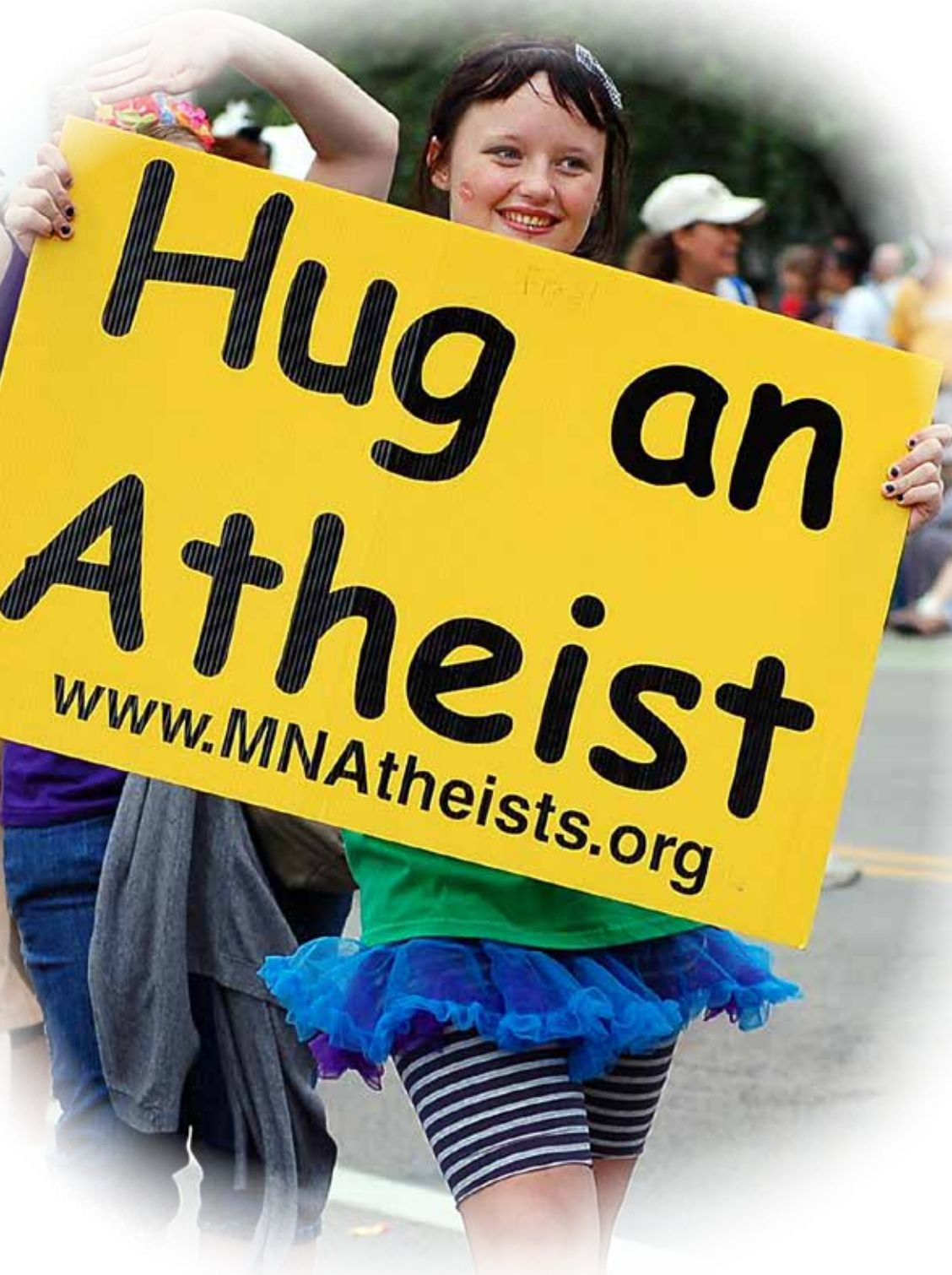


InsideLife

**The 'New Atheists'
and the God Controversy**



**Caring for
Creation**

**Science
and
Faith**

**Four
Things
You Can
Learn from
Your Child**

**Issue 22
Your FREE Copy**

CONTENTS

3 The 'New Atheists' and the God Controversy

9 Science and Faith

10 Atheist Recommends God

12 Three Cheers!

14 Caring for Creation

15 Four Things You Can Learn from Your Child

Inside Life

PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750
Phone: 09 489 8910

Email: insidelife@gci.org.nz
Website: www.insidelife.org.nz

Editor: Rex Morgan
Graphic Design: Philip Baldwin
Printed by Inkprint Ltd

Inside Life is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve inside the marvellous mystery that is life, to discover what it is all about. What does life mean? Where did it come from? How can we make the most of it?

Inside Life provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help, and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.

Inside Life is published three times a year, free of charge, as a community service.
© Grace Communion International 2014.
All rights reserved.
ISSN: 1177-3693

Our Cover: *Minnesota Atheists march in the Twin Cities Gay Pride Parade on 26 June 2011 in Minneapolis, USA. 'New Atheism', also called 'militant' or 'aggressive' atheism, advocates that religion should not simply be tolerated but should be criticised, countered, and even suppressed by force. A flagship book of this movement is Richard Dawkins's The God Delusion. Our lead article gives a Christian response to this book.*

Photo Credits

Cover ID 20061235 © Michael Rubin | Dreamstime.com
p. 3 © David Shankbone: Richard Dawkins Darwin's Rottweiler
p. 4 #68324030 | dollarphotoclub.com
p. 5 Dennis Gordon
p. 6 #69736475 | dollarphotoclub.com
p. 9 #69769428 | dollarphotoclub.com
p. 10 #54704744 | dollarphotoclub.com
p. 11 #32229044 | dollarphotoclub.com
p. 12 #15495161 | dollarphotoclub.com
p. 13 ID 19292431 © John Kropewnicki | Dreamstime.com
p. 14 Philip Baldwin
p. 15 #59146889 | dollarphotoclub.com
#71345035 | dollarphotoclub.com

The 'New Atheists' and the God Controversy

By Dennis Gordon

Just lately it feels like open season on Christianity. This has long been the case in parts of the world liberated—or still waiting to be liberated—from communism, and the past 20 years have seen a dramatic increase in the persecution of Christians in countries or states dominated by Muslims, Hindus, and even Buddhists. But now even in the western world, in countries with a long-standing Christian tradition, attitudes to Christianity have moved from indifference to open disrespect and even ridicule.

Print and entertainment media frequently portray the Christian laity and clergy as quirky, hypocritical, lacking integrity, or otherwise flawed (the 2006 movie *Amazing Grace*, which documented William Wilberforce's 26-year-long parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade, which ended in 1807, was a stunning exception). Christianity, and religion in general, are presented as ignorant, irrelevant, or worse, dangerous, offering nothing of substance or relevance to the real world, nothing historically truthful or reliable. An incarnate God? Crucified and resurrected from the dead? Come on, who are you kidding? It follows from this general spirit of unbelief that Christianity cannot ultimately have anything meaningful to say about the significance and purpose of life, about relationships, about morality.

Symptomatic of this malaise is the 2006 book by British atheist Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, as well as books in similar vein by Dawkins's 'New Atheist' colleagues Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens



Richard Dawkins at New York City's Cooper Union to discuss his book *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* on 29 September 2010.

(among others). 'New Atheism' is a social and political movement in favour of atheism and secularism, advocating the view that 'religion should not simply be tolerated but should be countered, criticised, and exposed by rational argument wherever its influence arises'.¹

The impact of New Atheist writers continues to be felt. Dawkins, for example, hates religion, any religion, and he leaves no stone unturned in

marshalling evidence that supports his contention that religion, including Christianity, is pathological. He has some biting judgements on certain non-Christian religions, but one gets the impression that he was using his book as an opportunity to bludgeon the faith of his own Judeo-Christian culture, the very one that, ironically, nourished the science that he regards so highly and the democratic freedom that now allows him to attack the Bible. For Dawkins,

the God concept is a virus that infects otherwise healthy minds.

Dawkins invents his own definitions of faith in order to attack and demolish them. Faith is 'blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence',² a 'process of non-thinking',³ and 'evil, precisely because it requires no justification, brooks no argument'.⁴ These are not Christian definitions, but Dawkins makes no distinction between religions. He is right to express concern about indoctrination of children (which he regards as child abuse) but his arguments

apply equally to non-religious ideologies. He is highly selective in his illustrations. His tactic is to present the 'pathological as if it were normal, the fringe as if it were the centre, crackpots as if they were mainstream', as one commentary has noted.⁵

Criticism of the Old Testament God...

If Dawkins is to be believed, the Bible is one of the two most toxic books on the planet (the other being the Quran). Further, 'The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction:

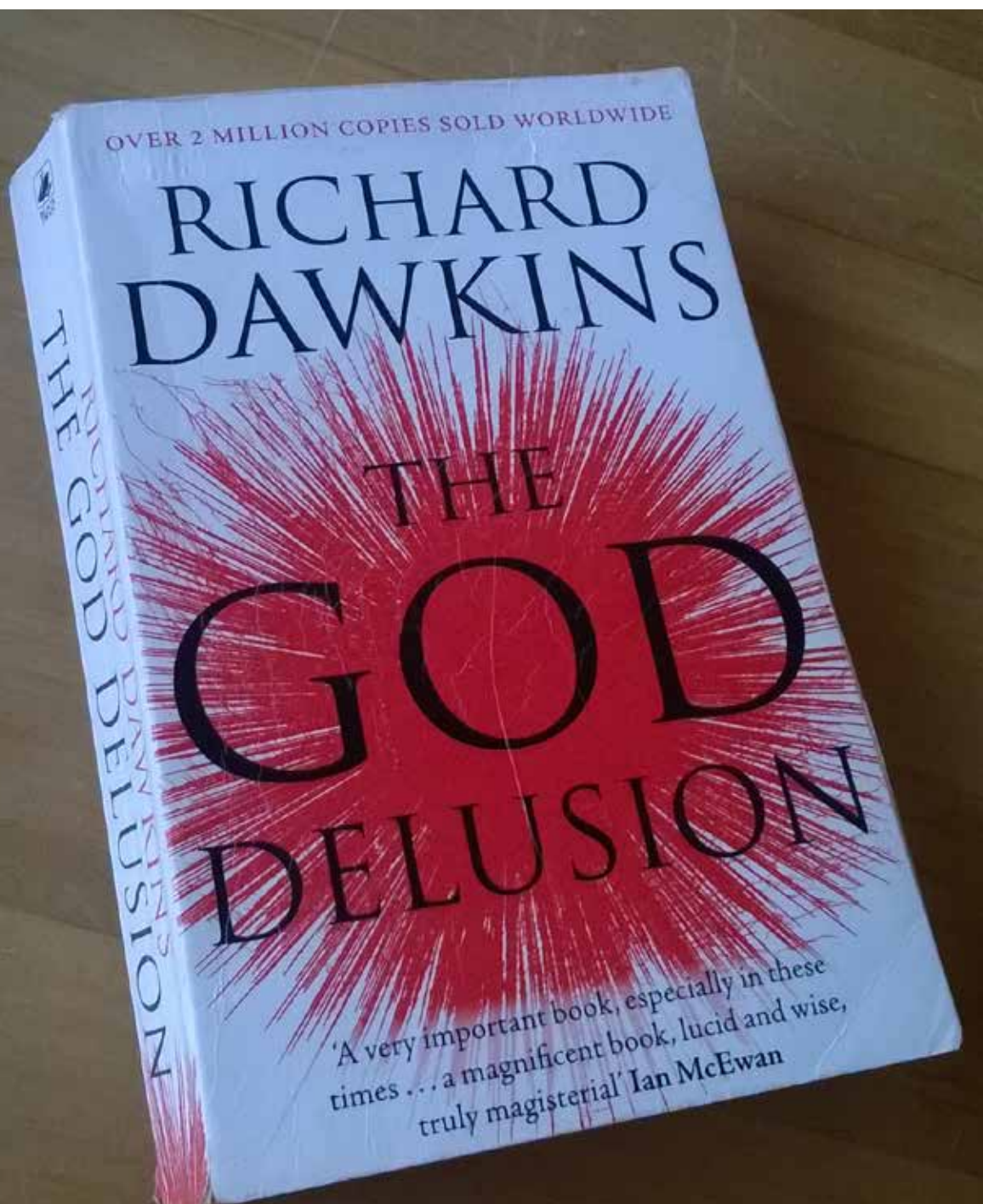
jealous and proud of it; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filocidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sado-masochistic, capriciously malevolent bully'.⁶

In support, he quotes Thomas Jefferson: 'The Christian God is a being of terrific character—cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust'.⁷ Concerning a source of morality, he states that we can follow the instruction of the Ten Commandments or God as a role model, but both routes, he avers, 'encourage a system of morals which any civilised modern person, whether religious or not, would find—I can put it no more gently—obnoxious'.⁸

To support his contention, he does a potted history of the Pentateuch and Joshua (but not the Prophets and their calls for social justice), wherein he reveals his profound ignorance of the biblical books, the historical-cultural context in which they were written, and their literary brilliance. He fails to understand, in his selection of outrageous incidents from Scripture, that, far from describing God's nature, they illustrate or mirror human nature, and that in Jesus we see the true nature of God revealed.

In their book, *The Dawkins Delusion?*, scientist-theologian Alister McGrath (Professor of

Inside Life





Historical Theology at Oxford University) and Joanna McGrath (Lecturer in the Psychology of Religion at the University of London) explain:

Historically, it is important to appreciate that these ancient texts arose within a people who were fighting to maintain their group or national identity in the face of onslaughts from all sides, who were making sense of their situation in relation to a God about whose nature their thinking became more and more developed in the millennium over which the material that makes up these Scriptures was being produced and...the external criterion for dealing with the interpretation of these texts is...the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.⁹

...and the New Testament Jesus

But Jesus and the New Testament do not get off lightly, either. Jesus' ethics are asserted to apply only to his Jewish in-group and Dawkins mischievously accuses Jesus of encouraging his disciples to

abandon their families in order to follow him—like some modern cult leaders. By virtue of the crucifixion, he regards the concept of atonement as 'vicious, sado-masochistic and repellent'¹⁰ and 'barking mad'.¹¹ Can Dawkins be deliberately ignorant that Jesus taught us to love even our enemies? And in this fact lies the paradox of the crucifixion, which few have explained as well as the late William Barclay:

Before Jesus came no man knew what God was like; men thought of God as king and judge, as justice and holiness, as wrath and vengeance; but they never conceived of the supreme wonder of the love of God. So in Jesus Christ God comes to men, and he says: 'I love you like that'. When we see Jesus healing the sick, feeding the hungry, being the friend of outcasts and sinners, this is God saying: 'I love you like that'... And, if Jesus had stopped before the cross, it would have meant that there was some point beyond which the love of God would not go...It means that God in Jesus Christ

says: 'You can betray me; you can hate me; you can misjudge me; you can scourge me; you can crucify me; and nothing you can do can alter my love...'

He died to show men what God is always like, not that he should threaten us into a prudential response, but that at the sight of him we should be moved and compelled to love him as he first loved us.¹²

Isn't that what 'amazing grace' is all about? It is God's love, in conjunction with the notion of justice served for humanity's appalling track record of violence, that makes the concept of substitutionary atonement comprehensible.

Dawkins finds it near impossible to concede that religion, including Christianity, has contributed anything positive to the human enterprise. This blindness in the face of abundant historical evidence and common sense leads him to make stupid and mean-spirited assertions, like: 'Sacred music and devotional paintings largely monopolised mediaeval and



Renaissance talent',¹³ as though religion curbed creativity and that there were abundant other outlets for it. On the contrary, monastic communities, the antecedents of the first universities in Europe, evolved into places of writing, learning, and the arts, attracting some of the best and most cultivated minds and talents. It was out of devotion to God, empowered by inspiration, insight, and responsiveness to the highest ideals, that complex harmonies, melody, and musical notation were invented or perfected. One of Dawkins's devotees, Professor M.K. Jain of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Delaware, has made the equally ignorant, and insulting, statement: 'The very construct of Truth or God stifles reason, thought, inspiration, and imagination'.¹⁴ It's remarkable how some atheists can be so one-eyed while claiming to be objective scholars.

Limits of Science

Dawkins has such a high view of science that he seems unable to

accept that it may have limits or that there are questions science cannot answer. In a chapter titled 'Why there almost certainly is no God', he rejects all traditional arguments and 'proofs' from nature for the existence of God, which of course he is right to do, for God cannot be proven as though he were a mere scientific equation or something to be demonstrated by physical tools.

Jesus himself reminded us that 'God is spirit', to be 'worshipped in spirit'.¹⁵ This is made possible by the indwelling Spirit of God, who makes God known relationally,¹⁶ but how can an atheist understand or accept this? Dawkins and other atheists are bold enough to offer us a new set of Ten Commandments, but as philosopher Noam Chomsky, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has remarked:

On the ordinary problems of human life, science tells us very little, and scientists as people are surely no guide. In fact they are often the worst guide, because they often tend

to focus, laser-like, on their professional interests and know very little about the world.¹⁷

God is rejected by Dawkins as being 'very, very improbable'¹⁸ but his argument is weak. It turns along these lines: our own existence is highly improbable, but since a creator God must be even more complex to have created us, then his existence must be even more improbable. Curiously, it appears that one of the major reasons he rejects God as a Prime Mover or First Cause is because there is no way to explain where God came from—'Who designed the designer?'

'The theist's answer is deeply unsatisfying, because it leaves the existence of God unexplained.'¹⁹ For Dawkins, this is a problem. But it is hardly likely that a scientifically explicable God would be God. The 'I AM' God of the Bible claims to be the intrinsically self-existent Being that is eternal and unchanging and from which all things proceed—which is at least a philosophically logical claim concerning an astonishingly

information-rich and otherwise inexplicable universe—but this God also claims to be spiritually and relationally knowable and this is the experience of billions around the world. Dawkins is so convinced that science has completely disproved God, he cannot understand why so many scientists are religious. He is certain that atheism is the only option for the thinking person. But the fact is, as the McGraths point out, nature is ‘open to many legitimate interpretations...atheist, deist, theist, and many other ways’.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, Dawkins’s book has raised the ire of many critics, and not just religious scholars. Distinguished atheist philosopher Michael Ruse (Professor of Philosophy and Zoology at Florida State University) reported that *The God Delusion* makes him embarrassed to be an atheist.²¹ Other atheists, like Scott Atran, an anthropologist and psychology professor at the University of Michigan, have also pointed out the deficiencies in knowledge and scholarship in Dawkins’s book.²² But Dawkins has an enthusiastic following and has convinced many by his arguments, to the point where, amazingly, he is being cited as an authority on the subject of religion!²³

We may ask, ‘What are we all here for? What is the point of living?’ Rationalist Peter Medawar concedes science cannot answer these questions.²⁴ But Dawkins will have none of this. Without hesitation he asserts that we are not ‘here’ for anything, that our existence has no ultimate point or purpose, regardless of how we came to be. Likewise American astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson confidently proclaimed on the recent *Cosmos* series on television (quoting the late Carl Sagan): ‘The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be’. But how can he possibly know? It is as much a metaphysical claim as the Judeo-Christian claim of the ‘I AM’ God.

You are invited to come and meet the sponsors of *Inside Life!*

Grace Communion International services are held weekly in the following locations:

Auckland: The Mt. Eden Senior Citizens’ Club Hall, Balmoral
(corner Dominion Rd and Brixton Rd)
Saturdays at 2.00 pm.

Contact: Rex Morgan, ph. 09 489 8910

Rotorua: Contact Peter Lindop, ph. 07 349 2272

Wellington: “Thumbs Up” Hall
5 Elizabeth Street, Petone
(access via Silbery Place carpark)

Saturdays at 2:30 pm.

Contact: Dennis Gordon, ph. 04 386 2094

Invercargill: Contact: Les Evans, ph. 03 218 7020

Small groups meet regularly in other NZ locations nationwide.

For details, contact Dennis Richards,
ph. 06 353 6224 or visit www.gci.org.nz

Dawkins seems blind to the reality of human nature. In his worldview, all religion is evil and when it is removed from the world we can all live in peace! He seems to believe that all religion necessarily leads to violence, as though religion were its root cause. (Compare Atran, who writes: ‘...if religion is primarily about what ought to be, including moral framing that convinces people to commit to others beyond the logic and evidence for advancing self-interest, then conflict is not inevitable’).²⁵

On the other hand, Dawkins naively presents atheism as benign, as though Soviet, Maoist, and Khmer Rouge purges never existed, that churches and synagogues weren’t razed, and that, throughout the atheistic communist world, children weren’t (and aren’t) indoctrinated in a worldview that subjugates the individual in favour of the state. Dawkins argues that, yes, the leaders of these purges may have been atheists, but they didn’t do evil things in the name of atheism, and asks (seriously!), ‘Why would anyone go to war for the sake of an absence of belief?’ Bizarrely,

Hitler is portrayed as having been religiously motivated, just because he claimed in several speeches (1922 and subsequently) that he was a Christian (Catholic). Ironically, although Dawkins rightly rails against mind control (citing Islamic persecution of anyone who would dare convert to another religion), in his brave new world (which clearly would be very controlling), the teaching of any religious concepts and precepts would be forbidden, science and ‘rationality’ would rule, we would all confidently face a purposeless future with equanimity, and presumably we would have no reason to go to war against one another! Now really, who is deluded?

The Christian Response

So, how should theists respond to Dawkins and the other New Atheists? Well, definitely not like the nominal Christian who wrote (to another atheist, but Dawkins quotes him): ‘Satan worshipping scum...Please die and go to hell...I hope you get a painful disease like rectal cancer and die a slow painful death, so you can meet your God,

SATAN'.²⁷ Expletives abound in the rest of this invective.

Surely grace must prevail, especially in wrestling with contrary views. I think of an interesting remark that the late Oxford University academic and lay theologian C. S. Lewis made through a fictional character in *That Hideous Strength*, the third novel of his Perelandra Trilogy. In the household of Dr Ransom is an Ulsterman, MacPhee, whose contrariness can be irritating to other members of the household (and the reader). In defence, Ransom comments: 'He is our sceptic; a very important office'.²⁸

The fact is, Dawkins scores some hits—not difficult to do when much silliness and patently unscriptural beliefs and practices exist in the collective enterprise known as Christianity. Was it wise for an Ohio family to send their 12-year-old son to school with a T-shirt reading 'Homosexuality is a sin, Islam is a lie, abortion is murder. Some issues are just black and white!'²⁹ The school told him not to wear the T-shirt and the boy's parents sued the school. Misplaced zeal, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse, power plays, sectarianism, and other expressions of human nature, plus the rejection of modern science in some parts of the evangelical world do not reflect the teachings of Jesus.

A pithy summary statement of Dawkins's book is that of Terry Eagleton, Professor of English Literature at Manchester University:

Dawkins, as one the best of liberals as well as one of the worst, has done a magnificent job over the years of speaking out against that particular strain of psychopathology known as fundamentalism, whether Texan or Taliban. He is right to repudiate the brand of mealy-mouthed liberalism which believes that one has to respect other people's silly or obnoxious ideas just because they are other people's....The book is full of vivid vignettes of

the sheer horrors of religion, fundamentalist or otherwise. Nearly 50 per cent of Americans believe that a glorious Second Coming is imminent, and some of them are doing their damndest to bring it about. But Dawkins could have told us all this without being so appallingly bitchy about those of his scientific colleagues who disagree with him, and without being so theologically illiterate. He might also have avoided being the second most frequently mentioned individual in his book—if you count God as an individual.³⁰

In the end, the God controversy is nothing new. It is as old, in fact, as the tension that existed between two brothers—Cain and Abel. Abel had a 'god-consciousness'; Cain did not. Feeling alienated from something he did not understand, Cain, the non-religious one, grew in hostility towards his brother and ended up taking his life.³¹

Perhaps there is a lesson here.

Notes

- ¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Atheism
- ² Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 198, cited in A. McGrath and J.C. McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), p. 17
- ³ McGrath and McGrath, p. 17
- ⁴ Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston, MA and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), p. 308
- ⁵ McGrath and McGrath, p. 22
- ⁶ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 31
- ⁷ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 31
- ⁸ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 237
- ⁹ McGrath and McGrath, p. 90.
- ¹⁰ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 253
- ¹¹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 253
- ¹² William Barclay, *The Plain Man Looks at the Apostles' Creed* (London & Glasgow: Collins, Fontana, 1967), pp. 331-332
- ¹³ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 164
- ¹⁴ M.K. Jain, 'Unleashing thought: taming brawn, grunt, and smarts. A review of *Before the Dawn: Recovering the Lost History of Our Ancestors* by Nicholas Wade, *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 82 (2007): pp. 131-139

- ¹⁵ John 4:24
- ¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 12:3b; 1 John 3: 24b
- ¹⁷ 'An Edge Discussion of Beyond Belief: Science, Religion, Reason and Survival', Salk Institute, La Jolla, (November 5-7, 2006). www.edge.org/discourse/bb.html [Accessed 16 March 2008].
- ¹⁸ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 109
- ¹⁹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 143
- ²⁰ McGrath and McGrath, p. 45
- ²¹ Quoted on the dust-jacket of *The Dawkins Delusion?* and in publishers' blurbs.
- ²² See 'An Edge Discussion'
- ²³ See Jain.
- ²⁴ Peter B. Medawar, *The Limits of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 66
- ²⁵ S. Atran, 'The Nature of Belief, A Review of Six Impossible Things before Breakfast: the Evolutionary Origins of Belief by Lewis Wolpert', *Science* 317 (2007): p. 456
- ²⁶ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 278
- ²⁷ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 212
- ²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (London: The Bodley Head, 1945), p. 184
- ²⁹ This was widely reported. See for example 'Court Sides with Student, OKs Wearing T-shirt to School Saying 'Homosexuality Is Sin. Islam Is a Lie. Abortion Is Murder'', *The Huffington Post* (24 August 2005). www.huffingtonpost.com/2005/08/24/court-sides-with-student-n6153.html [Accessed 21 March 2008]
- ³⁰ T. Eagleton, 'Lunging, flailing, mispunching: A review of Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, *London Review of Books* (19 October 2006). www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n20/eag01.html [Accessed 21 March 2008]
- ³¹ Genesis 4: 2-8; Hebrews 11: 4; 1 Jn 3:12



Dr Dennis Gordon FLS is a biodiversity scientist at a Crown Research Institute in Wellington. His specialist research includes the study of fossil marine organisms from

the Cretaceous to the present day. He edited the recently published three-volume *Inventory of New Zealand Biodiversity* and has been a member of the international project team of the online *Catalogue of Life*. He is an Associate Member of the UK-based Society of Ordained Scientists, served on the Council of Wellington Churches as Deputy Chairman, and teaches courses on specific books of the Bible at the Wellington Pacific Bible College.

Science & Faith

By Joseph Tkach

What is happening at the leading edge of science is fascinating. Why shouldn't it be? There is a paradox in scientific investigation and achievement today. As we push the frontiers of scientific knowledge further into outer space and deeper into inner space, we begin to realise the limits of what we currently know.

The very last sentence of Stephen Hawking's book, *A Brief History of Time*, says: 'If we find the answer [to why the universe exists], it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—for then we would know the mind of God'.

This does not mean that Hawking is looking for God. He uses the term 'God' as a metaphor for what science does not yet understand. Hawking, along with many of the world's leading physicists, is investigating what is called the Grand Unified Theory, the underlying principle that links all forces in the universe.

Although I am not a scientist, I find what is happening at the leading edge of science fascinating. And why shouldn't it be? As the first verse of Psalm 19 says: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands'. That was written about three thousand years ago, in a time when we had a very rudimentary understanding of the workings of the cosmos. How much more fascinating is it today when we have an even greater grasp of the nature of our universe?

Even scientists who are atheists admit that the magnificence of the creation fills them with awe, even if it

does not lead them to acknowledge its creator. But what it should do, at the very least, is to make them think twice before making bold statements about there being no God. And their reflections may even lead them to a more profound discovery about what, or who, transcends nature.

There is an active paradox in scientific investigation and achievement today. As we push the frontiers of scientific knowledge further into outer space and deeper into inner space, we begin to realise the limits of what we currently know. Things we thought to have nailed down, may no longer be the case. We discovered the universe was expanding, but believed the rate of expansion was slowing down. Now, scientists believe it is actually speeding up. The scientists working at the Hadron Super Collider in Geneva may be on the verge of discovering things that could turn our understanding of physics on its head. The creation does seem to be, as various astronomers and physicists have observed, not only stranger than we had imagined, but stranger than we could ever imagine. There is a mystery even to creation itself that transcends human knowing.

Of course, this, of itself, neither proves nor disproves that God exists. That is a question beyond science. God cannot be measured by scientific instruments. There is no microscope, no telescope, no micrometre, no measuring device that can measure God. God transcends his creation. God is not a created thing, and creation is not an extension of God's being. Real knowledge of God himself depends upon God's own self-revelation.

Long before the scientific age, the writer of the Book of Job shrewdly observed: 'We'll never comprehend all the great things he does; his miracle-surprises can't be counted'. (Job 9:10 The Message)

To those who know him, like the Psalmist, even God's actions in creation remain a mystery beyond human comprehension. However, that does not mean we should not try to understand the mysteries of creation. It is sad that many Christians see scientific discovery as a threat. But why should they regard it as a danger? Yes, some may use certain selective bits of scientific information about creation to counter Christian beliefs about God. But God, by his Spirit, may use someone's desire to look into the mysteries of creation to open them up to searching for the mystery behind creation. And for those who know God in Christ, appreciating the wonders of creation will help us, like Job, recall the wisdom, power, and creativity of our Lord. Truth is truth, and something that is true about creation cannot ultimately contradict something that is true about its Creator.

Scientific discovery, when properly interpreted, can show us more of God's handiwork. And faith in that God, when properly understood can show us that the Creator is not only powerful beyond our imagination, but has a love for us that is not only greater than we understand, but greater than we can even imagine.

This is a transcript of the weekly 'Speaking of Life' radio programme by Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International. For more information visit www.gci.org.

Atheist Recommends God

By Rusty Wright &
Meg Korpi

The headline in *The Times of London* grabs your attention: 'As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God'.

The tagline is even more pointed: 'Missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa's biggest problem, the crushing passivity of the people's mindset'.

What kind of atheist is this? Matthew Parris, *Times* writer, award-winning author, and former Member of Parliament, is not your typical atheist.

Atheists and Agnostics Unite!

Recent projects promoting atheism or agnosticism

include best-selling books: Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, Sam Harris's *The End of Faith*, and Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great*. Bill Maher's film *Religulous* calls 'anti-religionists' to unite against religion's dangers and 'enshrine...rationality'.

In Illinois and Washington state capitols, the 'Freedom from Religion Foundation' countered government-sanctioned Christmas nativity displays with signs declaring religion false, heart-hardening, and mind-enslaving.

It is unusual for an atheist to write favourably about faith. What led Parris to his surprising conclusion?

Reluctant Observation

Parris grew up in Africa, and returned recently to cover a non-governmental development organisation for *The Times*.

The NGO, Pump Aid, helps provide clean water to rural communities.

The organisation is secular, but several of its 'most impressive' African representatives are devoted followers of Jesus. Their character evoked memories for Parris:

Travelling in Malawi refreshed [a] belief...

I've been trying to banish all my life, but an

o b s e r v a t i o n

I've been unable to avoid since

my African childhood.

It con-
founds my

ideo-
logical beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my worldview, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.

Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects, and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good'.¹

Interestingly, Parris's carefully considered conclusion, based on empirical observations across Africa, resonates with biblical statements: Jesus told a first-century leader: 'You must be born again...of the Spirit'.² Paul, an early skeptic-turned believer, affirmed: 'Anyone who belongs to Christ has become

a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!³

How It Liberates

Parris emphasises Christianity's impact on the individual, beyond the good works it spawns. Living in Africa, he observed 'the Christians were always different'. Their faith seemed to have 'liberated and relaxed them'. They exhibited a liveliness, curiosity, engagement, and directness that seemed absent in traditional African life. The Christian Pump Aid workers he met stood out for their honesty, diligence, and optimism.

Parris bemoans tribalism for fostering an attitude of fear and 'exaggerated respect for a swaggering leader'. He credits Christianity's emphasis on a direct, personal relationship with God for encouraging an individuality that can help 'cast off a crushing tribal groupthink. That is why and how it liberates'.

Whoa! Christianity engenders individuality and frees the mind? Is this the same Christianity that some criticise for breeding a herd mentality among undiscerning followers—something like 'a crushing groupthink'?

Actually, it isn't. Parris specifies Christianity based on a personal relationship with God. He observes that such Christianity 'smashes... through' the traditional collective mindset. No surprise. Jesus overturned Temple tables and blasted religious leaders for supplanting God's ways with their own. Criticisms of Christianity/ religion as mind-enslaving and heart-hardening likely characterise devotees—and there are many—tainted by misguided thinking or

misplaced devotion, not led by the biblical God.

Though atheists and Christians might debate the mechanism, atheist Parris finds the fact undeniable: when God is personal, Christianity changes African hearts, lives, and communities for the better.

Notes

¹ Parris's article can be accessed through www.timesonline.co.uk.

² John 3:7–8

³ 2 Corinthians 5:17

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. His work is distributed through Rusty Wright Communications.

Meg Korpi is senior research scientist with the Character Research Institute. She holds a PhD from Stanford University, and has lived on four continents, including Africa.

Three Cheers!

By Aubrey Warren

This past weekend I joined 10,000 other people for the annual Gold Coast half marathon (another 5,000 did the full marathon, and thousands of others the 10k, 5k, or wheelchair races). It's a great weekend on the beautiful Gold Coast in winter.

I was again struck by the role the spectators play in this event. All the way along the route people clapped, cheered, and encouraged the runners along. Many obviously knew someone who was running, but many were doing it just to be part of the event and lend support. Some held signs ('Go mum!' ... 'Your feet hurt because you're kicking so much butt' ... 'You look so hot' ... 'Why do all the cute ones run away?' ... 'The end is near'). Some played music, and some just yelled encouragement. One lady was leading a small group who were clapping everyone who ran by around the 15k mark and called out: 'Your feet hurt from running; our hands hurt from clapping'.

So, with nothing but kilometres in front of me, I thought a bit about the role of 'cheerleading' in the workplace.

And my first thought was how ghastly the idea would seem to a lot of people. So, let's quickly dispense with the notion of having to be an Energiser Bunny personality or insincerely applauding mediocrity for some sort of 'feel good' effect. Rather, it's about the essential 'encouragement' factor that leadership provides—in a whole range of ways and styles.

Cheerleading has a negative connotation for many of us, implying a manufactured and superficial sense of enthusiasm or support.

Its history in a sporting sense goes back to American football in 1869, but it now extends to many other nations and has become a sporting competition in its own right. The purpose of the cheerleaders (or 'yell leaders' as they were originally known) was to engage the crowd in enthusiastic support for their team to encourage victory.

Whether or not you're a cheerleading fan, you know that if you're the one being cheered on in a tough game or race or project, it does make a difference. It's 'en-courage-ing' when the going is tough, mundane, or just long and tiring.

Every time I run a race I appreciate the expressions of support from race spectators and notice how—in apparently small ways—they encourage the runners to hang in there, keep going, or just bring a smile to our faces with their humorous signs. (When you're a long way from the finish line and the muscles are complaining, it feels great to laugh.) From an individual clapping to a group chanting cheers to someone holding a sign, their efforts provide a sense of occasion and encouragement. It's very different to simply being out on a solo training run. And if you've ever been a spectator cheering on runners or players, you know how it not only makes you feel good, but connects you to the game, the race, the event, and to the people who are playing or running.

So, here are 'three cheers' to consider in the context of 'encourage-ing' leadership:

The Cheering Leader

'Followers need to feel significant', Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones remind us in *Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?* 'Social psychologists have

made repeated pronouncements on this profound human need for recognition. So it is remarkable how often as individuals we seem to want it but not give it.' Cheerleaders make a point of emphasising the achievements, strengths, and efforts of those on the field or in the race. They don't seem to spend too much time booing, looking exasperated, or complaining. It's important to regularly acknowledge—sometimes privately, sometimes publicly—the achievements and contributions of those who work with us. We all know how easy it is to feel taken for granted.

The Leader of Cheers

'Cheers!' is a shorthand for 'to your health', an expression used in many cultures and languages. Noting the practice of people everywhere to hold national, cultural, community, and family celebrations, Jack Kouzes and Barry Poser (*The Leadership Challenge*) note that 'Celebrations are among the most significant ways we have to proclaim our respect and gratitude, to renew our sense of community, and to remind ourselves of the values and history that bind us together. Celebrations serve as important a purpose in the long-term health of our organisations, as does the daily performance of tasks'. Leadership is about creating community: interestingly, another thing Goffee and Jones note that we look for in our work.)

Cheerleaders at a game create a sense of celebration, harnessing the emotional energy of supporters. Even in informal situations like a race, one or two people cheering on anonymous runners will often encourage others to join in the cheering or clapping, creating both a sense of community through encouraging participation. What



this creates is a positive, motivating environment. Creating a culture of celebration and appreciation can be an important feature of effective leadership and organisational health.

The Cheer-ful Leader

Cheerleaders are, by definition, cheerful. Which is probably why some of us react negatively to formalised cheer-leading as manufactured enthusiasm. Realistically, we aren't all naturally cheerful (or at least, not obviously and expressively so) and don't want our leaders to be full of cheer all the time: it could quickly wear thin! But we don't want the opposite either, and we do all need signs of positivity on a regular basis; we look to those who express confidence and energy, whether that's expressed gregariously and publicly, or more quietly and personally. We read leaders' behaviours and moods and we know that 'emotional contagion' is as real in workplaces, as much as in sports teams. In *Primal Leadership*, Daniel Goleman cites a study of 62 CEOs and their management teams that 'found that the more positive the overall moods of people in the top management team, the more cooperatively they worked together—and the better the company's business results'. Whatever our temperament or personality, our moods—and how others experience them—matter for the 'good cheer' of our companies.

No doubt there is a cheerleading role for those in formal roles of leadership. But anyone anywhere can lead through cheering others on or just being cheerful. Just like the people on the side of the running course. So, whatever your style of cheerleading, thank you for the positive difference you make. 'Cheers!'

© Pacific Training & Development, 2013. Used with permission. For more information about leadership and team development, communication training or accredited coaching go to www.pacific.qld.edu.au or call +61 7 5553 6060.

The Biblical Mandate for CARING for CREATION

DICK TRIPP



"... a detailed Biblical approach to the growing crisis in our environment, its causes, the role of the Christian Church and the challenge that lies before us all"
ARCHBISHOP DAVID MOXON

The Biblical Mandate for Caring for Creation by Dick Tripp. Exploring faith today; title no. 23. Wellington: Avery Bartlett Books, 2011. 158 pp. ISBN 978-0-473-19374-4.

Bible in the light of the present fact of Creation'. The environmental and ethical sources that he brings to the issues are largely contemporary and his scriptural references show that he is no flippant 'proof-texter'; rather the weight of the biblical references seems to cry: 'We should know this. How could we have set aside such persuasive evidence from Genesis, the Psalms, and the prophets?' Tripp comments particularly: 'So many of the detailed instructions of the law refer to the use and care of the land, directly or indirectly, that this is easily the most comprehensive of the ethical and theological categories of the law'.²

Two themes remained with me from this impassioned plea for Christians to become 'staunch creationists'.³

The one is Tripp's call to a eucharistic life rather than a consumeristic one: 'Perhaps the greatest reason for caring for the earth is, simply, gratitude'.⁴ The recent film *Interstellar* offers a dystopic prediction of how ungrateful humans are becoming for the beauty and fruitfulness of our world.

The other concerns salvation and redemption: '...if we are to treat our bodies with reverence now because they belong to the Lord and will one day share his glory, surely we must care for creation now for exactly the same reasons'.⁵ Christian environmentalists believe that they are called to care for this world precisely because it will be redeemed along with its inhabitants.

Notes

¹ p. 31

² p. 102

³ p. 144

⁴ p. 144

⁵ p. 132

By Philip Baldwin

Dick Tripp has left his readers in no doubt of the need for urgent attention to the state of our world and its inhabitants. In the first five chapters of *The Biblical Mandate for Caring for Creation* he cogently outlines the growing crisis in climate change, waste and pollution, water contamination, de-forestation, plant and animal extinctions, and desertification. From a NZ perspective, it is particularly chilling to read that American agencies' estimate that 13% of waste comes from agriculture, and 75% comes from mining, oil, and gas production—sectors of the economy where the NZ population continues

to have serious environmental concerns.

One of the most basic causes of our blindness to caring for creation, Tripp argues, is that 'Modern humans, leaving God out of the picture, see themselves as autonomous, accountable to none but themselves....'¹ A brief overview of the modern environmental movement, the positive and negative influences of Christianity on environmentalism, and the growing emphasis on caring for creation in modern Christianity conclude the first part of the book.

Then the author begins a closely reasoned exposition of scripture that leads us 'to read and understand the

Four Things You Can Learn From Your Child



By Jim Rohn

Remember the master teacher once said 2,000 years ago: 'Unless you can become like little children, your chances are zero; you haven't got a prayer'.¹ This is a major consideration for adults.

Be like children, and remember there are four ways to be more like a child no matter how old you get.

1. Curiosity

Be curious; embrace childish curiosity. What will kids do if they want to know something badly enough? You're right. They will bug you. Kids can ask a million questions. You think they're through, then they've got another million; they will keep plaguing you; they can drive you right to the brink.

Kids use their curiosity to learn. Have you ever noticed that while adults are stepping on ants, children are studying them? A child's curiosity is what helps them to reach, learn, and grow.

2. Excitement

Learn to get excited like a child. There is nothing that has more magic than childish excitement: so excited that you hate to go to bed at night, that you can't wait to get up in the morning, that you're about to explode. How can anyone resist that kind of childish magic?

Once in a while I'll meet someone who says: 'Well, I'm a little too mature for all that childish excitement'. Isn't that pitiful? You've got to weep for these people. All I've got to say is: 'If you're too old to get excited, you're old'. Don't get that old.

3. Faith

Faith is childish. How else would you describe it? Some people say: 'Let's be adult about it'. Oh, no. No. Adults too often have a tendency to be overly skeptical. Some adults even have a tendency to be cynical. They say: 'Yeah. I've heard that old positive line before. It will be a long day in June before I fall for that positive line. You've got to prove to me it's any good'. See, that's adult, but kids aren't that way.

Kids think you can get anything. They are really funny. You tell them: 'We're going to have three swimming pools'. And they say: 'Yeah. Three.

One each. Stay out of my swimming pool'. They start dividing them up right away.

But adults are not like that. Adults say: 'Three swimming pools? You're out of your mind. Most people don't even have one swimming pool. You'll be lucky to get a tub in the backyard'. You notice the difference? No wonder the master teacher said: 'Unless you can become like little children, your chances, they're skinny'.¹

4. Trust

Trust is another childish virtue, but it has great merit. Have you heard the expression 'Sleep like a baby'? That's it, childish trust. After you've gotten an A+ for the day, leave it in somebody else's hands. Curiosity, excitement, faith, and trust—that is a powerful combination to bring (back) into our lives.

Notes

¹ A free translation of Matthew 18:2

Reprinted by permission of *SUCCESS Magazine*. All rights reserved.
www.success.com



Visit our website:

www.insidelife.org.nz

to access the articles previously published in **Inside Life**

Important questions covered in previous issues of *Inside Life*:

- ❖ Can we solve the Mind-Body Problem?
- ❖ Does God have favourites?
- ❖ Is there any part of life that does not need a Creator?
- ❖ Why does God allow suffering?
- ❖ Is the Church heading for extinction?
- ❖ What's new about Atheism?
- ❖ Does the Christmas story still matter?

Back copies of these issues are available free of charge from

Inside Life, PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750



Yes, please send me a
FREE subscription to ...

Inside Life

Please send your request to
Inside Life

PO Box 304055
Hauraki Corner
Auckland 0750

Name:	_____
Address:	_____ _____ _____
Phone:	_____
E-mail:	_____

Please include back copies
on the following topics:

This copy of **Inside Life** has been distributed by:



Grace Communion International

Wellington Region

This magazine is freely given as a community service.

Should you have any questions, please feel welcome to contact

Brian, ph. 04 527 8095, email brian@gci.org.nz;

or Dennis, ph. 04 386 2094, email dennis@gci.org.nz