

Institutional Rights

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It seems logical that institutional rules must dictate what is or is not upheld or permitted by the institution. However, when these rules conflict with the behaviour, views or rights of members of the wider society then we have a problem.

For example, institutional rules may be disagreeable or even offensive to some, or there may be real or perceived dissonance with the laws or culture of the land, as was the case with the American Embassy. It is necessary to try to balance institutional rights against the rights of its members or those of the wider society. Some of the pertinent questions are:

- Should students at a private church-owned school be indoctrinated in the practices and doctrines of the church?
- Should a church-owned institution require that its employees subscribe to the tenets or doctrines of the church?
- Should an institution's legal rights always take precedence over other considerations?
- How far should a religious body go to protect its pulpit from the views of persons it disagrees with?



Transforming The World

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While national governments commit their countries to the laudable aspirations of the 2030 Agenda, other parties are sounding an alarm! The fact that such an alarm lines up with Bible prophecies (e.g. Revelation 17:10-18) is sufficient reason to view the developments with heightened interest

or even to be perturbed at what may happen next. We are admonished to prepare ourselves by watch and prayer.

For Our New Converts

Did You Know That...?

- the correct interpretation of the prophecy in Daniel 8:14 *"And he said unto me, unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."* is a critical, foundational teaching of the Seventh Day Adventist Church;
- this prophecy specifies that as of 22 October 1844, Christ has been in the **Most Holy Place of the sanctuary in heaven** functioning as our High Priest;
- in the Most Holy Place is the Ark of the Covenant which contains the Ten Commandments, the standard by which sin is identified;
- **Christ's work** in the Most Holy Place is one of judgement and cleansing of the sanctuary by blotting out the confessed sins of repentant believers;
- the experiences of SDA pioneers in the 1840s fulfilled prophecies and are reflected in the messages of the **Three Angels** in Revelation 14;
- the **'mark of the beast'** is the violation of the fourth commandment, whereby God's hallowed day of worship is supplanted by Sunday and this will be the great final test of our allegiance to God.



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In this issue we have a special contribution on atheism, plus brief interrogations of institutional rights, the 2030 Agenda of the UN and the knowledge base of the new converts to our church.

Transforming The World

The 70th General Assembly meeting of the UN held in New York in September 2015 was historic in being addressed by the pontiff, Pope Francis. The outcome was a document unanimously agreed by the 193 countries represented "THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: TRANSFORMING THE WORLD".



The Agenda has 17 Goals with 169 targets covering all aspects of global life; the scope is unprecedented: **"Never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda"** (para 18). As stated by the UN Secretary General "It is a ... **transformative vision** for a better world." "Institutions will have to become fit for a **grand new purpose"**

Climate change has been given special treatment. Besides the

technical steps to be taken, Pope Francis gave advice on the issue of environmental management from his standpoint in a major papal edict, the *Laudato Si*. There the value of Sunday rest was underscored (para 237). The Paris Agreement to bind countries to address the issues was signed by 174 countries in April 2016, including Jamaica.

Is it paranoia that causes many to see in this grand new scheme of things the making of the anticipated and feared **"New World Order"**?

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A Christian's Struggle With An Atheistic Worldview



The days of not questioning God's existence are fading away. At the core of things, Jamaica has been a highly conservative society where religion is concerned. But a contradiction exists:

On one hand, God is adored and revered while on the other (especially by generation Xers and millennials) he is out of favour. Many were told to never question the divine. The result? A level of hagiophobia – *the (irrational) fear of the divine*, except in instances of trouble when a talisman – or *guard-ring* is required, then we pray with every breath until we have passed the difficulty.

Nature has no voids however, this means that if (and that's a very big if), we choose to deny the existence of God then our conscience will demand something else upon which to value our existence. If God is simply a human invention then the next rational question would be "what are the other viable alternatives"? Could atheism be a reasonable substitute? We ought not to dismiss atheism as just musings. I have given more than a cursory glance to some of the more influential atheists of the past and many of the leading atheists today. Yet, when all is said and done, there are three main reasons why as a Christian I reject an atheistic worldview.

1. Atheism Cannot Answer the Big Questions of Life. Worldviews are

usually validated based on their ability to sufficiently address the four biggest topics that surround our existence. These have taken on many forms however, in the interest of simplicity they are as follows:

- i. Origins – where are we from
- ii. Purpose – why are we here
- iii. Morality – how should we live
- iv. Destiny – where are we going

Maybe I am not as well read as I ought to be, however I am yet to come across any atheistic literature that sufficiently addresses these queries. Sure, there have been many attempts to answer them from a naturalistic point of view, but none of these seems to me more reasonable than explanations offered by theism.

2. Atheism Denies Common Sense. Atheism as a worldview directly contradicts many of our common sense beliefs regarding the world, such as the belief in moral absolutes and the existence of free

will. Instead we find an overkill of arguments for **determinism** which is the idea that everything *past, present & future* has already been written in stone. **Sam Harris**, one of the most outspoken atheists of our time, has written an entire book of arguments in favour of this belief.

Consider for an instant though that the denial of free will raises far more troubling questions than it could ever answer: *Why did Harris bother to write the book, trying to persuade us to reject free will, if everything is already determined? How can anyone be held accountable for a crime? Why give moral praise? How can Harris or anyone else seriously emphasize the virtues of reason, which speaks to a mind capable of reflecting on ideas, if there is no immaterial mind and all beliefs are determined?* This is merely the tip of the iceberg relating to how atheism contradicts common sense. In its search for consistency, atheism as a worldview grossly undermines a plethora of the very things that make life meaningful.

3. Atheism as a Worldview Lacks Hope. Fundamental to humanity is the idea of objective purpose, human value, and life after death. According to **Carl Sagan**, the Cosmos is the only thing that truly exists. While French atheist **Sartre** observed, once we lose eternity the *amount* of time we have is meaningless. Yet his solution is to create meaning by simply choosing a certain course of action. **Bertrand Russell** on that same note intimated that we should build our lives upon the "*firm foundation of*

unyielding despair." Essentially, we should *pretend* that the universe has meaning, which is really just an exercise in self-delusion.

For the record, my saying that atheism lacks hope does not render it as being false. Could it be that our deep-seated desire for hope and meaning is a pointer, as offered by **C.S. Lewis**, to the existence of real hope and meaning?

As a thinking human [Christian] it is natural to doubt, to question and to explore. However, until atheism provides satisfying answers to the big questions of life; matches our common sense beliefs about the world, and provides hope, there is in my mind no reason to embrace it.

By Kwame A. Thomas

Institutional Rights

Recently, there have been situations in which institutional rights have been the subject of extensive commentary or debate. These include:

1. The American Embassy's decision to hoist a flag on their premises in Jamaica in solidarity with the victims of an attack on an LGBT nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

2. The reported stance of the Andrews Memorial Hospital that its employees should be held to certain moral standards.

3. The censoring of Doug Batchelor by the Florida Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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