's leadership with more intersectionality in looking at what we all have in common and how we all can work together striving for greater equality.

SSA, if you look at the recent conference in 2017, all the diversity and inclusion and different messages that we had available to students who also want those messages and they're much on that same page.

So, we are meeting students where they are and hopefully continue to challenge them. That is continually, vitally important for the secular movement as a whole. We will continue to see those messages and values continue.

So, hopefully, we are on the forefront of that. Hopefully, we will continue to push those boundaries. I am sure there is one. I do not have a greater failure at this time.

Jacobsen: Looking ahead, what are some goals, targeted objectives of the SSA?

Bolling: So, we started a listening tour. For me to get to talk with a lot of the secular leaders, the stakeholders of our organization. Then last Fall, we launched a tour of some of the schools in different areas of the country: being able to see the students at work on what they're doing, being able to talk with them specifically and directly, hear what their concerns are, and what their needs are.

So, we can make sure that with the internal structure of the organization that we are doing that. That is one of the big goals currently in doing that. A big push for the organization is a little bit longer term. A lot of our primary focus has been on the students in the student organizations.

So, we are going to be looking at working with the advisor of the organization and what services that we provided them because they can offer a tremendous amount of stability and continuity to the student organizations and helping the student leaders.

So, that is going to be a big focus of ours. Another big focus of ours, a multipronged approach if you will, is looking at the issue, the personnel of student life and student affairs on campuses, and religious life on campuses.

Working with them, so, they understand that almost a quarter of their students on campus do not get into that primarily religious traditional mold that they're used to. My guess is that most of them do not recognize that, making sure that they have some language and understand some of the concerns of secular students.

They can change some of their behaviors and the services they're offering so that secular students feel much more included in the campus community. It is a much more welcoming community for them. I want to see that, especially on college campuses.

That something that continues to translate once we start affecting the college community. But being the unreligious is giving the same validity and same open welcome options as any religion that someone would choose.

That is a tall order, but us working at the college level is a great place to start that and begin this conversation. Once we are able to address some of these issues with higher ed., we clearly can see the interest.

With that interest, we can see what they're only starting to do, interested in doing to help make sure that secular students and those conversations are being included and welcomed on our campuses. So, we think that is good.

We will have some additional goals coming later out in talking about the chapters on our schools and those sorts of things. Our big priority for the Summer of 2017 was working with the staff. One is our scholarship program.

SSA offers a variety of scholarships. We have one specifically targeted towards historically black colleges and universities. We help facilitate several scholarships for high school and college students for several other organizations that affect the community.

So, that kicked off in August. Then September was our huge push for being in the academic year. Right now, that is a huge focus for our staff. We are going to be asking a lot of the other secular organizations to assist us in increasing that awareness this upcoming year, reaching out to the people involved in their organizations.

"Hey, if you have a student who's in high school or college. One, let them know that there is SSA, we'd love for them to get involved. They'd probably enjoy that. Two, if there is not one, please consider starting one."

So, we have already had some additional conversations with some of the people in the secular movement and they're excited in helping us out and doing that. So, that is going to be a big push in increasing the numbers and involvement across the country.

Chat with Christopher Villadelgado Barredo

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 20, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How was HAPI incorporated into your life?

Christopher Villadelgado Barredo: Chance, if I remember rightly. I was highly active in online debate groups before and the HAPI founder, Ms. M., chanced upon me, I think.

It's a little vague now, but being a part of HAPI was a very fulfilling experience for me as it allowed me to help through writing and publicizing projects.

Jacobsen: What made humanism such a compelling life perspective for you as a comprehensive practical philosophy?

Barredo: I have a wonderful family I guess. I also had awesome fictional parents like Capt. Picard in Gene Roddenberry's Star Trek: The Next Generation.

I was a humanist long before I knew about the term itself. Wanting to help make the world a better place, the adherence to the scientific method and the good values instilled by my parents were already an integral part of my character and personality growing-up.

I loved the arts in all shapes and forms, and when you internalize the lessons in literature, like books, comics/manga, movies and TV series — especially anime/cartoons, you end up with a very nice goal for the world no different from that espoused by modern day superheroes — humanism.

When people truly wish the best for everyone else and are concerned about the next generation, like the hero characters in the Japanese anime, Naruto, or the BBC's Doctor Who, the world becomes a happier and kinder place.

Kindness I think is one of the best values the human species innately has and it has served humanity in its survival. I believe more of it is necessary if we want to spread amongst the stars. Kindness begets more kindness and true concern creates bonds of unity and cooperation.

Humanism as a comprehensive practical philosophy allows us to keep the best parts of our society and humanity without any of the harmful and useless baggage present within religions.

This I think is the best thing about it. Anywhere on the planet that you travel to, kindness, empathy, sound logic and family are always game changers in a world of strife, marginalization, prejudice and madness.

I would even dare to compare it to the best thing about science — physics is the same anywhere and everywhere and so is humanism. That's something religions don't have. Humanism is a true and unifying natural world view and the good thing is that it's not subject to superstition.

Jacobsen: What is your best coda statement on humanism?

Barredo: Humanism unites us, one and all, through the best values humanity has to offer.

Jacobsen: How does religion influence politics?

Barredo: In all the wrong ways, and I say that unapologetically. Religion is a wolf in sheep's clothing, it maintains its benevolence in words and does promote good action every now and then,

but it will always come at a cost as it also, like a computer virus, implants marginalization, demonization, dehumanization and passes judgment upon people through a belief system based on superstition rather than evidence and actions.

Statistically, where religion is strong; poverty, violence, anti-science, miseducation, closed-mindedness and enmity are most powerful. Imagine the voting and lobbying power of that.

Scripture provides reasons to be good, but also good justification to be hateful and spiteful. The sad thing is that, rather than openly declare that these harmful parts should be discarded, the pious would be violent and antagonistic against those who criticize.

What kinds of laws and culture would such ideas develop? Definitely not a kind and open one. Religion may teach people to be kind to those who are of their house, but at the end of the day, there's always a fiery judgment for any who do not share its faith.

The historical trends never change where religion is involved. Religion causes severe delays in scientific, cultural and economic development to such an extent that it can be named as one of, if not THE biggest, hindrance to planetary cooperation outside of run-away capitalism in a resource limited world.

Jacobsen: Does this make religion more of a political movement?

Barredo: Yes of course. Imagine all those laws and lobbying that create more problems than solutions. Religion declares how things should be done, usually in very specific terms. Like how much a woman is worth if a father chooses to sell her.

Let me give a few examples of problems that are largely caused by religion in politics; anti-climate change, the flat Earth movement, terrorism, anti-vaccination, alternative medicine and a myriad of other anti-scientific nonsense. These are all caused by indoctrination into faith-based thinking.

Religion rejects the scientific method, a method which relies on evidence, peer-review and fact checking, in such a way that it kills intellectual development. Why else would they be highly interested in our children?

Children are the easiest to manipulate and brainwash due to their developing brains. Superstition, where once it helped people work together is unravelling society and keeping us from making highly needed progressive change. As they say, never underestimate large groups of uneducated crowds.

Jacobsen: Does religion tend to treat women as inferior and as untrustworthy?

Barredo: It depends on which religion we're talking about. For the 3 great monotheisms, I would say yes! It doesn't matter what kind of excuse the apologists and cafeteria religious say, if we want the gist of the underlying cultural view, one needs only read and study what the Torah, Bible and Qur'an say.

Jacobsen: What social activist initiatives are you working towards now?

Barredo: I am currently working with other like-minded humanists, wonderful people, on a project. However, it's still hush hush at the moment until we get our matters settled. But watch out for it. I never considered myself a big name, but I am highly vocal both on and offline, and attend social functions where I can meet diverse kinds of like-minded folk. In small ways, I try to make a difference in the human rights, environmentalist and humanist movements through

various organizations. If those small functions end up being big things that influence people to be more humane and scientific, then it is of worth to me.

Jacobsen: How do you find the humanist movement in the Philippines as a whole?

Barredo: It needs more publicity, honestly and frankly. Most people are humanistic without realizing it and that is a good thing, but I think we need more publicity as there is power and strength in knowing. The common thing you hear when you mention humanism is. “what’s that?”. That needs to change.

Jacobsen: What targeted objectives are the most important for the development of humanist values within Filipino society?

Barredo: A higher education standard both at home and in institutions. Good education has always been the greatest support of humanism in any society. As of right now, humanism is communicated in English mostly since it’s the international medium. However, for the common folk, this gets lost due to the weakening standards within our education system. For me, the target is always the empowerment and development of the next generation.

Publicity allows awareness and we can have more of that through grassroots projects, media publicity, discussions and conferences. An educated folk will have more lobbying and voting standards and that is the best way to translate the global movement’s mission and vision into practice.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Christopher.

Barredo: Thank you for the opportunity to say something!

Interview with Professor Colleen MacQuarrie, Ph.D. — Professor, Psychology, University of Prince Edward Island

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 22, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How can the young become involved in the issues around reproductive rights?

Professor Colleen MacQuarrie: If you are thinking nationally, I would say that if you are interested in social justice issues. You look to people acting locally if you can. Sometimes, there are organizations connected to more broad-based national and even global networks.

It is important to think of all of those levels of the structure and how you might fit in, how your skills might fit into action on one of those fronts. For example, I know every province would have different organizations.

They would go by different names. Often, you will find these organizations hooked up with the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada. There is the National Abortion Federation that spans both the United States and Canada.

It is always important to be linked to these bigger national bodies, to have an idea of how your local issues link up to the larger systemic issues. In rural and Northern communities, you will have an incredibly similar situation as to what we have had in PEI.

It is harder to get access. Activism in terms of Physicians for Choice if you are a medical student or if you are a lawyer — making sure that you understand the laws around that and can be in your own sphere of influence. In terms of partnering for access, there will be people already working to help you. They have the toll-free lines.

In PEI, if you are beyond 12 weeks and 5 days, they do not have the equipment here to perform the abortion you need, so you need to go to another place. There has to be support in place in order to be able to do that.

Our local abortion rights network has now been affiliated with the women's health centre. They work with us to help support women if they need a drive from one place to another. It is a matter of knowing what your local situation is and plugging into that and imagining how the local situation plugs into the larger picture.

I think there is a regrouping of the anti-abortionists in Canada. They are trying to come up with some re-branding of some old ideas. They are trying to claim that abortion harms women. At first, when we started our work here the antis were chanting that "abortion is murder."

Once our preliminary findings came out and that unsafe abortions harm women's health, we kept our messaging really clear and tight to the evidence that we had. Suddenly, the anti-abortion message came out: "Abortion harms women's health." It seems like the anti-abortionists take what you say from your research and turn it around.

One thing based on some of my research is that women who were constrained to get abortions had to go through hurdles and achieved a certain level of self efficacy that they had never known in

their lives. I want to frame the search for an abortion that is safe as something that allows you to hold your dignity, leaving situations of violence to obtain an abortion as something fostering self-actualization — quite the opposite of what has been termed the abortion syndrome, which has been, through a number of research studies, debunked.

There are all kinds of things that the anti-abortionists and organizers talk about to try to say that abortion harms women which have been soundly debunked such as, abortion is connected to breast cancer. No research supports these anti-abortion statements.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

MacQuarrie: I didn't do the specific research, but there is research that no abortion is not harming women. The antis claim it is harming women's mental health. No, abortion in itself does not harm women's health. Often, the conditions women are living in harm women's health.

There has always been a reframing. The branding they are trying to put across is that the new generation is *above abortion*. I think that is making them superior beings.

Jacobsen: I want to clarify on one point. If a jurisdiction or a bounded geography — some area — makes abortion illegal, does the research state that this decreased the rate of abortions?

MacQuarrie: Never, the research evidence is overwhelming, e.g. in Canada, in the US, certainly on the continent of Africa. Unsafe abortions are on the rise any time that you restrict abortion access then you have an increase in unsafe abortions.

All you do when you restrict abortion access is create the conditions for harm.

Jacobsen: How does this damage a woman's reproductive organs potentially if in an unsafe circumstance? How does this potentially put a woman's life *at risk* if done in an unsafe circumstance?

MacQuarrie: I think that we also have to put the whole thing in context. Pregnancy is actually riskier than a safe abortion, which is really interesting. We don't often talk about the whole complexity of reproductive lives.

A pregnancy is actually a riskier thing than a safe abortion in safe conditions. So, depending on how an abortion is performed, if it is unsafe, then it is not performed by appropriate measures. Of course, the woman can die.

I think that the National Abortion Federation has some clear statistics as does the international organization, World Health Organization, that the rates of the number of women who die from unsafe abortions every year, especially in sub-Saharan Africa are shocking.

Our study showed that even in places that appear to be developed, restricting abortion access — making women travel farther, for example, the rate of harm goes up. Locally, when you have abortion restriction, what you see will be a rise in the women being later in their pregnancy getting the abortion; so, the later you are in your pregnancy then this increases some of the risks in terms of the difficulties in performing the abortion, but also the holistic toll on a woman's well being.

Even when they thought there were no abortions in PEI, there were abortions in PEI. The province's own health records showed unsafe abortions were happening. Also, around the time of when we were trying to get our findings out, there was a newborn that was left in a paper bag

beside one of the churches. Shocking. We have to remember that infanticide also comes with abortion access restrictions. Apparently the authorities were concerned about the health of the mother too — so, we don't even know who would have placed the baby there — whether it was another person, perhaps a violent partner or controlling parent who put the baby there. We have to face up to some issues here.

Who has the interest in blocking women's access to abortion? What society are we in if we are to deny the bodily autonomy of half of our population? I think there are physical repercussions and mental repercussions that are deeply concerning if you are telling people that they are walking wombs.

Women's Equality Party (WEP) Member Ejected

Phoebe Davies-Owen and Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 23, 2018

Dr. Heather Brunskell-Evans, a visiting research fellow at King's College London and member of the Women's Equality Party (WEP), has been called transphobic over recent comments. Her research has focused on the gendering of the body in medicine and sexuality.

In addition to the claim of being transphobic, Brunskell-Evans has been sacked as "an official spokeswoman after complaints about her views on transgender people," according to *Pink News*.

She has been a critic of parents embracing their trans children, calling it "abusive" of the parents.

In a conversation with Moral Maze of Radio 4, she said, "What actually happens is that a small child is told there is something not quite right with its body, and it's got the brain of another gender. I think we're imposing... I think it's abusive, actually. We're imposing restrictions on children."

Josiah Mortimer, in the *Left Foot Forward*, reported that Brunskell-Evans said that parents should not encourage children as feeling as if in the wrong body. In a debate with two trans activists, Brunskell-Evans stated:

If a child decides that it's an astronaut, one can play along with this. One doesn't have to moralise about it but quite clearly the child is not an astronaut. In fact, it's incumbent upon adults who are responsible for the welfare, psychological and social and medical, of children not to go along with this story.

Currently, according to The Christian Institute, an adult diagnosed as gender dysphoric and living as an individual of the opposite sex for two years can submit an application for a recognition of gender.

In a statement issued on her website, Brunskell-Evans wrote that "A substantive number of medical professionals are extremely worried about this practice," referring to the use of hormone blockers.

She continued, "...but daren't speak out for fear of accusations of transphobia." She states that hormone blockers have serious health consequences, including the probability of infertility.

She refutes that she has promoted prejudice against trans individuals and instead has called "for transparent public debate, without fear of reprisal, of the social, psychological and physical consequences of the narrative that children can be born in 'the wrong body.'"

The reactions to opinions like Brunskell-Evans' are becoming more outraged, as the issue of Transgenderism becomes more contentious.

Only a few months ago in Bath University, an investigation was started into claims that an application for research on gender reassignment was declined because it was "potentially politically correct."

James Caspian went back with preliminary findings that suggested growing numbers of young people, particularly women, were regretting gender reassignment, and when he re-submitted his proposal to an ethics committee, it was rejected.

Both Brunskell-Evans and Caspian's views were barred from having a presence at universities, institutions where diversity of ideas, research, and academic claims should be encouraged and debated.

Interview with Brenda Germain — President, MASH Ft. Bragg

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 23, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Growing up in Syracuse, New York area, what was the family life regarding religion? You worked a number of jobs including construction, restaurants, sawmill, and also water treatment. Did personal atheism affect work experiences at all?

Brenda Germain: Our family life did not include attending religious services at all. Those jobs I listed were here in NC. I kept my atheism hidden for years from everyone in this small yet very religious area out of concerns that I would be unable to find work.

The first time I actually let it be known that I was an atheist was in 1991 when I applied to return to Moore Regional Hospital after George HW Bush was reported to make the comment that atheists weren't patriotic and that he didn't think we should be citizens.

Jacobsen: Why did you attend Western Carolina University for undergraduate education in Clinical Laboratory Science? How did post-graduation transition into 10 years in a hospital lab?

Germain: I attended WCU Sept 1990 — Aug 1991. I began at Sandhills Community College earning an AAS in Medical Laboratory Technology in 1989 and continued there for another year picking up transfer classes while working at Moore Regional.

I returned to Moore Regional post-graduation. I stayed there until 2001 when my body could no longer tolerate the rigors of that job.

Jacobsen: You earned an AAS in Internet Technologies from Sandhill Community College and worked for 10 years as a web designer and programmer. Why select this path in professional life?

Germain: Practical considerations; I needed a job where I could sit down most of the time since my legs were giving out and I had already taught myself html and wanted to go to the next level educationally.

Not all that removed from laboratory science, just another field of science where logically thinking is helpful. I'm nearly 60 and I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up! But over the years, I found that I gravitated towards sciences of all kinds.

Jacobsen: Now, you are the president of MASH Ft. Bragg. How did you earn this position? What are some of the activities within the group? What are the tasks and responsibilities of the president?

Germain: I'm not sure earned is the right turn of phrase. I was one of the last remaining members of the original group that worked on Rock Beyond Belief and the group's treasurer. No one else wanted the responsibility, so I assumed the position to keep the group alive.

In an area such as this, it is vitally important to me to let other atheists know they are not alone and that like minded people are all around. I was astounded early in the process of working on Rock Beyond Belief to discover another atheist living less than 2 miles away.

Our activities fluctuate with our membership. Currently we do a monthly Secular Supper where we get together at various local restaurants to foster a sense of community and many of us wear our MASH t-shirts to public acknowledge that we exist.

On Memorial Day we have a cookout at our house for the members and a Solstice Dinner each December at our house. Our Solstice Dinner includes a Tree of Knowledge with science quote ornaments and forbidden fruit to be picked.

Every year we apply for a table at the local Dogwood Festival as an outreach to other area atheists, letting them know there is a community where they are welcomed.

We do two charitable events each year; School Supplies Drive each summer for a Fayetteville STEM school and our Solstice Food Drive for the Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC.

In the past we have had Critical Drinking (get together at local bars), Healthy Heathen Walks (nature walks), astronomy get togethers, speakers and attending secular events such as Reason Rally as a group. I always encourage our members to take on events that are of interest to them.

Right now, I'm kind of a one-person show. My responsibilities are administrative, filing paperwork for our Dogwood table each year, keeping our website up and running, organizing and posting Secular Supper.

Fiduciary responsibilities include safeguarding the group's money, writing checks as needed, collecting donations for our charity events and seeing to it the money is properly spent. I also design and develop graphics for our t-shirts, Facebook and website.

While I would love to do more activities, I am limited by lupus. No sunlight, no staying out in the heat and I get tired very easily. As we rebuild the group from the latest membership contraction, there will be more activities based on our new members' interests, time and efforts.

Our ongoing challenge is stable membership as military members retire or are stationed elsewhere. This is part of why we welcome all secular people in the group, active duty, retired and civilians. Our community is too small to exclude anyone. We are building an interNOfaith community!

Jacobsen: How can people become involved in or support MASHH Ft. Bragg or other similar secular organizations?

Germain: Short answer, to become involved, become a member! People can join our group through Facebook or through our Events Calendar on our website mashfortbragg.org. People can support us by donating to our charitable events or to the other reputable secular organizations. For the non-secular folks out there, please stop vilifying us. We are your neighbors, your family and the people in your life who stand ready to help you without imposing our beliefs upon you.

Chat with Rayd Espeja — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 27, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Did you have any family background in religion?

Rayd Espeja: I grew up in a religious environment. Two of my uncles are priest and an aunt which is a nun. My grandmother used to gather us every 6:00 PM to have our novena while every Sunday she would drag us to church and receive the Holy Communion. I used to be an active member of the Legion of Mary and later became the Youth Leader of our sect which is the “Rosa Mystica” The Mystical Rose.

Jacobsen: How did you find humanism?

Espeja: It started as a spiritual venture which allows me to enter various religious sects when I was younger. My eagerness to find some answers leads me to what I believe right now which is Humanism.

Jacobsen: How do others in the culture seem to leave religion?

Espeja: There are some corners in religion that will definitely leave you confuse and thirsty for answer. Those people who opted to leave are actually the people who fully understood the religion itself rather than those who questions without knowing. It is like, when light is casted the brightest, the shadow lies is in its darkest.

Jacobsen: What makes for the proper definition of humanism?

Espeja: Humanism is when you completely trust and respect your fellow and build confidant out of them.

Jacobsen: What is the main prejudice from the dominant faith against the faithless?

Espeja: Faithless are empty vessel. They are lost and never truly seen the mighty work of the creator. I often laugh it out whenever I encounter such prejudices from my acquaintances, friends and even my family. We can never change them thought about us if we counter them with words just to defend our belief, instead I would let them see it through the works I committed with.

Jacobsen: How can people with ties to family and culture through religion leave it without backlash? Is this even a mild possibility?

Espeja: My country is dominantly religious and I cannot imagine how other faithless people able to get away with it. Perhaps, if only we are open with our belief and able to let them understand how being faithless makes us a better version of ourselves. What I mean is that, we should act on it instead of indoctrinating them.

Jacobsen: Why do people seem to leave faith and embrace humanism? How can we expedite that process as a movement?

Espeja: Religious Faith oftentimes rough especially towards our LGBTQIA+ fellow. Some freethinkers, enlightened people embraces Humanism and stand otherwise with what faithful are

believing in. Making ourselves visible might encourage other to step in and join the cause. As human, our main reason to live is to look after with one another.

Jacobsen: What is the general treatment of women in religion in the Philippines?

Espeja: Women in religion are treated as a second class citizen. Yes, they are free to practice the religion, but they still need to submit themselves with a male superior.

Jacobsen: How did you find and become involved with HAPI?

Espeja: We used to be part of a freethinking group in Facebook and we are fond of flaunting our ideas, bragging things we had done just to prove that we are part of the country's thinking class. Later on, we got bored and found ourselves completely useless since we never initiate putting all our ideas in actions. So then, Marissa Torres Langseth came. She is one of the annoying people you'll ever meet on web, but I must say this annoying lady knows her job so well. She told us to establish the local chapter of HAPI here in Bacolod City and like a wild fire all the ideas we have manifested into projects.

Jacobsen: What is the best reason for hope in the irreligious movements?

Espeja: Being in an irreligious movement allow you to become more selfless, and that is the main core of being a Humanist.

Event: March 10 and 24, and April 7

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 27, 2018

There is an upcoming series of events going by the title Café Humaniste. The series are by the International Humanist and Ethical Union. The focus of the overall series will be discussions on local issues and humanity.

The big and the small, IHEU is an international umbrella organization of which IHEYO is a part and the youth branch devoted to the 18-to-35-year-old cohort.

In addition to IHEU, it will be collaborating in the hosting of the event with various local organizations around the globe; hence, the framing of IHEU as an umbrella organization or the mothership.

Café Humaniste will be supported with media and marketing as well as financially by IHEU. The local chapter will manage the event as well as cover the logistics too.

The purpose for IHEU and the local organizations with Café Humaniste is for the enabling of humanists around the globe to be able to support and promote humanist values and rational thinking in a format that is both informal and friendly or casual and colloquial.

The Humanist Alliance Philippines International is going to be bringing Café Humaniste to Bacolod City, Philippines. The event will occur on March 10 and 24, and April 7 at Tippys Bistro with a total of five speakers.

These speakers will be Nikko Dy Guaso, Arthuro Alvarez, Jan Erik Villa, Hermogenes Gacho and Alvin John Ballares. Aside from the humanist talks, HAPI will also present the very first book HAPI published, *From Superstition to Reason*.

Largest Queer Museum Planned

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 22, 2018

In London, United Kingdom, the first ground breaking museum will show the history of queer culture or sexual minority culture. Joseph Galliano is the man behind the museum and will use this to tell the untold stories of the queer community to be preserved within the museum.

The scale and scope of the initiative will be something that other museums will contrast to in sheer scale and scope. This Museum will have a collection of artistic, cultural, historical, and political artifacts.

Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, is giving the museum his own backing for it. Many big businesses have a mandate for corporate social responsibility. The Museum representatives are reaching out to corporations in relation to the corporate social responsibility finances in order to find a donation. Big things cost big money.

The goal of the immense size of the museum is also to give room to reflect all genders, orientations, and races within the larger LGBT umbrella. Many historical periods and moments and people may have been forgotten.

Time in the museum can be a time to reflect and remember those potentially lost stories.

“The history [of LGBT people] has been recorded in a very piecemeal way and if you just take men, the most visible part of the community, the pre-1960s generation is aging, we’re losing those stories and a lot was already hidden,” Galliano said.

“If you think about BAME [black, Asian, and other ethnic minority] people, women, and trans people’s stories, which were prioritised even less than the men’s stories, than that’s a wealth of untold material.”

There is meant to be a 3D experiential aspect and interactive part of the museum. This is supposed to help build empathy with the narratives and stories being presented at Museum. The original idea came from the 50th anniversary of the “partial decriminalization of homosexuality in Britain last year.”

The 1967 decriminalization marked a large transition in the history of the United Kingdom for the civil rights and feminist movements, especially, and specifically, regarding changes in the social, legal, and cultural landscape of the country.

In fact, the 19th century saw homosexuality as an area of illegality, as something criminal. It came with social oppression. It came with being something against the law. Throughout the history of the United Kingdom, in terms of the civil rights and feminist movements, the LGBT community experienced setbacks and victories.

But the overarching trajectory has been a win for the sexual minority community and the queer community in general; the museum provides a window into these triumphs and tribulations of the queer community in the United Kingdom through time.

This can be highly useful for those not knowing such as the young, especially in the presentation of the struggles, abuses, losses, and sacrifices of those who are dead.

This is something that the younger generation with the current rights and privileges of the modern sexual minority communities may not realize a time when it was far less accepted in the social scene and within the legal frameworks of the United Kingdom at the time.

Galliano said, “We’ve had so much change happens so quickly — it’s been amazing; I never thought I’d be wearing a wedding ring — the trouble is that in difficult political times those can be rolled back very quickly.”

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TV Host and Humanists UK Patron Fronts Humanism Course

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 2, 2018

A TV host and a patron for Humanists UK is the front for an online course in humanist content. Humanists UK describes the course as “designed to meet growing demand from the vast segment of the population who are not religious but who are nonetheless hungry for answers to questions.”

Sandy Toksvig described her delight that she is able to present the course. In addition, she does have a personal fascination with the big questions, which has continued throughout her life in addition to being pleased with the opportunity to be able to provide some answers in the educational context.

She views humanism as an approach to life and worldview to make informed decisions about life. She knows that increasing number of people do not hold a formal religious opinion. However, people still want to have an ethical, meaningful, and fulfilling a life.

In other words, she asks questions such as “How should I live?”, “How can I know what is true?”, “How should I treat others?”, and “What kind of world do I want?”

She explained that you’ll be able to find the tensions and dilemmas within the humanist worldview in addition to arguments against it tied to humanist responses to those arguments.

It sounds like a fair presentation from course through the material. She notes that there will be contributions from “academics, humanist campaigners, celebrants, pastoral carers, and members of the public to help widen your awareness.”

The chief executive a few of us to the UK, Andrew Copson, stated, “Today a majority of people in the UK declare themselves to be non-religious, but we’re no less curious about life, about one other, or about the big questions.

The point of providing these bigger questions is in order to have a course that can stimulate social learning and debate and conversation from the subject matter.

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Vaporize the Earth, Solidify the Moon

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 3, 2018

There have been new simulations about the early formation of the Solar System. Some of them have been done around the relationship between the Earth and the Moon. There was a time when the Earth could've been part of a big squishy doughnut of rock in the early Solar System.

This was about 4.5 billion years ago when an object hit the Earth and the Moon appeared shortly thereafter. One new simulation, as reported by *Science News*, suggests that the moon formed when the hot cloud of rotating rock vapor in the early Solar System with large planetary objects, or something like them, smashed into each other at incredible velocities.

The radiation in this cloud mixed with planet matter can send huge tumbling rocks hurtling. The moon, apparently, "grew from fragments in this hot, high-pressure environment, with a bit of iron solidifying into the lunar core."

Within only a few hundred years, which is less than a blink of an eye in cosmic time such as the formation of the Solar System, an almost completely formed moon came out of the cloud and condensed.

The Moon apparently spent sufficient time in the cloudy mixed up material of the doughnut to acquire similar ingredients, to create similar ingredients, as the Earth.

The simulation, and note importantly that this is only a simulation but still an important contribution to the theoretical underpinnings and comprehension of the formation of parts of the early Solar System, contrasts with the current explanation, which is that a protoplanet about the size of Mars, called Theia, collided with Earth and that the Moon formed from the distant pieces of it out of the collision.

The contents of the Earth, in the current explanation, would mean that the Earth should have a different set of constituent elements in it than the Moon, but do not, which contrasts with the main explanation of a Theia and proto-Earth collision in the early Solar System.

The Earth's and the Moon's constituent elements are highly similar, which supports the notion that they come from the mix of various elements in the gaseous, radiative, rocky, donut cloud of the early Solar System.

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HAPI General Assembly Upcoming

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 3, 2018

The General Assembly for the Humanist Alliance Philippines International is upcoming at a select venue in order to convene humanists within the Philippines in one place. In spite of the scattered nature of the island distribution of the Philippines, this will be an event to bring them together in one place in order to work for humanism and humanist ideals within the Philippines, which is predominantly religion in general and Roman Catholic Christian in particular.

The discussions at the HAPI General Assembly will be on the short-term and the long-term goals on the organizations in addition to the future activities and events that can improve the livelihood of HAPI and its membership in the Philippines.

It will occur in Bacolod City, Philippines coinciding with the Masskara Festival in October, 2018. The slogan is “The Road Ahead,” which is the HAPI orientation of building the future of humanism in the Philippines.

The speakers will include important members of the humanist community with the Philippines including Alvin John Ballares the Executive Director of HAPI, Dwengster Bulalac the Chief Financial Officer for HAPI, Michael Sherman the Assistant Chairperson, Andy Uybocho a guest speaker, Alain Presillas a member of the BOT of HAPI, and Jan Erik Villa who is on the BOT of HAPI and is the Project Director.

The host of the event will be the HAPI Bacolod Chapter, which is “one of the most active and balanced chapters in the Philippine.” The venue will be L’Fisher, Bacolod City, Philippines. It is along Lacson Street and has been “Tourism Strip of Bacolod City, L’ Fisher Hotel prides itself as the only first-class accommodation in the locale. Right in the heart of the city’s business and commercial center...”

The event is officially scheduled for October 19–21, 2018.

For more detailed information, please see here:

<https://hapihumanist.org/the-road-ahead/#about>

<https://facebook.com/hapibcd/>

“The boundary condition of the universe...is that it has no boundary” — Hawking

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 4, 2018

Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson has a talk show entitled Star Talk. It is in the final parts of its fourth season. Filmed in the American Museum of Natural History, the famous astrophysicist will be interviewing a renowned astrophysicist.

If you did not know, there are not that many astrophysicists around, and to see two of the bigger names in one place as interviewer and interviewee is a treat, especially with good production quality.

Tyson asked questions such as: “what was around before the big bang? In other words, what happened *before* the moment the universe began?” Hawking’s response, in a way, sidestepped the classic question in order to reframe it.

He explained that the earlier into the universe’s timeline you get, close and closer to the Big Bang, then the more time smooths out while never getting into a starting, singular point.

Like one of those curves that gets infinitely close to the x or y axis but never quite makes it, I have read another example, which I believe was from Hawking again.

It talked about the North pole being the northernmost point on the Earth; same with the South pole. So to ask the question, “What is South of the South pole or North of the North pole?”, does not make sense because nothing is more South than the South pole or North than the North pole on the Earth.

It is almost the same, but not quite, example through the reframing of the entire question for an insightful response on Big Bang cosmology.

Some variations on the big bang go down a little smoother than the original. In the simplest version, the beginning of time is a sharp point, where everything we currently observe was mashed into a ball of energy smaller than an atom — then burst outward, duh. But what came before? Physicists such as Stephen Hawking tried to restore a kind of timelessness by getting rid of that starting point, imagining a universe with no clear “bang.” You can wind back the clock to the edges of those first moments of existence, but asking what came before would be like asking why you can keep walking north when you get to the North Pole. Time, as we define it, loses its meaning as the universe shrinks down.

It never quite narrows to a single point. But no one has proved physics works like that — yet.

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Interview with John Carpay — President, Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 4, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As a formal topic in postsecondary institutions in Canada, there have been issues around prevention of free speech in arguably the most important area in Canada, i.e., the academic system. What seems like the set of motivators behind these obstructions?

John Carpay: There is a growing cultural trend, especially among millennials, that assumes people have a right to be free from hurt feelings, discomfort and offence. In doing so, the fundamental right to free expression, as well as academic freedom in the scholarly context, is necessarily compromised. Some words and ideas will be offensive to someone, thus the two cannot co-exist. Either we have a right to free speech, or a right to be free from offense, but we cannot enjoy both.

Jacobsen: For those younger and in the international community, what should they bear in mind as to the importance of the ability to speak one's mind in a public, and especially an academic, forum?

Carpay: History often favour the activists and agitators. The great social movements that have resulted in things we consider normal today, like the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, gay rights, etc. would not have been possible without free expression. Each of these movements, at their time and place, were deeply offensive to the majority. These ideas violated the "Safe Space" policies of their time. But that didn't make them wrong. Calls for censorship are made by people who see their own beliefs and opinions as infallible. But truth can withstand vigorous challenges and criticisms without crumbling.

Jacobsen: Cultures adhere to multiple, mutually contingent principles and values. Some conflict more than others. In Canada, what principles and values, in the culture at large, seem to conflict with freedom of speech the most? How does the law or attempts at instantiations in law restrict — or potentially limit — freedom of speech?

Carpay: Political correctness is growing in Canada, and threatens our fundamental right to freedom of expression. In some provinces, human rights legislation conflicts with the Charter right to free expression, as in the recent case of BC school trustee facing a Human Rights complaint for speaking out against the province's curriculum guidelines on transgenderism.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, John.

Conversation with Michael Madriaga — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 4, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you become a humanist?

Michael Madriaga: I was raised in a Roman Catholic household, the eldest among three boys. I spent my early and formative years in a Catholic school as well. I was surrounded by religiosity in almost every facet of my life, but it didn't stop me from asking questions about the beliefs and traditions that were being taught to me.

"Why do we do the Block Rosary?" "Did we all really come from just two people?" To sate my hunger for knowledge (and perhaps to escape my random existential musings), my parents supplied me with books — volumes of them. I took interest in topics revolving around astronomy and biology.

I also loved to read about beliefs held by various religions outside of Roman Catholicism. I started to compare them with one another. For some reason, however, I could not believe in any of them. I was looking for something tangible to hold on to, something that I could test or examine and prove to be true or false.

I guess this way of thinking eventually led me towards non-belief in general. In the course of this journey, I started to consider that every person is responsible for his or her own actions and that ascribing events or circumstances, whether good or bad, to a supernatural agent is intellectually dishonest.

I saw people as complex individuals who, given the right amount of motivation and opportunity, can excel and be the best that they can be.

Jacobsen: How did you find HAPI?

Madriaga: I found HAPI through Marissa Torres-Langseth a couple of years back. We know each other even before its inception as I was also a member of PATAS (Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society) and it was there that I first learned about secular humanism and its values.

Jacobsen: Why is humanism the right worldview and ethical life stance for you?

Madriaga: Humanism allows us to view various aspects of life outside the rigors of traditions or religious dogma. It espouses value in evidence-based decision making and scientific inquiry. It serves as a bridge, a common ground, where people of various creeds and affiliations can unite and work together for a goal that can be beneficial to everyone.

Jacobsen: What is the best argument for humanism to you?

Madriaga: We progress farther together as a species when we learn to look beyond our individual predispositions and work together to create a better world for our children.

Jacobsen: What was your most moving experience as a humanist?

Madriaga: It was after the Typhoon Haiyan struck Tacloban in November 2013. We lost contact with pretty much everyone in our coastal town in Capoocan, Leyte after the storm knocked out

the power and communication lines. I went there in person shortly after the typhoon struck to check on the community and find relatives who we've lost contact with.

It was good to know there were zero casualties that time in our area, thanks to the technical information that we've been receiving about the incoming storm from friends and relatives who've been tracking it as it traversed the Pacific before impact. The concern by the time I arrived was that the relief goods from Tacloban were scarce and took a lot of time to get there.

We managed to organize a small relief effort to provide food and water to the locals with the help of the barangay officials and provide information to their worried kin outside the island that they are safe. The people of that community belong to different faiths and, in the face of adversity, they managed to set aside their differences and looked out for each other.

Jacobsen: What are your hopes for the next few years for humanism within the Philippines?

Madriaga: It may seem like an uphill climb, given the current conditions in this country. Filipinos consider their faiths and political affiliations as part of their identity. Antagonizing them for what they believe in simply won't work.

To be able to change hearts and minds and for another to consider one's own proposition, we have to be able to find something that we all can work with. HAPI's programs such as HAPI SHADE and HAPI Trees are great avenues to reach out to people and inspire them to participate in activities that would enrich the lives of our citizens and of future generations.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts?

Madriaga: We can agree to disagree on a lot of topics and concerns, but what matters is how we deal with each other at the end of the day. Let us practice what we preach and put our deeds before our creed. Cheers!

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Michael.

Star serves up a planet

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 5, 2018

The star Proxima Centauri, on March, 2017, produced a massive solar flare. The evidence comes from new analysis of observations of it. That big flare is an issue for its orbiting satellites, planets and so on.

One of closest planets, Proxima b, did not likely have a good go of it, if thinking in terms of potential life on the planet. The star brightened by 10^3 times in only 10 seconds with a rapid dimming again. Quite remarkable.

Proxima b, compared to the Earth, is far, far closer to its own solar system's star. It receives about 4×10^3 more radiation than the Earth from its own solar flares, from the Sun.

It simply doesn't compare in scale, really. MacGregor, one of the researchers in the paper, said, "If there are flares like this at all frequently, then [the exoplanet] is likely not in the best shape."

That planet is one of the places hoped-for to have life on it. It is only 4 light years away and a potential candidate to find our cosmic cousins. Its own mass is comparable to Earth's and has temperature likely suitable for water.

The star is a M dwarf or a star class prone to notorious flares that can rip the atmosphere right from the surface of the planet, including Proxima b.

It took analysis and later re-analysis by two separate teams, respectively, to see that the solar flare was in fact a solar flare and not another solar system occurrence. Hopefully, Proximarians (of the b type) didn't have to move planet.

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Off the Lazy Path — If You Cannot Find the Community, Then Make One

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 5, 2018

Out of the long history of the rejection of the traditional religious moral frameworks, practices, rituals, and beliefs about the fundamental constituents of the world, humanism bubbled to the surface in pockets in the world's history, whether schools associated with Charvaka or Lokayata materialist school in India and Mengzi or Mencius in China, or thinkers of the Greco-Roman orientation (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica; Stefon et al, 2016; Humanists UK, 2018).

Even with these formations in various parts of the world with different histories and peoples, humanism arises as a tendency in human thought across time more than a formal school of thought, with exceptions to some uncommon instances in the ancient world.

Of course, these “tendencies of thought” arose as rich and accepted, and flourishing, formal *schools of thought* in the Renaissance Era, with approximations of their modern form, during the 13th and 14th centuries in Northern Italy with a geographic transition into England and continental Europe (Grudin, 2017).

Given its assertions about the nature of the world — an emphasis on empirical investigation for imprecise, but ever-improving, reels of the material world, the focus on the natural world discovered by natural means or *naturalism*, reason and compassion allied with scientific investigation for decision-making with relevance to human beings and their happiness, and so on and so forth, these tend towards opposition with the dominant schools of thought seen in mainstream faiths across the world because of perpendicular, in content and purpose, assertions about the universe (Papineau, 2016; American Humanist Association, 2003; Harvard Divinity School, 2018).

The emphasis on, though not exclusionary utilization of, faith or “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see,” the discovery and comprehension of the world through revelation in order to prepare for the hereafter in some form, and care, compassion, and often good works (if not by grace) geared to the wellbeing of immaterial souls (The Bible, 2018; The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2017).

Granted, *Encyclopedia Britannica* orients humanism within the religion palette, as a formal religious view counted in some censuses, but with an addendum about its own emphasis on human community and the natural world and not on the sacred and a potential afterlife.

In short, another form of religious belief focused on the here-and-now rather than the unforeseen and hoped-for there-and-then (The Bible, 2018). Formal religious practices tend to require assiduous effort, especially if of the self-flagellate kinds.

Given current trends within Canada, and by these standards, most Canadians with religious traditions, heritage, and practice do not meet this criteria for formal religious practitioners: religious by title (Press, 2013; Clark, 2003; Slater et al, 2015).

However, if the belief and epistemology, in its standard representation of trust in a higher power than oneself, then it amounts to hazy-lazy as a life trail.

To investigate, to prod and probe, to question, to doubt about everything, this takes time, effort, and another path in life less fuzzy and with fewer lazy moments than its traditional and dominant counterpart.

To construct a community in this manner brings about the common wisdom, which contain some modicum of truth values in its fundamental presuppositions, the unbelievers and infidel types, to play on the conceptual maps of the formal religious, in the construction efforts towards a communal environment of some form can feel as if “herding cats.”

How almost completely true, how pitiable, yet how hopeful and triumphal, the assumption amounts to at least two or more people *trying* in spite of the common pessimism and tiresome intellectual meanderings around the creation of said community.

That community of human beings in search of meaning, relationships, a common language and culture, music and art, and some place to build a foundational sense of family and sense of mutual respect and individual dignity in the pursuit of one’s livelihood: humanists.

In a Christian country, in Canada, via interpretation of the numbers throughout its history right into the present, many of the individuals with rejection of God with a formal atheism, often in the Abrahamic tradition, will move into the religiously unaffiliated categorization, but this amounts to a rejection of God or gods *and* the affirmation of their non-existence as well, in general (Press, 2013; Clark, 2003; Slater et al, 2015).

One of these groups of people equate to the humanists. Not only the standard denial found in atheism or the standard position of unknowing known as agnosticism; not only those related but distinct positions, humanism provides an affirmation of life values with an implied axiological status or set of values about life, epistemology or means through which to know the world, ontology or considerations about the foundational nature of being, ethic or how we should behave in accordance with and to one another, even a young aesthetic with the slow development of an art and culture with some writings and music and visual presentations meant to evoke emotions or strike thoughts.

Many in Canada grow without a faith or transition into none, the Nones, and then find a secular religion in its benign interpretation in humanism. It may seem like a big switch, but probably does not amount to much for many. In other words, to get a new lease on life, all you need to do is change your point of view a bit; and we are never too old for that. Plus, it comes with a community, but it remain acknowledged as a hard road to earn it.

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Conversation with Michael Osei-Assibey — President, Humanist Association of Ghana (Part 1)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 8, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Did you start off a humanist? What's your story into irreligion in general and humanism in particular?

Michael Osei-Assibey: I will like to believe so, but honestly I doubt that is possible in the settings I found myself. I have always enjoyed myths and fairy-tales. I grew up in a very religious household but my mother encouraged my love for reading. I will spend hours with my face in a story — chasing endings. It also helped that I was moved around a lot as a kid and each household I found myself in practised their faith differently. So, from age 6 to about 13, I went through about 6 different denominations of Christianity and, courtesy of my grandmother (a Muslim), practised Islam for a few months.

I was intrigued by the traditions and practices of all these beliefs but I always held them in the same regard as Greek mythology or the Legends told to me in my Akan and Ga traditional folk-tales. However, in moments of crisis or when overcome by fear, I will always have a strong urge to believe and hoped that I could say a few words and all will be well.

In senior high school, I started performing some thought experiments and had, for instance, one of my shoes as my god for a while to see how belief affects my life. I was surprised when I found out I seemed to be happier and had more luck in general. I realized having a belief may give one a positive outlook on life but it had no consequence on reality or the facts of life. This I will say was the pivotal moment in my journey to irreligion. I disassociated myself from organized religion right after senior high, preferring to apply reason and logic to everything.

Studying engineering in the university also helped to hone my analytical skills and made me want to perform a root cause analysis on any subject. I believe in trying to find the solution to living an ethical faithless life is how I stumbled on humanism. I may have been a humanist a long while before I even put a name to it but doing that 8 years ago was able to help me focus more on what I wanted from this journey.

Jacobsen: What kind of work did you do before the humanist positions?

Osei-Assibey: I am a building service engineer with a speciality in mechanical and plumbing systems. It is what I do to put food on the table so I can concentrate on humanism. Being a part of the built environment industry and running my own design firm affords me the time to do the things I am also passionate about.

Jacobsen: What is your formal position title now? What tasks as responsibilities come with it?

Osei-Assibey: I am currently the elected President of the Humanist Association of Ghana (HAG). I was the Organizing Secretary of the same organization in the previous cycle. I am also a board member of the Humanist Service Corps. I remember in thanking my colleagues and friends for giving me the opportunity to serve them as president, I told them my position will be in name only. To me “president” sounds too ominous so I prefer to see myself as a project manager and

group cheerleader. My main job is to keep the association together and our projects running smoothly, together with my executive committee. In order to get all the members involved in as many of the activities as possible, we try to break activities into teams with every team member being a stakeholder in ensuring the success of that activity. One of the most difficult tasks that comes with the job is being the face and voice of the association. I plan however, to make my presidency about showcasing the outstanding individuals in the organization.

Jacobsen: Who inspires you?

Osei-Assibey: Remarkably, I am most inspired by the stories of the individuals in my organization, and the many humanists, feminists and freethinking youth I have met in person and online. Given how religious and antagonistic our society is towards new ideas, it takes intrepidity to be a freethinker and to be open about it. Even more so, whenever I hear the passion with which ideas and solutions are discussed and the depths of intellectualism involved, as well as the zeal to go out there and get things done, it gives me hope for Ghana and Africa.

Jacobsen: What book continually enlightens you — worth the re-reads?

Osei-Assibey: This is a good question. It's not going to be any of the usual suspects, I promise. I spent my teenage years performing so many thought experiments about the human condition, reading on the subject feels like being in an echo chamber. One book however that I can read over and over again is Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. It doesn't read like your normal sci-fi and you can start reading from any chapter and somehow, it makes sense! Within are so many commentaries on the human condition but they are presented in a humorous and subtle manner that makes for an excellent read. Most importantly, there are no endings to chase. For those who like to over analyse everything, it's the perfect book to write numerous thesis on. To those who just want to relax, it will have you smiling and shaking your head at the sheer ridiculousness of it all.

Deepest Water in the Earth Revealed by Diamonds

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 8, 2018

A special type of ice crystal within gems is pointing in the direction of water being as much as 800 kilometers below the Earth's surface. As Gramling (2018) notes in *Science News*, "Researchers discovered ice-VII entombed within a diamond. This cubic form of ice (crystal structure shown) is found only at very high pressures such as those deep in Earth's interior."

As things appear to be the case, with the high-pressured formed ice-VII, the high-density ice embedded in diamond offers some clues as to the nature of the Earth between 610 and 800 kilometres beneath its surface.

This crystal does not exist on the Earth's surface, which the researchers deduce means that there is abundant water 610 to 800 kilometres deep within the mantle of the Earth.

Its presence in diamonds suggests that there is water-rich fluid in the transition zone between the upper and lower mantle, and even into the top of the lower mantle," Gramling stated.

A Mantle Petrologist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem explained that this was the first time researchers have found the water at these depths into the Earth.

One fact is when the Earth's crust moves deep into the Earth over long periods of time that it drags water in with it. This leads to many questions. How much water? How deep? And so on.

We do not know how deep the crust slabs move into the Earth. "Researchers have suspected that abundant aqueous fluid exists in the deep mantle," Gramling stated, "Ferried there by slabs bearing water-rich minerals that shed their water when they reach the transition zone."

The new evidence of water provides some new information and sheds light on the possibilities of the happenings that deep into the Earth's surface. The diamonds were key because as they formed they created internal-to-themselves pockets where miniscule amounts of fluid or rock from their surroundings can enter, and stay — for researchers to pick up.

A Mineralogist, Oliver Tschauner, from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and others were not looking for ice when they found it using variety of techniques including X-ray diffraction, infrared spectroscopy, and X-ray fluorescence.

The contents of the diamonds used in the research had a variety of fluids with salts, and carbon-rich fluids as well. These water-rich fluids may help with the circulation of tectonic plates and volcanic eruptions.

The water deep below the surface may help rocks melt, where the water helps with the redistribution of the heat in the mantle of the Earth. The water, apparently, reduces the melting point for the hot rock under pressure.

Potassium, thorium, and uranium are large and heat-producing elements, which do not fit well in the crystalline and rigid structure of the minerals. The melted rock can help.

One researcher said, "You just need a little bit of fluid, and they are moving into the melt."

But there was one interesting final note by Gramling, "The study also raised another mystery. Fluid inclusions within diamonds originating at shallower depths, perhaps 150 to 200 kilometers

below the surface, contain a mélange of water, salt and carbonates. But Tschauner and his colleagues found that in their deep diamonds, the inclusions are sequestered individually: ice in one inclusion, carbonates in another, salts in yet a third.” ‘We were surprised that they were all separate rather than occurring together,’ Tschauner says.”

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Conversation with Michael Osei-Assibey — President, Humanist Association of Ghana (Part 2)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 9, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What has been an emotionally trying experience as a humanist in Ghana?

Michael Osei-Assibey: There certainly has been and will be many experiences that will be emotionally trying for humanists in Ghana but personally, it's been the times that bigotry cut close to home. We can not choose the families we are born into and one can only hope that the people you love will share the same empathy you have for humanity. However, it is that same level of empathy that helped me through those times, with the realisation that we are a product of our environment. It spurred me on to talk about issues of sexual orientation, tribalism, religious intolerance and critical thinking with members of my family, no matter how uncomfortable it got.

Jacobsen: What are the ongoing educational initiatives of the Humanist Association of Ghana?

Osei-Assibey: HAG started a book drive, I believe in December of last year. One of our member, Helen List, Owner of the Afia Beach Hotel, organized a Christmas book drive to make a Christmas Tree out of books which she donated a majority of to the HAG efforts. The working plan is to encourage reading in the public schools in our communities. HAG has been in talks with the Kotobabi Cluster of Schools to listen to their problems and discuss whatever solutions they propose and how we could be of help. Although their problems seemed overwhelming as with all other public schools, HAG is committed to helping out however that we can. The First step is the donation of books and stationery to the primary schools as well as working with Learning Support Solution to provide learning support to the students. We also intend to create relationships between the private schools with access to educational psychologists and teachers with specializations to create an avenue for sharing ideas. HAG is also in talks with the Accra Planetarium to find a way to get the students in these schools interested in Science and experience the universe in the planetarium.

HAG already has a relationship with the Young Adults Support Services of Africa, a non-profit working to empower children and young adults in need of care and protection because of institutionalization, abandonment, neglect, disability or abuse to become productive members of the community. We have had a presentation with the young adults under their care on social issues and hope to continue along the same lines of bringing the discussions to them and giving them the tools of critical thinking to be able to discuss these ideas.

Members of HAG also run the HAGtivist podcast which is in its third season. On there, we discuss social, political and cultural issues through a humanist perspective.

Finally, we hope to start debate programs in at least one university before the first quarter of next year. Universities are supposed to be breeding grounds for free thinking but that is not currently the case. We hope that these debate programs will change that.

Jacobsen: What are the current social and political activist projects of the Humanist Association of Ghana?

Osei-Assibey: As much as HAG tries not to be reactionary, it is difficult given the climate we find ourselves. Our online activities target LGBTQ rights in Ghana with our most recent one being an open letter to the speaker of parliament (insert link) on his homophobic stance. Our monthly meetings invite the general public to discussions on activism, inequality, climate change, political and economic thought, etc. Currently, we are having conversations on the marriage between economics and humanism in order to better understand the inequalities in our society and how to tackle them.

HAG also affiliates itself with pro-environment groups such as Environment 360, and we will be participating in this year's Float Your Boat competition (an initiative to raise funds to educate kids about being environmentally aware) of which we were last years' winners. We designed and constructed a raft using recycled plastic bottles, and raced with it.

Our current focus online is starting conversations on critical thinking with a series of articles planned to discuss the issue of pseudo-science in our healthcare system. The rise of homeopathic clinics and alternative medicine centres is worrying and we need to help with the sensitisation/education of the public of the potential damage they can cause.

Jacobsen: What are the likely trajectories of the humanist movement in Ghana for the next 5 years?

Osei-Assibey: One of the few things that fills me with hope is the increasing number of people asking questions and showing signs of scepticism. A few years ago, social media was flooded with religion, pseudoscience and people falling for all sorts of scams. However, more people seem to be asking questions now and being more sceptical about information that they receive. This trend gives me hope because it is out of scepticism that humanism is birthed. There are also a lot more openly irreligious people and a lot more people openly criticizing religion with some movements even arising within churches themselves, questioning the historicity and morality of the bible and the activities of the church and religious leaders. What do I see this culminating to in 5 years? The last poll in 2010 placed nones at a little over 5%. By 2022, nones should be over 10% of the population with humanists, atheists and agnostics making a chunk of that number.

Jacobsen: Who are the perennial threats to the freedom to be irreligious in Ghana?

Osei-Assibey: The biggest threats are those who will be most affected by an irreligious, secular society. Religious leaders have been increasingly whipping up the hate against people who do not believe or finding subtle ways to reaffirm the faiths of their flock by pitting them against logic and reasoning. There are many times that religious leaders have been called out for their actions but seem unfazed, bouncing back with more rhetoric about how the ways of their deity is mysterious or how the "anointed" can not be touched. Sometimes, it feels like they are grasping at straws and the backlash they receive from other people of faith give me hope that their power and influence on society is waning. In our organization, we have come to realize that economic independence is also a major factor in presenting non-belief or coming out as irreligious especially to the youth who are mostly still dependent on their parents or family. I have sometimes had to advise friends not to reveal their non-belief to family yet in order not to face the most likely harsh results of being disowned.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts?

Osei-Assibey: Becoming a humanist was a tough decision because it meant I will be going against the grain with respect to family and society at large. What has made it easier is the

relationships that have been cultivated into one that I can call family. I found the love of my life, a feminist and a humanist, who shares my passion for fighting inequality wherever we find it and we will be getting married in December. I also found friends who add meaning to my life and share in the crazy notion that we can affect positive change in our own small way, and in our own small circles that may resonate and ripple across the entire country and continent.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Michael.

Brighter Brains Institute (BBI) call for funding

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 10, 2018

The Brighter Brains Institute (BBI) is making a call for fundraising through GoFundMe. This particular initiative can use a boost. What is it? The Nyakiyumbu Widows Association is hoping to raise money for a Peanut Farm in order to provide tuition money for orphans and teachers' salaries.

The GoFundMe can be seen here:

<https://www.gofundme.com/nyakiyumbu-widow-peanut-farm>

Nyakiyumbu is farming village close to the border of the Congo and has a huge number of widows and orphans because of rebel militias, M23 and the ADF.

There are many deaths to AIDS, hepatitis, and Malaria. Also, the community is comprised of many hunters, who are killed for poaching in the close by Queen Elizabeth Park.

The Bakonzo tribe of Nyakiyumbu has a traditional dish there, peanut sauce. The profits from the Peanut Farm will help with the Nyakiyumbu Widows Orphanage Humanist School.

Any and all donations would be greatly appreciated to a humanist community, and a community generally, in need.

Conversation with Violine Namyalo — Secretary, IHEYO African Working Group

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 12, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Was irreligion part of family life growing up?

Violine Namyalo: No, irreligion was not part of my family life growing up. As a child, I grew up with my Grandmother. My Grandmother was a staunch Catholic who even wanted me to be a catholic sister. When I started growing up, I started leaving with my mother, unlike my Grandmother, my mother was a Born-again Christian and I started attending church with her. When she died, I was taken to a Christian orphanage where I stayed for several years. This shows clearly that irreligion was not part of my family life growing up.

Jacobsen: When were you fully aware of humanistic values? When did you become an explicit?

Namyalo: I got to know about humanistic values as a student at Grace Fellowship High School in 2010 through the debates that HALEA always conducted at our school on a weekly basis. These debates had topics that triggered my mind to start reasoning critically about issues I had taken as absolutely true without questioning. I become an explicit humanist in 2012 after reading more about humanism and also getting involved in public debates that HALEA always conducted.

Jacobsen: Who is a humanist hero to you?

Namyalo: My humanist hero is Kato Mukasa. This is because he was the founding chair of the Humanist Association for Leadership, Equity and Accountability (HALEA), a humanist organization that introduced humanism to our school and eventually enabled me to know the meaning of Humanism and I decided to be a humanist. He has been involved in several empowerment projects that have supported especially the girl child and young mothers and through such activities I always see humanism in practice. Currently I am attending a course for Humanist celebrants which is the first of its kind in Africa and it has participants from six African countries. This course is an initiative of Kato Mukasa, Pearl Vocational Training College with support of Humanist celebrants' trainers from Scotland, UK and USA.

Jacobsen: What are your favorite books?

Namyalo: Wow, my favorite books include *Humanism* by Barbra Smoker, Paul Frierre's *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed*, *A short Course on Humanism* by the British Humanist Association and *The Dangerous Superstition* by Larken Rose to mention but a few. These books greatly shaped my thinking, they confirmed to me that one can be good without a god, and most importantly they clearly explained to me the meaning of humanism and the need to respect people's rights.

Jacobsen: When you look at the situation in Uganda, what is the state of irreligious compared to religious people?

Namyalo: The exact number is hard to tell partly because irreligious people have never been counted here. However, my general observation shows that the religious people take the lion's

share in Uganda's population and if I estimate, people who claim to be religious are 90% of Uganda's population.

Jacobsen: What are some major wins for the irreligious in America?

Namyalo: Humanist movements have been able to register their organizations with the government of Uganda and the projects are going on well. We have several humanists' schools and active secular movements.

Jacobsen: Where does the history of religion, both modern and ancient, in Uganda stem?

Namyalo: Because Uganda is a multi tribal country, every tribe has got its own culture and every culture has got its own belief system or religion. These belief systems are derived from the social, economic and political organization of each culture. For example, the Baganda people of Central Uganda derived their ancient religion from their cultural practices like Farming, Fishing and Hunting. They have a god of the sea, rain and hunting. This shows how the ancient religion was derived from the cultural practices.

The modern religion came with the Christian missionaries in the 1870s and the Arab traders. The Christian missionaries introduced Christianity and the Arab traders introduced Islam.

Jacobsen: Why is religion such a powerful socio-cultural and political force there?

Namyalo: The main reasons as to why religion is a powerful socio-cultural in Uganda are largely because of Illiteracy and Ignorance. This is because Uganda has got a number of illiterate and ignorant people about the science facts together with people without interest in researching on other existing knowledge that debunk the creation stories and miracle stories which have no basis in science.

In addition, the high level of indoctrination is another reason why religion is so powerful in Uganda and throughout the world. In Uganda religion is introduced to people at a tender age, they find it hard to challenge it even when they grow up. This is one of the reasons why some educated people also remain religious. They find it hard to challenge an idea they have been considering true since their childhood.

Finally, we live in a country where poverty and diseases are everywhere without immediate solutions. Too many people find solace and consolation through religion, it at least gives hope however false it can be, religion appears to be providing solutions to several problems afflicting our people and so people seek refuge in churches as a stepping stone to solving their many problems.

Jacobsen: As a Membership Director of HALEA and UHASSO, what are the organizations? What are your tasks and responsibilities?

Namyalo: HALEA and UHASSO are humanists' organizations based in Uganda. These organization are charity organizations and they are registered with the government of Uganda and are members of IHEU. I volunteer as a membership director to both UHASSO and HALEA and my job is to see that new members join the humanist movement in Uganda, collect membership fee from members and also to see that members are in good terms with others.

Jacobsen: As the secretary of IHEYO, what are the topics of concern to African humanist youth that come up through IHEYO African Working Group?

Namyalo: The need to put more effort in promoting free thinking.

The need to be a reflection of what a true humanist must be in order to show the world that humanism is a good way of life and that someone can be good without a god.

Jacobsen: What are some hopes for the humanist movement in particular and irreligious movements in general in Uganda?

Namyalo: I see humanism with a great future. Religion is a powerful socio-culture because Ugandans are only ignorant that the church, shrines and mosques are only making money out of them. Once the existing projects (Humanist schools, Humanist Ceremonies and many others) become more successful, Ugandans will be free from the enslavement of religion and become freethinkers, and indeed humanists.

How Early Did the First Stars Form in the Universe After the Big Bang?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 13, 2018

Astronomers have been in the process of acquiring important data on early signals from the universe shortly after the Big Bang in search of the earliest formation of large-scale structures in the cosmos, e.g., stars, galaxies, quasars, and so on.

In only 180 million years after the Big Bang, apparently, astronomers from Arizona State University (ASU), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and the University of Colorado at Boulder discovered important objects through the EDGES experiment or the Experiment to Detect the Global Epoch of Reionization Signature project.

They made the discovery with funding by the National Science Foundation. Thank you much, NSF, this is barely possible without you. The astronomers discovered a small window into the early universe at only $T=180$ million years, where they could see stars forming.

Arizona State University Astronomer Judd Bowman said, “Finding this miniscule signal has opened a new window on the early universe... Telescopes cannot see far enough to directly image such ancient stars, but we’ve seen when they turned on in radio waves arriving from space.”

The accepted models of the early Big Bang universe depict stars that were “massive, blue and short-live.” The Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation or CMB is a radiation permeating the entire universe, which is the remnants of the Big Bang throughout the universe. It can be picked up as radio signals, like the static on those old televisions in movies.

Peter Kurczynski, the National Science Foundation Program Director, explained, “There is a great technical challenge to making this detection... Sources of noise can be 10,000 times brighter than the signal — it’s like being in the middle of a hurricane and trying to hear the flap of a hummingbird’s wing.”

The detection of the early universe in any clarity is hard. It is as if having really bad distance vision and trying to shoot a bird in flight. You will have some problems. Apparently, the early universe stars emitted lots of ultraviolet light, which gives a clue.

Free-floating hydrogen atoms absorbed the CMB photons or light particles in the early universe. MIT Haystack Observatory Astronomer Alan Rogers said, “You start seeing the hydrogen gas in silhouette at particular radio frequencies... This is the first real signal that stars are starting to form, and starting to affect the medium around them.”

In the data, there is a clear signal from the early universe. The CMB intensity dropped, ultraviolet light ripped free-floating hydrogen atoms into parts, and the electrons floating away. This is called ionization.

As the early stars died, other large-scale astronomical objects kept the ionization in-process while heating the free hydrogen and getting rid of the signal. That happened at $T=250$ million years.

Kurczynski said, “This discovery opens a new chapter in our understanding of how the world we see came into being... Indirectly, they have seen farther than even the Hubble Space Telescope to find evidence of the earliest stars.”

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Women's Rights Campaigners March in London

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 17, 2018

Women marched in London, United Kingdom. The March4Women marked the 100th anniversary of women earning the right to vote in the United Kingdom as well, which was a historic event and makes this a historic anniversary protest march.

Khan said, "It is an honour to walk in the footsteps of the women and men who fought for women's suffrage, retracing their protest route from Parliament to Trafalgar Square."

Celebrities took part in the march including "Bianca Jagger, Anne-Marie Duff, Natalie Imbruglia, Biffy Clyro and Michael Sheen joined London's mayor Sadiq Khan on the march."

One protestor was the famed actor Michael Sheen, who said that he would take a pay cut to make a point about equal pay. The protestors were calling for an end to violence in the workplace and gender discrimination.

"I think it's absolutely imperative that no matter what the industry, no matter what the profession, that people should be paid the same for doing the same work. That's just a given," Sheen stated.

The Gulf News stated that the thousands were present at the protest, even upwards of 10,000 according to *Refinery29*. This is seen by some as an uptick in the intensity of the demands for various kinds of equality.

"I think we are living in a world where there are some dinosaurs that are trying to take us back. And there are those that are moving together, trying to say 'that's not the way we want this world to look'," Helen Pankhurst, great-granddaughter of suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, said, "and moving us forward, and looking at issues around inequality and naming prejudice and all sorts of forms of entitlement, that just shouldn't be part of the scene of the 21st century."

MalayMail Online stated that the march started in Millbank's Old Palace Yard and finished in Trafalgar Square with important speeches on women's right to vote in history, where women's rights campaigners spoke in the same place leading up to the *Representation of the People Act* of 1918.

Women who owned property, through the act, were able to vote if over the age of 30, which was the first for women. This paved the way for universal women's suffrage as a movement with some tactics including "arson and bomb attacks."

This was the sixth annual march of Care International. Many protestors had sashes bearing the words "deeds not words." Theresa May supported the protestors.

Conversation with Jason Quizon — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 18, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you become a humanist, explicitly?

Jason Quizon: I came from a poor family in the province. We never have a house to call our own, we barely made it thru the day. We are 5 siblings, all of us in school, a miracle in it self. My Father works as a potmaker and my Mother has a small store. We never have much, but my parents never hesitated to share food to our neighbors. We are living close to our relatives (father side), they never showed the same kindness of our parents to our neighbors. They almost always bring us down whenever they can. I guess those were my motivation, to become kind as my parents and to never become like our relatives.

Jacobsen: How does being a humanist change your life?

Quizon: When I was Saudi Arabia, I joined Bible studies and born again Christians. The pastors are hostile towards other religions. It made sense to me during those days, reading the Bible, it was the right reaction. I am now more accepting of other people's beliefs. I see to it that I find the kindness in them irregardless of their belief. I try to be the best person I can be as that is the best argument I can have aa to being good without really believing in a god.

Jacobsen: How do the religious treat you?

Quizon: My relatives and friends who knows me treat me well. Acquaintances and new people I meet always assume I am Catholic. I was never assaulted personally. Online it's different though.

Jacobsen: How do the religious treat humanists or the irreligious generally?

Quizon: With contempt. They almost always say that we are Satanist. Come to think of it, I don't mind being with the Church of Satan, as their commandments are way better than any other religion.

Jacobsen: What is the importance of the humanist worldview and ethical life stance as an applied philosophy?

Quizon: We are living in the now, and we are living with other humans, with real people. A lot of things decided upon in my country for example are influenced by religious dogma to the point that it causes harm aside from being totally nonsense. At this day in the age of the Internet and globalization, no one should lose their life because of blasphemy, no mother should die because priests say reproductive health is not approved by god

Jacobsen: What makes a good humanist?

Quizon: A good humanist do good things because its the right thing to do. A good humanist also calls out bullshit in his/her society.

Jacobsen: Why are human rights more salient than transcendental moral law?

Quizon: Moral laws varies by culture, and by time. Human rights are universal and never changing. Human rights are never subjective, hence should be upheld before any moral law. But we all know that this is not the case.

Jacobsen: What is the best argument for making humanitarian and humanist changes to the country to you?

Quizon: Look at the most progressive and happiest countries in the world, these are mostly humanistic in nature.

Jacobsen: What are your dreams for humanism in the country for the next ten years?

Quizon: For Humanist based organization to penetrate the common household and at same time have a strong presence in the government.

Singularities, What is Inside a Black Hole and Behind the Big Bang?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 18, 2018

Sunday Express reported on the possibility for research in standard Big Bang cosmology into areas before not empirically researched. That point being before the singularity at the moment of creation or the Big Bang as it is sometimes called.

It has been notoriously thought as something outside of the realm of empirical physics and only left to theoretical physicists to speculate and compare with moments of the universe after $T=0$, when time began — literally came into existence.

One international team of researchers is proposing a different picture of a before of creation, of a time before the Big Bang. Apparently, the singularity of black holes is akin to the Big Bang because the laws of physics appear to break down.

With some complex math and quantum strangeness, the international team of researchers claim the origins of the universe and the center of a black hole can be explained, comprehended, and not seen as a sort of known unknown.

Professor Mir Faizal at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada and the University of British Columbia, Okanagan in British Columbia, Canada explained, “It is known that general relativity predicts that the universe started with a big bang singularity and the laws of physics cannot be meaningfully applied to a singularity.”

Faizal co-authored the paper with Salwa Alsaleh, Lina Alasfar, and Ahmed Farag Ali. Faizal said that the current theories show the singularities, in black holes and at the Big Bang, are built into the interpretations of the math to make the theories. They follow from the math.

However, if they include quantum effects to remove the singularities, then the standard theories based on work by Roger Penrose, Emeritus Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics in the University of Oxford and Emeritus Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, and Stephen Hawking, Director of Research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology within the University of Cambridge, can be modified.

Those changes to remove the singularities imply new models. Those old models without the quantum effects to remove the singularities relied on specific models with problems. One model includes string theory, which, as noted, has its own problems.

Only “very general considerations” rather than a specific model is needed to ‘prove’ the proposal in the paper by Faizal and others. The paper concludes that the centers of black holes do not amount to singularities, but, rather, to empirically testable areas of future research.

“The absence of singularity means the absence of inconsistency in the laws of nature describing our universe, that shows a particular importance in studying black holes and cosmology,” the paper said.

IHEU on Freedom *From* Religion

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 19, 2018

The Mothership, the International Humanist and Ethical Union, is on the move.

Elizabeth O’Casey, Director of Advocacy for the International Humanist and Ethical Union, was telling the truth and takin’ names, recently. As she reported in the IHEU news, the first statement to the 37th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council was a response by IHEU to the claims made by the Vatican delegation about freedom from religion not being a human right.

O’Casey corrected the Vatican delegation. The Vatican delegation representative named Ivan Jurkovic, on an earlier Friday, said, “Of the utmost concern, the use of the term freedom from religion, which is not contemplated in the international instruments, reveals a patronising idea of religion, going beyond the mandate of the special rapporteur.”

In the international forum where O’Casey correct the Vatican delegation representative, the term for the Vatican is the Holy See. She listed the established rights for freedom from religion in order to accentuate the need for freedom from religion for those without a formal religious faith in their lives.

“...freedom from coercion to adopt a religion is protected by law; freedom to have no religion is protected by law,” O’Casey explained, “freedom to leave a religion is protected by law; and freedom to criticise a religion is protected by law.”

Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of Religion or Belief, corrected the Holy See representative as well. The freedom of religion and belief protects freedom from religion.

Shaheed pointed to those non-believing bloggers whose lives are at risk throughout the world. That is, the freedom to the religion or belief is for people, not for the religion or the belief; hence, the ability of individual members of the international community to be free from religion is a matter of freedom of belief or religion, as Shaheed and O’Casey astutely pointed out, respectfully, to Jurkovic.

O’Casey cautioned that the statements of Jurkovic on behalf of the Holy See were dangerous as well as objectionable. She noted the cases of punitive socio-cultural contexts and hate from the state for those who lack a religious belief or faith.

As Dr. O’Casey is a highly informed commentator on world affairs and the arena of the faithless, she described the 85 nations in the world that “severely discriminate against non-religious individuals” with 7 countries being highly active in their discrimination against the religious in 2017.

O’Casey made a closing statement, “...so long as the rest of the international community stay silent, the rights of the invisible minority of non-believers across the world will continue to be trampled upon, including by members of this Council.”

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Dr. Leo Igwe's iDOUBT Workshop

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 19, 2018

Dr. Leo Igwe is on the move once more. As per usual, he is someone to watch as he is working to help the public with community services devoted to critical thinking.

As a Nigerian activist and journalist, Igwe created a 5-Step Critical Thinking or CT workshop entitled “iDOUBT” in order to appeal to modern sensibilities in title one can safely assume.

He wants to reduce and eliminate the superstitions plaguing the tribal groups in the Philippines and throughout Subsaharan Africa. He earned a doctoral degree from the University of Bayreuth with a specialty in Witchcraft inside of Ghana.

The workshop has been presented 12 times at the time of this writing. Igwe is a prominent and widely celebrated humanist in Nigeria and increasingly around the world for his humanist, secular, and critical thinking work.

He is a busy man and a good person in general (from personal experience at-a-distance).

iDOUBT workshops have five steps for students to be able to examine their belief systems and possibly rid themselves of their superstitions from their youths. Most of the superstitions are inculcated at a young age.

If you would like to access iDOUBT, contact brighterbrainsinstitute@gmail.com.

What Can Women Do for Justice in the Case of Conflict-Associated Sexual Abuse and Rape in Columbia?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 20, 2018

The United Nations Refugee Agency reported on Colombian women and their work to combat against sexual abuse. Michelle Begue stated that the women in Columbia are working through the court system to find justice in sexual abuse and rape cases.

One narrative is reported of Leonor Galeano and her daughter, an adolescent, who had to flee their homes when left-wing rebels and the Colombian government were fighting. It was to get away from the gunfire.

Galeano's daughter is 12-years-old, when they settled into a new house in Southern Columbia she became the friend of a kid of a local official. With Galeano's guard down and not knowing, the local official raped the 12-year-old several times.

The daughter of Galeano became pregnant from the rape. Leonor stated, "Because we are displaced, people believe that we are worthless, that we don't have the same rights."

The armed conflict in Columbia has stories like these. It has been ongoing for over 5 decades. 7.4 million people have been extirpated from the borders of their country. Mothers and daughters, like Leonor and her 12-year-old daughter, comprise the more than half of the displaced population.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable in these war circumstances. People are concerned about the daily needs of survival. They lack social and familial support networks. This makes those on-the-move due to conflict, especially women and children, vulnerable to the exploitation sexually.

A community-based protection assistant at the United Nations Refugee Agency Adri Villa, said, "There is a deep relation between sexual violence and displacement... But sexual violence isn't just a cause for displacement. It sometimes occurs during and after displacement, once they have settled in their new home."

No specific collated information exists on the total number of children and women victims of sexual violence in the 50+ year conflict in Columbia, but this is linked to a deeper problem of no official registry.

Many lack basic skills, knowledge of their rights so as to enforce them, and lack the resources and connections to do anything about it. So, collectives have been forming independently.

One is in Putumayo province in the Southern areas of Columbia. It is an umbrella of 66 groups, currently, which are advocating and enforcing the rights of women in these difficult circumstances with "tens of thousands of displaced women among nearly 146,000 victims of the armed conflict in the region bordering Ecuador."

Muriel Fatima, the President of the Life Weavers Women's Alliance, said, "The problem of sexual violence... is most prevalent among families who have been forcibly displaced, because they are in a state of greater vulnerability."

Life Weavers Women's Alliance has been considered a pilot project for peace in Columbia. The organization gives empowerment workshops and counseling to women affected by sexual violence and abuse in the region.

More importantly, as the Life Weavers Women's Alliance has been allying with the United Nations Refugee Agency, there has been an increased chance for the women survivors of rape and sexual violence to be able to fight for justice in a court system.

The Life Weavers Women's Alliance has been crucially getting financial resources from the United Nations Refugee Agency in order to combat the rampant sexual violence and abuse ongoing throughout the country.

The UNHCR has been keeping its commitments and promises by doing so. In 2016, there was a peace agreement reached between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia or FARC and the government of Columbia. This has, temporarily, ended the hostilities between the two warring groups.

"I am thankful because with the help of the alliance and UNHCR I have survived," Leonor Galeano said, "I consider myself a survivor, because I have moved forward."

Chat with Nandip Andrew — Executive Committee Member, Western African Regional Representative. African Working Group AFWG International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization IHEYO

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 27, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you find the humanist movement in Nigeria?

Nandip Andrew: The humanist movement in Nigeria for now, is moving at a snail's pace, compared when the founder Dr Leo Igwe was in Nigeria, there was always meetings or conference been organized. but now, nothing like that, we only have one conference organized by one of our humanist chapter, the Humanist Assembly of Lagos. and most recently the African Humanist Youth Day AFHD 2017, host again by Humanist Assembly of Lagos. we have also some humanist group in Nigeria, like the Humanist Society of Nigeria etc, the chapter also have their meetings in Abuja the Nigerian Capital. i was invited last year, because of a very tie schedule i could not attend. people are really coming out to identify with humanism, but the humanist organization at the national level is very weak. I wish to encourage the various chapters to keep propagating humanism, freethought and critical thinking.

Jacobsen: What seem like the bigger threat to the practice of humanism freely in Nigeria?

Andrew: The biggest threat to the practice of humanism in Nigeria is fear... in fact fear causes members not to show themselves physically, but on the social media, members at the comfort of their homes, in their rooms express their disbelief, but call up a meeting or conference only few would attend. another aspect again is discriminations, when the community or society a humanist member is leaving, people tend to look at the member as dangerous or some kind of an immoral person, sometimes led to physical attack.

Jacobsen: Who is a personal hero for you there? Have they written any books? If not, who is a Nigerian who writes on religion your books that you like?

Andrew: My personal hero is Dr Tunde Arogundade, is my former part time lecturer, he helped me out in the late 2009 into the light of humanism from the darkness of dogma, provide books from his private library, books on atheism/humanism, the other person is Dr Leo Igwe, his commitment in the propagation of humanism in Nigeria and Africa as at large. yes, Dr Tunde is writing a book about the religion crisis between Christians and Muslims, Boko Haram, (Boko Haram are Islamic terrorists in northern Nigeria, that bomb and kill thousands of innocent children, women and men and adopted hundreds in the name of propagating Islam) and the Nigerian politics. The Nigerian that writes on religion the book i like is Mr Adebawale Ojowuro, the title of the book is *The Crisis Of Religion*.

Jacobsen: Does your professional life impact your activist life?

Andrew: Yes, may professional life impact on my activist life. in my office i am identify as an atheist, in my home life i am call an atheist, in my local community i am call an atheist, my wife was nickname "MATA BA ALLAH" in Hausa language, (meaning MATA is wife, BA no,

ALLAH god. a wife of a person that don't believe in God). I feel very comfortable to identify as an atheist.

Jacobsen: What makes a good humanist?

Andrew: A good humanist, is one that does not discriminate based on religion or race, a good humanist is a peace loving person, a good humanist tries to make the world better and safer place for us to leave and our children, because this is the only place we got

Jacobsen: What are some positives of religion in your perspective?

Andrew: Some positives aspect of religion is allowing me to know the truth, through the reading of the bible and it led to my freedom. is very good that every humanist should study or read others religious books.

Jacobsen: How do you hope humanism develops in Nigeria for the next 10 years, at a minimum?

Andrew: There hope for the growth of humanism in Nigeria for the next 10 years, if only the majority of youths in Nigeria who are humanist should remove fear and replace it with courage. we have started seeing that happening, if it continues Nigeria will leave Uganda and Ghana far behind in 10 years to come, but i know they too will make sure they are not left behind.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts?

Andrew: My final feeling is being unhappy that others like me in the Nigerian Humanist Movement have not made any impacts for the past few years. Hopefully, we will make sure we try our best.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Nandip.

Andrew: Thank you for the interview Scott Jacobsen.

A Compendium of Crimes and Criminals of the Eastern Orthodox Church — Part 4

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 27, 2018

I doubt this is comprehensive, nor is it representative of the positives of the church either; it is reportage on the reports from the news. I didn't see a compendium, so decided to write one. Part 1, 2, and 3.

The continued child sex abuse cases emerge from the Eastern Orthodox Church (Velissaris, 2013). Archbishop Stylianos talked about the Greek Orthodox Church and its child sexual abuse.

This is only a week after the Church fronting the Victorian parliamentary inquiry with the denial of its culpability there. Stylianos opines that no religious organization is immune.

Stylianos said, “Religious organisations, which consist of human beings, even as clergymen, can never be regarded in advance as immune of such criminal acts.”

The Bishop Iakovos of Miletoupolis denied child sexual abuse by Greek Orthodox Church clergyman in Victoria. However, further reportage found the opposite and worse, the child sexual abuse was happening and Iakovos attempted to cover the child sexual abuse up.

The Greek Orthodox Church involved in child sexual abuse by its clergyman and then caught in lies attempting to cover the abuse. One priest was found guilty of indecently assaulting a teenage girl in 2002.

In the inquiry, Iakovos said the Greek Orthodox Church is on good terms with the Victoria police.

Stylianos explained the protocol, “If a complaint is made, the local Bishop immediately convenes to the Code of Conduct Council, and investigates the complaint... The respondent is notified, the complainant is offered counselling/support services. If a mutual resolution cannot be reached, the matter is then referred to the Archbishop who may refer the matter to a canonical court for final determination. Finally, if criminal conduct is established, the church must refer the matter to the police authorities. The archbishop will then take disciplinary action based on the severity of the complaint.”

Two cases of priests being defrocked with one involving taking marriage license fees. While this inquiry was ongoing at the time, the Catholic Church was being similarly taken to task for its staff sexual abusing children.

Stylianos, at the time, argued that if priests could marry then the sex scandals may be avoided.

The Associated Press in 2014 reported on dozens of Greek police being involved in an operation to clear a hostel, which is being used as a rebel monastery.

The hostel was for monks claimed as “schismatic” by the Greek Orthodox Church. One monk and five supporters were in the apartment. It is located at central Thessaloniki.

The court ruled for an eviction. “Monks from the 1,000-year-old Esphigmenou monastery, in the self-governed Mount Athos monastic community near Thessaloniki in northern Greece,” the Associated Press reported, “are in a bitter dispute with the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch, spiritual leader of the world’s Orthodox Christians.”

The monks make the allegations that the Ecumenical Patriarch is treasonous because he wants better relationships with the Catholic Church.

The 125 monks did not want to cede the monastery. That means the building on Mount Athos (where “women are banned”) and the Thessaloniki hostel.

No women allowed and crushing of dissent.

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O Dark Matter, Dark Matter, Wherefore Art Thou Dark Matter?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 28, 2018

Galaxy NGC1052 confuses astronomers. The galaxy floats about 65 million light years, 6.5×10^7 light years, away from the Milky Way Galaxy.

The reason for the perplexation comes from the missing matter, the unaccounted for mass purported to come from dark matter, which, according to modern theories coming from standard Big Bang cosmology, should account for the missing mass in the universe.

The matter that comprises us only makes for a fraction of the total mass of the universe or the contents of the cosmos. Our known matter makes less than 5% of the universe. Dark matter accounts for about 27% of the universe with dark energy for approximately 68% of it.

An international team of astronomers found NGC1052 lacked dark matter, which in the standard cosmological theories of the formation of galaxies remains integral to their creation and maintenance.

In other words, to miss a crucial ingredient suggested as necessary to its formation, it baffles the experts. By analogy, you may think about a full-grown human organism without mitochondria in its cells, “How did this form into an adult organism at all?”

Similarly, with the lack of dark matter, given current cosmological Big Bang models, “How did this galaxy form without dark matter present in it?”

The lead author for the paper published in *Nature*, Pieter van Dokkum, said, “When galaxies begin to form, the first thing that forms — we think — is a little object of dark matter... Dark matter is the scaffolding on which galaxies are built.”

The University of Toronto’s Dragonfly Telescope Array helped the astronomical researchers find ultra diffuse galaxies. Those taking large volumes of space, larger than average, while lacking much mass, much density compared to others, hence “diffuse.”

The galaxy was renamed NGC1052-DF2. With larger telescopes such as the W.M. Keck Observatory and the Hubble Space Telescope, there were subsequent observations.

Robert Abraham, Professor at the University of Toronto Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics, asked, “How would you get stars to form in this organized way over such a large part of space, unless there’s enough gravity to pull all that stuff together? ... The answer is, I have no idea. There must be more than one way to form galaxies.”

“You see something like this, and you do sort of scratch your head and you think there’s something fundamentally wrong in our picture,” Abraham said. “But for now, I think the evidence for dark matter greatly outweighs the evidence against it. But you do need to keep an open mind,” Abraham continued.

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Abiodun Sanusi on Being a Non-Believer

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 29, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You are 23. How did you come to be a freethinker in a religious family, in a familial setting of 6?

Abiodun Sanusi: Yes, I became a freethinker through rigorous vigorous reading and thinking. Although I was very active in the Anglican church I attended with my family. Up to the stage that, I became an altar boy (an acolyte) and everyone in the hood including my family was happily expecting me to get into the seminary immediately.

I got out of the high school or the university when they discovered I chose to go to the university after high school, in fact, the Anglican church we attended sponsored my tertiary education by providing 70% of my school fee.

Jacobsen: As you became an atheist in your first year of high school, how did you go about making the transition from religious to non-religious?

Sanusi: Like I said earlier, I became an atheist through thinking, reading, debating, and doing a lot of research. I only made my transition known to friends and family through logical explanations and scientific and philosophical methods, which I always implore during conversations and debates and in my everyday activities by rejecting dogmas both local and foreign and by asking for proofs for everything including the Bible and Quran and even African religious creeds.

Jacobsen: You live in Lagos and study in Ogun state. Why did you pick geography and regional planning for tertiary education studies?

Sanusi: Yes. I picked geography and regional planning for so many reasons:

1. I wanted to become an astronaut and visit space to know if all NASA says about space and the universe was true.
2. I wanted to be the first African or black to visit space (I still look up to that though).
3. I opted for geography because I cannot afford the fee to study astronomy and there is no institution in Nigeria where I could study astronomy even if I could afford it except in the US or Russia and I cannot afford that.
4. I want to develop my environment through environmental science as I look forward to venturing into mainstream politics after school.

Jacobsen: As you are against oppression in any form, how do you fight this some activist work in Nigeria?

Sanusi: The first time I stood individually against oppression was during my final year in high school when I stood up to a teacher who was a notorious bully and I came out victorious although with a little price of cutting the grass.

But I was glad I saved the whole 12 (SS3) classes from being flogged severely with the cane and going through severe punishment for days or a week.

Now in the university, I have always stood against oppression since my first year and I sometimes pay for it with my grades (score reductions). Even now, we're standing up to the school over the issue of stop and search at the school gate, which involves only the students who board the public shuttle.

As those who go in with their cars are never stopped nor searched at the gate, including the staff, a comrade was illegally arrested by the police 2 days ago, but was released yesterday after students went to the police station to plead as we were threatened with expulsion if we ever dare stand up to the school management against oppression.

There is so much I cannot say here but I am yet to be affiliated to any human rights organization as I'm yet to find a vibrant one (I'll be glad if I could, especially an internationally recognized one).

Jacobsen: How can the international community support the atheist community in Nigeria?

Sanusi: The international community can help atheists and the atheist community in Nigeria by helping to sponsor human rights and atheistic campaigns and providing legal backings for freedom of thoughts, sex, gender, and every other thing, which should be personal and doesn't affect anyone in any sane manner.

The homosexuals especially should be helped by helping activists worldwide including local ones to stand up for gay rights in Nigeria and Africa, and to sponsor and support youths as most of us can't come out as an atheist because of rejection, especially financially and death threats in places like northern Nigeria.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Sanusi: I would be very glad if the international community could help promote atheism and human right through media campaigns like billboards and television programmes and radio programmes.

I will voluntarily gladly volunteer to host television programmes in favor of atheism and human rights including gay rights.

Thanks.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Abiodun.

The New Life of a Burundian Refugee, Clovis Munezero

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 29, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You are Burundian, but have fled, recently. Why?

Clovis Munezero: I am Burundian, but recently I have fled my country.

When I saw that my life was in danger, my friends were killed; my companions jailed, some of my family disappeared and others imprisoned; I have reason to flee my country. I have left my country because it was going through a political crisis and trouble that took a lot of human lives and property damage.

Everything starts on 26 April 2015 when the current president of the Republic of Burundi declares for the 3rd Term, which is unconstitutional. We revolted by demonstrating in streets to defend the Constitution. Some three weeks during demonstrations, a military group attempted a coup that eventually failed.

We had already lost several human lives during the demonstration, which lasted some two months was followed by persecution of any person who demonstrated against the will of this illegal term. Several people have left the country for fear of being killed and others have been imprisoned, others killed.

My turn came on 17 November 2015 when people without uniforms came for me at home after having kidnapped the day before my uncle with whom we lived together. That day I left home and it took me almost two weeks to cross the border of Rwanda-Burundi. I had to change from house to house of friends.

On 28 November, our family member took me in his car up to the border of Rwanda and I crossed. There I stayed with my friend for three days who fled before. Then, I took the road to Nairobi. I reached there after two days on 2 December 2015. I started all over again. A refugee's life begins.

Jacobsen: What is your own family religious background?

Munezero: My family religious background is Christianity. I was grown up in that family but my parents did not attend the same churches and it was almost never discussed matters of faith. They taught us the 10 commandments of the bible and some verses of the bible based on the good and the bad. What makes us grow with this experience of diversity?

We're 4 siblings and none does not share the same church with each other and never did us any harm to the family.

Jacobsen: How did you lose faith?

Munezero: How did I lose my Faith; I grew up in the scout family movement with a lot of diversity. Leaders taught us that it is a lay movement: we had nonbelievers, Muslims, and Christians. Growing up in that diversity pushed me in to do some research to find out the event that shaped the world.

I started reading some stories, especially about the Second World War, Vietnam War, Genocide in Rwanda, and what happened in the region as well as colonialism and that the people of the church were involved.

Faith is lost in this way. I replaced it by reason. The belief, I replaced it with science.

Jacobsen: What was the treatment by the community based on your loss of religious faith?

Munezero: The treatment by the community based on my loss of religious faith.

When people noticed that I was no longer part of their belief, above all the people close to the family judged me as part of Satanism, dangerous, but they saw how I was living my life with love, tolerance. I always had a position to defend. I started being tolerated as much as I can so long that I am proud of my orientation.

I to have always influenced the community, I always let my life to talk about me and be up of on my choice. I never had fear of the community for my choice because my family was not against me nor agree with my choice .and I did choose reason and science. Those are my “faith.”

Jacobsen: What is your advice for those who have lost faith and who may experience mistreatment for it?

Munezero: My advice for those who have lost their faith and can be abused.

Every person has the right to choose which way to follow and he/she has to have a reason for every choice. For those people must know well and defend this reason which pushed him/her to make such a decision of “losing faith”:

Knowing the entourage for not putting you in danger as a “suspect person.”

Knowing if there are people who understand you and who share with you the way of living.

Finding people with whom you share your especially daily information and orientation of thinking.

Seeking to build links with other people by your lifestyle and do not seek to explain everything to everyone.

When it is threatened and unable to defend yourself, leave the place.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Munezero: My thoughts or feelings is that; people that already part of the humanistic community, let us act on the responsibility of making our prosperous societies, charitable and trying to make peace on this land and make it a home to all.

Let us live peacefully through our daily lives, teach and influence the world with love and humanism. We are humans, try to be humanists. Thank you, sir, have a good time.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Clovis.

The One and Only Dr. Leo Igwe, TED Talk

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 30, 2018

Dr. Leo Igwe is a prominent and respected humanist in Nigeria and around the world. He has given a TED talk, which has garnered tens of thousands of views.

As a humanist, Leo Igwe doesn't believe in divine intervention — but he does believe in the power of human beings to alleviate suffering, cure disease, preserve the planet and turn situations of poverty into prosperity. In this bold talk, Igwe shares how humanism can free Africans from damaging superstitions and give them the power to rebuild the continent.

Please find the link here and enjoy this fascinating and captivating talk by Dr. Igwe:

https://www.ted.com/talks/leo_igwe_why_i_choose_humanism_over_faith

Aloys Habonimana on Humanism and Running for Life

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 31, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You are Burundian, but have fled, recently. Why?

Aloys Habonimana: In 2015, Burundi is fallen and in a political crisis, when the president wanted to stay in power illegally; the opposition parties and civil organizations were against that.

I as a person who started to understand the importance of living free with dignity, and prosperity as human being, together with others, we went to the demonstration to protest against that bad decision of the president.

I was in the party called MSD (Movement of Solidarity and Democracy). Most of the members of my party were killed by the members of ruling party (Imbonerakure Youth of Ruling Party). Others from groups are in prison. Others were persecuted until they are living with disabilities all their life by police and the intelligence agencies.

I left my country when I was looked for by Imbonerakure. I am sure if they caught me I would be persecuted and even killed because my position was to mobilize the young people for new changes.

I was looked for by Immoderacies for two accusations:

- To participate in the demonstration
- To be in the opposition party (MSD)
- I left my country without finishing my studies. It touches my heart.

Jacobsen: What is your own family religious background?

Habonimana: I participated in many churches. I was born when my mother was an Adventist and my father had no religion. Then at the age of 7, I was Anglican. In 2000, my father and mother decided to return to the Catholic religion.

I was baptized in the Catholic religion. In 2004, I left the Catholic religion for the Pentecostal Church. After 2 years, I left this religion because of things I did not understand. I found another religion called Jehovah's Witnesses for 7 years.

Afterward, I entered the Unitarian Universalists. My family is in Christianity.

I have so many backgrounds in different religions.

Jacobsen: How did you lose faith?

Habonimana: I was a true Catholic, even as I thought of being a parish Catholic, but afterward I saw that there are lies behind it. I had many questions about Jesus and mother Mary, but no Parish or Pastor answered me.

In the Protestant religion, I have seen that pastors are enriching themselves to the detriment of their faithful. I have noticed that pastors and ministers are hiding many things from their faithful.

Here I can quote:

- Not tell them the reality of life.
- Play with emotions of their faithful.
- Prohibit the use of scientific reason.
- Promote the religious discrimination.
- Put their faithful in exaggerated fear.
- In me extend family, we lost many people because of their religion which preached them, is not allowed by God to go to the hospital when they are sick.
- To prohibit their children not go to school instead of encouraging their children for the best future.

According to those things, when I was in those religions, my faith was lost; and now, I believe in human beings, which means that the human being has a power for creating a good thing and changing things.

That is why I want to work in humanitarian services for changing the lives of many people who are victims of their faith.

Jacobsen: What was the treatment by the community based on your loss of religious faith?

Habonimana: My native region is totally Christian. It is very difficult for me, even for my family. My family treated me as a bad child. I was even accused of being Satanist. None of my family and my friends understand me.

I was insulted in front of people. I remember that when I was in high school I was persecuted because I refused to go to Catholic church. I was in isolation. However, now because of my generosity, the kindness I show to the people; they start to understand me.

Jacobsen: What is your advice for those who have lost faith and who may experience mistreatment for it?

Habonimana: I advise them to be honest with themselves. It is not a fault to have different beliefs. It is in our duties. I can advise them to get in contact with other groups or associations of humanists who can help them to know their rights and their duties.

They have to be careful in their village because people can traumatize them, even kill them because of their beliefs. That is why it is better to be in an association known by the government and known by international organizations like IHEYO, for example.

Jacobsen: Any concluding thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Habonimana: As a refugee, I am in a country where there are many people who do not understand me; it is hard to feel comfortable. Sometimes, I get discouraged. Normally, a humanist life is a good life when you are free and do not have the fear of insecurity because it gives freedom to think and do things according to the belief.

That is why we need your assistance morally and materially. It is awful to sleep when you want to work, to stay closed when you want to be free. Humanism taught me a great thing; I want to change the mind of people who believe that God will give them all things.

There are people who pray every day to seek food instead of working and to study how they can overcome their problems. I want to do that by a nonprofit organization. I have this inspiration because of the value of humanism.

I want to encourage my friends who are in the bad situation to be associated with other associations and contribute to change this world where there are so many lies.

I take this occasion to thank all associations of humanist and all movements for the work they are doing for supporting and promoting humanism in this world.

I am very hopeful together we can change the world.

Best wishes,

HABONIMANA ALOYS

NAIROBI — KENYA

TEL +254 731982279

Email, loyohabo@gmail.com

aloyshabonimana@gmail.com

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Aloys.

Pope Refuses to Apologize for Residential Schools in Canada

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 2, 2018

The Roman Catholic Church with the assistance of the federal government of Canada oppressed in several ways the Indigenous populations of this country and the First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities, at a bare minimum, deserve an apology from the “Vicar of Christ of Earth” or the leader of the Roman Catholic hierarchs for the residential school system (The Canadian Press, 2018).

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau express disappointment in the decision to nullify the opportunity for an apology based on the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the residential school system.

Many, many students and families were traumatized and damaged due to the residential schools.

Trudeau said, “Reconciliation is not just between government and Indigenous peoples, it’s between non-Indigenous Canadians and Indigenous peoples as well. We will keep working with communities, keep working with individuals on the path to reconciliation because we know taking responsibility for past mistakes and asking forgiveness is something that is core to our values as Canadians.”

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission contained 94 recommendations with one being a papal apology. It would be similar to the request for an apology to Irish sexual abuse victims of 2010 and the Indigenous Bolivians in 2015.

Former head of the TRC, Se. Murray Sinclair, stated that the lack of apology can reduce the potential for healing.

“I think there’s always been a bit of a schism between those Indigenous communities that have members of the Catholic church,” Sinclair said, “versus those who are not members of the Catholic church within their communities and I think this is going to add to that tension.”

Perry Bellegarde, the Assembly of First Nations National Chief, said an apology would help with the “healing and reconciliation.”

About 2/3rds of the 130 residential schools were Roman Catholic run and Indigenous children were disallowed from speaking their language, practicing their culture, and forced to assimilate to non-Indigenous culture. Carolyn Bennett, the Indigenous Relations Minister, said the federal government will continue to work for an apology from the Pope.

Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer, who is Roman Catholic, said any group involved in the residential school system should apologize, but did not mention the Roman Catholic Church by name or the Pope — even though the majority of the residential schools were run by the Catholic faith.

Scheer said, “I think that any group or institution that had a significant role in the residential school system should help move past and help get through this period of reconciliation by apologizing for the role they might have played.”

The abusive residential school system ran for more than a century. Robert-Falcon Ouellette, of Cree and Métis heritage, said, “If one man could simply snap his fingers, things would have been done a long time ago, but unfortunately that doesn’t happen in large institutions” (CBC News, 2018). He thinks the apology will eventually come.

One can hope. In the meantime, for Indigenous Canadians, especially those who believe in and follow the Roman Catholic Church now, this may feel disappointing, like a slap in the face, and cause for concern that maybe the talk of reconciliation from the government and the religious authorities that oppressed the Indigenous populations for well over a century, at least, are simply talking and not intending to act on the rhetoric.

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Chat with Rholdee Dela Mance Lagumbay

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 4, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was your background in religion growing up?

Rholdee Dela Mance Lagumbay: Well, I was born a Roman Catholic family. My Grandfather is a hardcore RC. Every Sunday we go to church. But when we go home, I feel empty. When I grew up, I started seeking. I found other Christian Churches and attended their services. Still I find something is lacking. You see, Christian Churches always say that “Salvation” is only through Jesus Christ. But how about others who did not know Jesus in their lifetime? This idea deeply troubled me as I was growing. This is the “emptiness” I felt. If God was so wise, why can’t he understand the fact that there are some who will never know him in this lifetime?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you find Catholicism?

Lagumbay: Catholicism, Roman Catholicism (to be very specific) for me is not more of a Spiritual institution, but a Political one. It was created by Constantine the Great to expand his influence over Rome. He used the teachings of a Great Spiritual Master, wrapped it with Myths and Legends — viola! Mar Yeshua Ha Messiach became Lord Jesus the Christ. The Bible was compiled to support this Claim. He who says something against their “Canon” is then a Heretic. Excommunication was the most painful thing to happen. If you’re not killed, you’ll be put into exile.

The word Catholic means Universal. This should’ve been the focus of this Religion. Everyone is Part of the “Body of Christ” so to speak. Christian or not, Theist or Atheist, we are all part of the whole Universe, therefore Kathulikus (Greek word for Universal). This has been wrongly used by the Roman Catholics.

The Catholic Universalist Church is part of the Growing Liberal Catholic Movement. We are the type of Catholics who do not believe in the Authority of Rome, but we believe in the Divinity and Dignity of every man. We are the Heretics, the Gnostics, and the Mystics.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is mysticism within the Catholic tradition?

Lagumbay: Mysticism, is acknowledging that life in itself is ‘Mystical’. Man is the temple of “God”. Now, when I say God, I do not mean an old man in the Sky, but the One Ultimate Reality. It’s the all pervading Energy Consciousness that surrounds everything and everyone. The whole Universe, including “us” is made up of this Energy Consciousness. If you like, this is somewhat to what Star Wars called, “The Force”.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is Mysticism within the Church?

Lagumbay: It is actually the belief that God is within everything and everyone, yet beyond everything and everyone. This “God” that I speak of is both immanent and transcendent. We are all “Mystically Connected” to everything and everyone in the whole Universe. As per Albert Einstein, “Everything is Energy”. We are made up of the same substances. Our bodies are the real Temple of God. When we Pray or Meditate, the real “communion” with God happens internally, not in a church building. Now, this is the greatest mystery. Man is the meeting place of Both the

Divine (Spirit/God/Higher Self) and Mundane (Physical/Lower self). His body is the Temple of the living God!

As Catholicism evolved, it acquired so many rituals that helps Man attune to his higher self (e.g. Ringing of bells, incense, kneeling, raising of the Chalice, singing, etc.), so we retain these practices up until this time, since we believe this is vital to our Psycho-spiritual evolution.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do you practice the teachings of Jesus Christ in your universalist church?

Lagumbay: The Catholic Universalist Church has no doctrines or Dogma. We consider ourselves ‘pre-Nicene’ Catholics. Meaning, we do not adhere to all the councils. We do not even use the Nicene or Apostles creed.

We believed that the core teaching of Jesus was Love. It is giving highest respect to everyone.

We believe that the best way to serve “God” was to serve our Fellow man. We were given orders by our Master Jesus to Love, not to Judge our fellow man.

We welcome everyone to the Church and worship with us regardless of Gender, Race, Religion, Political Beliefs, etc. The Sacrament is also open for everyone. We do not believe in ‘conversion’, since religion is not important. Connecting with God is a personal thing to do. You can do that without having a religion. The only advantage if you are in CUC is that, you are free to whatever you want to believe. The Church will not condemn you for that. We will encourage you to pursue your Path (e.g. BUDHISM, HINDUISM, ISLAM, ETC.) as we believe every man has different paths that is necessary for Spiritual Growth.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As a Catholic priest in the Catholic Universalist Church, is this a title different or a content difference being in the universalist church as opposed to the common title of “Roman Catholic Church”?

Lagumbay: For the Catholic Universalist Church, priesthood is Servant Leadership. It is a Vocation, not a profession. We as ministers do not accept “payments” for sacraments.

We prefer to be called as “brothers”, but in the PH people call us “Father”. It sounds weird for me being called ‘father’ by people 60 to 70 years of age, but eventually I got used to it.

Priesthood, for us is a facilitator of the Sacraments. We lead the Worship Services. However, we do not see ourselves Higher than anyone in the congregation. In the Mass, we “worship” with everyone. We are all equally important. Again, you do not need a Priest to connect with God. We are just here to aid you with the rituals you need. Nothing more.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do you view the teachings of Jesus Christ?

Lagumbay: Jesus Christ, or Yeshua Ben Yosef was a radical Jewish Rabbi who knew the Higher Spiritual truths (about God/the Force) and is far more advance than any other ‘teachers’ of his time. He calls God “Abba”. This does not mean Father, but is actually ‘Heavenly Father/Mother who is the Source of Everything’. Jesus had female disciples which shows equality. He often speaks of the “Kingdom of God is Within!”, meaning, we co-create heaven here on earth by ‘following his teaching’, not by believing that ‘he is God’. Jesus, for us is more of an Enlightened Master just like the “Buddha” of Buddhism. He embodies the ‘Wisdom of the Cosmos’, which he showed to us through words and actions. Jesus knew that every man has this Divine potential to

become like him. The goal of Christianity is not to believe that Jesus was God, or the Only Son of God, but an active transformation of one's life through Love and Compassion. Master Jesus showed the way we need to follow. Mistranslations made Jesus the "Son of Man" (Bar Nasha in Aramaic). But it's wrong. The word in Aramaic is Bar Enash, which means, "Son of Mankind". So, Jesus was preaching not about his "Second Coming", but he was preaching this grand awakening or Enlightenment of the Masses. It is when us, Humans will finally awaken to our true potential and evolve into a higher being (which was embodied by Jesus 2000 years ago).

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What trends among the youth trouble you?

Lagumbay: What troubles me about the youth today is having "unprotected" and "uneducated" sexual practices. I am not pro or anti pre-marital sex. However, these acts have great consequences if done in wrongly (e.g. STD's, teenage pregnancy, etc.) Education must be the youths number one weapon. They should be properly informed about this.

I guess movies and social media has a great impact on youth today. I also believe that this platform can help educate the Youth.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What trends among the elderly trouble you?

Lagumbay: What troubles me about the elderly is that, most of them has closed minds and hearts. For them, they have already reached the "pinnacle" of wisdom, so they stop learning. There are no more room for new Ideas and innovation. They are the hardest people to deal with.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Robust societies have rich ties between generations. How can we regain that in the digital era?

Lagumbay: For me, genuine love and compassion creates a very solid tie between people, regardless of race, gender, nationality, age, etc.

If the Youth and the Elderly could both educate each other using the language of "Love and compassion", then I guess both generations can learn from each other.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do you practice the teachings of Jesus Christ in your universalist church?

Lagumbay: God is love. Jesus showed this through his life and teachings. He did not preach about the "end of the world", but he preached about the future of Humanity. He preached about the evolution of the Soul, perfected through the purifying flames of 'Hell'. For us, hell is Real but temporary. A God of love will not punish his Children for Eternity. Going back to "the Force" concept, we are all part of God. God can never punish a 'part' of Himself forever. You cannot say, "finger I do not need you because you are sinful." Instead, you redeem your finger. Same is true with God. The purpose of punishment is for us to be corrected, and become better individuals. Why do you think God will punish 'for eternity' a person that only lived a short and temporary life here on earth? That is totally nonsense. The belief of eternal hell is for control, and for money-making as well. It is far more logical to believe in karma and re-incarnation (which was originally one of the earliest teachings in Christianity).

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As a Christian Gnostic, how does this overlap with humanism, especially through HAPI?

Lagumbay: Spirituality and Humanism is “inseparable”. Why?

Because, “God is our Highest Self. It is the ‘Spark of the Divine’ that makes us truly Human.” I am a Spiritual Humanist. I also believed that Jesus was a Spiritual Humanist. He puts more weight on Human Dignity than following rigid rules and dogmas. He understood that “Laws were made because man do not understand Love. Love is the Fulfilment of the Law.”

That is why I am still here on HAPI, despite of those Radical Atheists bashers.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you find HAPI?

Lagumbay: I found HAPI Before I became a Priest. I was so lost that time. I had been through a series of paradigm shifts. It was a journey of “Spiritual Awakening”.

I bumped into HAPI through Facebook. I met a lot if likeminded people, surprisingly most of them are Atheists and Agnostics. It was through HAPI that I met Gino Paradela, whom introduced me to Catholic Universalist Church which I am now a minister.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is the history Christian Gnosticism in the Philippines?

Lagumbay: Before us, I have not known of any authentic ‘Christian Gnostics’ in the Philippines. Most of the groups I know are ‘imitations’, or simply “false gurus” promising Enlightenment using the teachings of Master Jesus.

However, in it’s simplest form, everyone can become a Gnostic. Gnosis is a Greek word for “Knowing” or “Wisdom”. It is knowledge not based on books or external teachings, but an ‘internal revelation’ of the Divine (God/Spirit). Gnosis is attained through meditation, contemplation, and action. We value the Bible, in the sense that it does not hold an absolute truth. It’s not a rulebook, but a compass. Read the scripture, contemplate, forget it’s meaning, meditate, and read it again. You will view the scripture in a different light.

And of course, you take action afterwards.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: If you could take one principle in the Bible for humanists, what would it be?

Lagumbay: Love. That is the core principle of the Teachings of Master Jesus. If we have Love, then we don’t need complicated Laws. Love is the fulfillment of the Law. The Laws are made because of Love. Love is the force that binds everything and everyone. God is Love! When we say, “do not do unto others what you don’t want them do unto you”, that doesn’t mean you are being kind because of a Reward of Heaven, or you are afraid of Hell’s punishment. You do ‘Good’ because the moment you look at into the eye of your fellow man, you see the Soul of God in him, which is also the same Soul in you. You do not hurt them because hurting others would also mean hurting God; and to love others is to love yourself More.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: If you could take one lesson from the Bible, what would it be for humanists?

Lagumbay: When Jesus was accused by the Priests of Blasphemy, he answered back, “Is it not written in your law? ‘I said you are gods’?”

Jesus was actually referring to Psalm 82:9 that says, “I said, you are gods, and all of you are Children of the Most High.”

Being that said in the Old Testament, and hearing that from the mouth of Master Jesus, we can conclude that Ancient Masters knew this One Ultimate Truth — that we all made up of the Same cosmic Substance, and we carry the DNA of God (e.g. The Force). We are the co-creators of our own reality. We can make our earth a Heaven or Hell depending on how we live our lives. Worship means to serve God, and we do that best when we serve our fellow men.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: If you could re-interpret a mainstream interpretation of Christianity for the general public to have a change of heart and mind about The Gospel, what would it be?

Lagumbay: “Nobody is coming. GOD has already SENT YOU.”

Let us not wait for a Messiah that would save us from damnation. Only we can save and uplift ourselves from the Hell that we are into right now. Only us can change our bad behaviour. Only us can change our attitude. Only us can overcome our addiction. Changing ourselves, we are also uplifting our consciousness. By doing that, we are also others. Thus, we are contributing to the Grand Awakening of Humanity.

Do not wait for Master Jesus to be re-incarnated on the World. We all poses the ‘Christ Consciousness’ within us. We need to awaken that ‘Divine Spark’ in us. We are born in this world to heal it. We are the ‘Messiah’ in training.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are your hopes for Christian Gnosticism and humanism in the Philippines?

Lagumbay: Well, I hope that Christians will be more open minded in the future. Gnosticism is a way of life. You can keep your religion, however you can choose to ‘tap’ the ‘Spirit’ within you, than following rigid rules and church doctrines. If your church rules contribute to spreading Genuine Love, then Go practice it. If not, don’t support it. If many of these rules contribute on hate, division, elitism and discrimination, then maybe you need to find a new Church.

I hope that Humanism will not be demonized by mainstream Christian Churches. I am looking forward to a future of Atheists, Theists and everyone in between will work together for the betterment of Mankind, rather than arguing who is right, when that act does not change anything at all.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts?

Lagumbay: Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts, words and ideals about Humanism. I hope and I pray with all my Heart that One day, there shall be no walls dividing Mankind. I hope that mankind will finally be free from the enslavement of Religion.

You see, instead of us accessing God within and unleashing our true potential as Divine Beings, religion trapped us into believing that we are damned, and that we are hopeless if we do not submit into their authorities.

Let us take back our Powers. We are the Temple of God. Our Hearts is the Altar of Sacrifice. We best serve. God by serving our Fellow man.

When I look into your eyes, I see the Soul of God. It is my Soul. To hurt you, is to hurt my self.

And to love you, is to love myself more.

Namaste.

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