
RELIGION

FEBRUARY 2019



ALETHEIA



ABOUT US

The Aletheia staff chooses topics that pertain to the realities of our high school community. Each issue comprises of: firsthand experiences submitted anonymously by Lynbrook students and alumni, a professional article relating to the theme, and resources compiled by the student staff. Additionally, this issue also features special submissions from parents that can be found near the end of the publication. Finalized issues are distributed in Lynbrook High School, uploaded online, and emailed to our subscribers. Past issues can be found onhsaletheia.com/archive. The content in Aletheia is composed by the students of Lynbrook High School. Ideas and opinions expressed within the publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Aletheia staff or the school administration.

OUR MISSION

Aletheia (a-lay-thee-uh) means "truth" in Greek. We are a student outreach publication that strives to provide a voice for all students at Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Aletheia was created to facilitate communication and overcome stigmas concerning prevalent and taboo issues within Lynbrook.

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Religion is definitely a very large portion of my life. Both my parents are Christian, so I've been following Christianity and going to church my entire life.

Christianity is a part of my monthly, weekly, and even daily life. I meet with my small group once a month, I go to Christian club, youth group, and church every week, and I pray daily. Christianity also effects my life choices. Although I may fail sometimes, I try my best to let my religion be the guiding force in my life. I try to give love, spread joy, have patience, be peaceful, be good, be kind, have faith, be gentle, and have willpower in everything I do. I am a Christian, not just because I was raised as one, but because I know that Jesus died on the cross to save us. The knowledge of his love for me has been an overwhelmingly helpful influence in my life, and I would not be the person I am today without it.

When I was about seven, my parents enrolled me in a Christian summer camp because it was cheap. The summer camp did a good job of balancing fun activities with blatantly religious ones, but as a non-Christian, sitting through a talk about God's love for humanity or some other bullshit like that was painful for me. I did not believe a god existed, and if he did, I had certainly never seen any evidence of his existence. Others' ignorance annoyed me. I couldn't realize how any logical human being could believe, but I dared not voice my opinions. I went through a few brief Christian phases, because sometimes the thought of believing in God enticed me for some reason. I experimented with prayers and prayed for myself, and the people who I knew needed help. Perhaps I was just not doing it the right way, but I felt like all my amen's weren't really going anywhere. By fifth grade, I had given up completely. I shunned all religion and declared it unnecessary.



if religion was real, I wouldn't be gay or at least I wouldn't be ashamed of it. no god would give me this if it's so sinful. no god could be so cruel as to let one of their children be born like this if it was wrong, and yet everyone within the religion I used to follow when I was so young said it was wrong. I've finally decided I don't want to be right. f*ck religion. for me at least, I don't give a damn what anyone else believes in.

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I believe in God, I believe in miracles, and my spiritual beliefs play an important role in my life. The reason I believe in God is because so many things about the universe are so inexplicable. My beliefs give me answers to the hard questions and a moral code to follow.

For me, a lot of questions really cannot be answered without conceding some kind of divine intervention. Why are we here? From a non-spiritual perspective, the best answer you can give is that you are here by chance. Your parents had so many different people in the world to choose from, and if they were to have settled with anyone other than each other, you would not have existed. I believe the way things played out was all by a divine plan. Many people would argue that you're here by random chance, and there is no objective reason for "why." That is a notion that I just cannot absorb.

For similar reason, I believe the stars, the moon, the planets, and the whole universe - are also structured together in accordance to a conscious divine plan.

I do not think the universe
just put itself together,
so perfectly,
by random chance.
...
religion is
warped in ways
beyond
recognition. it should
embrace everyone
but ive been disowned
for being gay
by my entire family.

My beliefs gives me a lot of comfort too, to know that there is a higher power, and that the force who created the universe is looking out for me.

I think faith of some kind gives you a moral code as well. Whether you're a Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Scientologist, whatever - you know what is right and what is wrong, because you believe a higher power has given you moral commandments.

Would it be wrong for a wife to cheat on her husband? I think most people would argue that would be. What is the husband never finds out? If it is still wrong, then why is it wrong? This is not easy to argue without citing to ethics that are taken on faith. To me, the answer is simple. Yes, infidelity is wrong because God told us so.

Why does God let horrible things happen? The answer is simple. I do not know, but this does not discredit His existence. If God knew how to create the heavens and the universe, I think He has a lot more knowledge than any of us do. To get answers on His behalf, or to think you know His intentions, in my opinion, is arrogant.

Not long ago, discussion had arisen between some of my friends about cheating on an exam. The majority of those friends were faithless (which does not make them bad people), and they could not grasp the notion of why I did not want to participate. That was where my spiritual beliefs really played their important role.

Since I hold the belief that God commanded us to be honest, I did not want to participate in a violation of academic integrity.

"I have days on which I make mistakes. At the end of these days,I still know the God who managed to create the heavens and the earth, is also forgiving."

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Yet these stakes were unreachable to me. Try as I might, I could not get ahold of it, lest even imagine it. This failure to understand the core of religion led me to humor the opposite: the people who stand ungrounded but confident, known as atheists. Atheism, I figured, ought to be the correct path for me if nothing religious was reachable for me. I was wrong. Whereas I was not able to cross the chasm to religion, I was not ready to accept the cold nature of atheism. Nor could I prove either was completely correct. This confusing in-between, this lonely feeling of consternation is what agnosticism means to me.

As a high school student, having an agnostic mindset is not a negative thing. In the process of growing, big questions that can be life-changing demand answers that can take years to nurture. In this state, I stand on the beach overlooking the sea, not diving in immediately but also not turning away from it forever.

"My mom was so shocked when I told her I wasn't Christian."

I don't understand, she doesn't seem like someone who genuinely believes in God. She only says things like, "God, help me" when she is in a desperate need of help, but doesn't usually pray. It's like she's a fair weather friend but expects me to be diligently following Christ.

I'm so tired of this happening and I wish I could make some kind of peace with myself so I can just accept the way that things are.

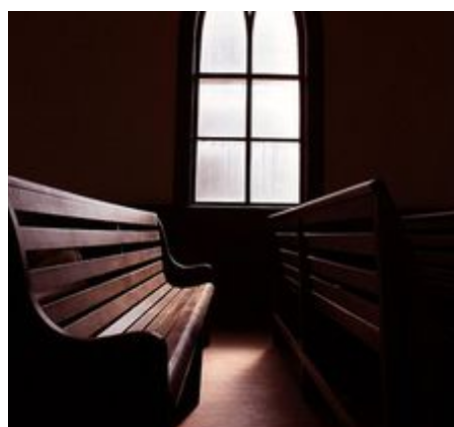
Im not Christian because I have too many questions. How did God let this and this or this happen? Why would God do this? How can you trust someone you can't even physically see? Sure, you see him through "signs" like the "beauty of nature" or something, but how do you justify that he rose from the dead? How can you trust someone that you can't even see? well, maybe if a traumatic event happened and you prayed and something good happened you would believe in God, but that doesn't happen to everyone. How in the world do you believe in someone so much? Because he "died for us"? Where is your proof? (see what i'm talking about)



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The Confusion of Agnosticism

Martin Luther once stated, “God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but on trees and flowers and clouds and stars.” The idea of religion is so deeply entwined with human history that it is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss one without the other. It has been the driving force, in some way or another, in a majority of historical events, ranging from war to healing and everything in between. Great thinkers, such as Anselm and Aquinas, have devoted their lives to venture the great sea that is religion only to wade knee-deep. The depths of religion, although uncharted, influence countless people around the world in their daily life. In the modern era, it ebbs into in every branch of human achievement and productivity.



What does this sea of infinite depth and complexity mean to an outsider such as myself? And how can anyone make a sense out of it if even Anselm and Aquinas merely scratched the surface? As a curious high school student, I strived to find answers to these fascinating questions. I was especially intrigued with peers who were steady believers in their faith. The driving force behind the Crusades or early exploration, something so undyingly important to, for example, ancient Christians, was the very same source of faith for many of my friends. To understand, I hesitantly agreed to attend my Christian friend’s retreat. I wanted to see the purest form of an instance of religion for the first time, but I knew I would observe from an outsider’s perspective.

The retreat was nothing short of eye-opener. There were a couple things I noticed. The most obvious one was how closely knit the church community was. A sizable band of people, each with a different background, profile, and, more noticeably, age supported each other in a community no less close than a family. Their connection, which was their individual beliefs in God, compelled them (sometimes even forced them) to rely on one another through the turbulence of life. Their system was purely a backup system, and a necessary one. In addition, interactions between members lacked the pretense of “normal” talk common in everyday talk. Theirs was a talk that embodied transparency and straightforwardness. Never before had I witnessed such a group of people communicate without some degree of duplicitous intent. My experience at the retreat forced me to search myself for a deeper answer. At the core, I envied the Christians, as I did any person of a religious faith. They were people who had firmly staked themselves to the ground against the howling winds of life.

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* Trigger warning: suicide

Almost a year ago, I was spending the evening lying in bed clicking through Netflix. My parents and sister were out of town and I didn't have much homework to do. While my hazy memory doesn't do my testimony great service, I'll try to explain why that day was the most important of my life. I felt almost light-headed and I saw a figure, who resembled Jesus stretching an arm out to me, I took it. He told me to read the Bible and then He disappeared. I was perplexed and couldn't trust my own eyes. I had been suffering with depression and anxiety for a long time, so I assumed that I was probably just going crazy and seeing things. But, I decided to listen to His advice anyway, since I didn't have anything better to do. I did some research on where to start, and began reading The Epistle of James. Each word resonated deeply with me, but I still had many doubts and fears about Christianity. I also mistakenly believed that other Christians wouldn't accept me, since I came from a family which followed a different religion quite casually, and since I couldn't go to church. I feared what would happen if my parents found out.

...



However, the covenant promises of God which the Bible described were so appealing to me. I was depressed, suffered panic-attacks almost daily, and had survived two suicide attempts. My family thought I was crazy and didn't trust me at all, so the tension in my house made me feel claustrophobic. I had been to therapy and my depression was lessening, but I still had no cure for my crippling anxiety. At the same time, I initially was cautious of eagerly accepting Christianity because I had heard about so many Christians on the news that weren't very nice (homophobes/racists etc.) But after reading through James, and really annotating the epistle thoroughly, I realized that Christianity isn't about following strict guidelines and yelling at atheists/gay people to stop sinning - Christianity is about following the perfect example of Jesus Christ. He warned his followers that bearing the cross would be a difficult, and at times painful/unappealing lifestyle but it was the only way to receive true joy and love from the Everlasting God.

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I read my Bible almost everyday and annotated it thoroughly. I also read Christian books, watched sermons online (Francis Chan is my favorite preacher), and joined a Christian youth organization secretly. I learned so much and my misconceptions were cleared. The reason Christians seem to be over zealous about converting people is because they truly love other people and want them to taste the joy and undying hope they received through Christ. Many people don't really understand why Jesus had to die for our sins or why Christians find that so significant. It's because people before the Crucifixion, were extremely sinful and deserved to go the pits of hell/Sheol(you can read about that in the Old Testament). But, God made a covenant promise to Noah and Abraham that He wouldn't destroy the world again and that He would multiply their descendants like the many grains of sand. But, when the people committed sin, God couldn't just look away(He is a righteous judge). So, He sacrificed Jesus, His only begotten Son, so that all people who believed in Him would metaphorically die along with their sins and rise again through His Resurrection. Also, the stereotype of all Christians being religious bigots is entirely false. We believe that all people are loved children of God and that we are not called to judge but to love. The crazy and homophobic/racist bigots or millionaire preachers you see on TV or read about in history books are not following even the most basic of God's commands. While Christians aren't perfect, we strive continuously to be.

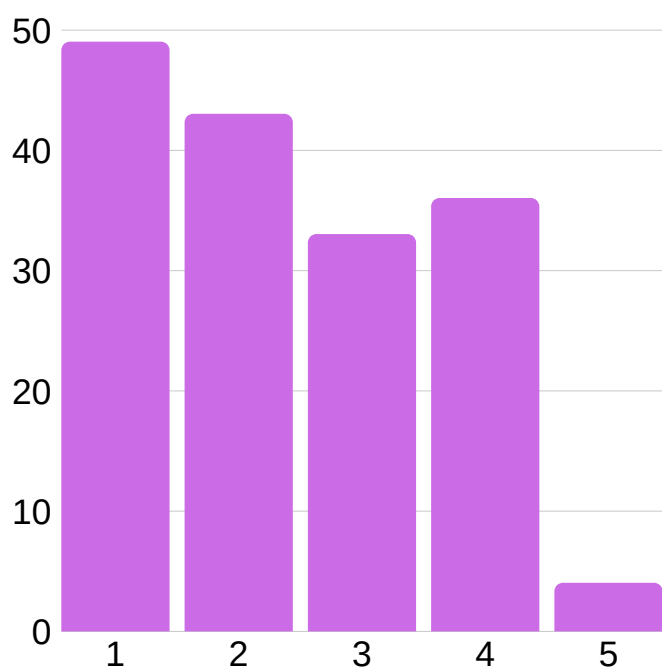
After committing myself to Jesus, I had to change many things about myself. I realized that certain actions/beliefs I had were not in line with what God wanted for me. I read the Gospels, and the Pauline Epistles and learned that while everyone sins (even Christians), I should try my best not to sin and definitely not support sin. So, while I still love everyone and try not to be too judgmental, I had to leave groups/activities which were not in accordance with Christian values. I want to stress that Christians are not homophobic/transphobic, but we simply are called to love our neighbors while not supporting sin. My political views somewhat shifted too. I would consider myself a moderate on politics/economic issues with conservative social beliefs. I used to identify as bi, but now those attractions have completely disappeared. I've changed my way of looking at the world entirely.

Honestly, while I have to deal with the repercussions of not adhering to what liberal society wants me to be, I don't really mind. What I have received, the gift of salvation and an unconditionally loving relationship with God, are far better than being popular and "in fashion." It's definitely hard to live in a society, where being religious is looked down upon and sin is promoted, but I remember that Jesus called us to live in the world, but to not be of the world. So, I will have to struggle to fight off the temptations, but luckily I have a loving, supportive community. I'm also applying to many Christian colleges so hopefully, one day I can come out of the "Christian closet" and truly be open about my faith and develop my spirituality. I'm taking online Bible/theology classes and annotating Scripture as often as I can to catch up with my peers who attended church for years. While I'm not exactly sure of how I will "spread the Gospel to all nations" I know I want to commit my entire life to Jesus. Whether that will be through ministry or through volunteering or teaching, I don't know yet. But, I know I can handle all the trials and temptations of life because "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

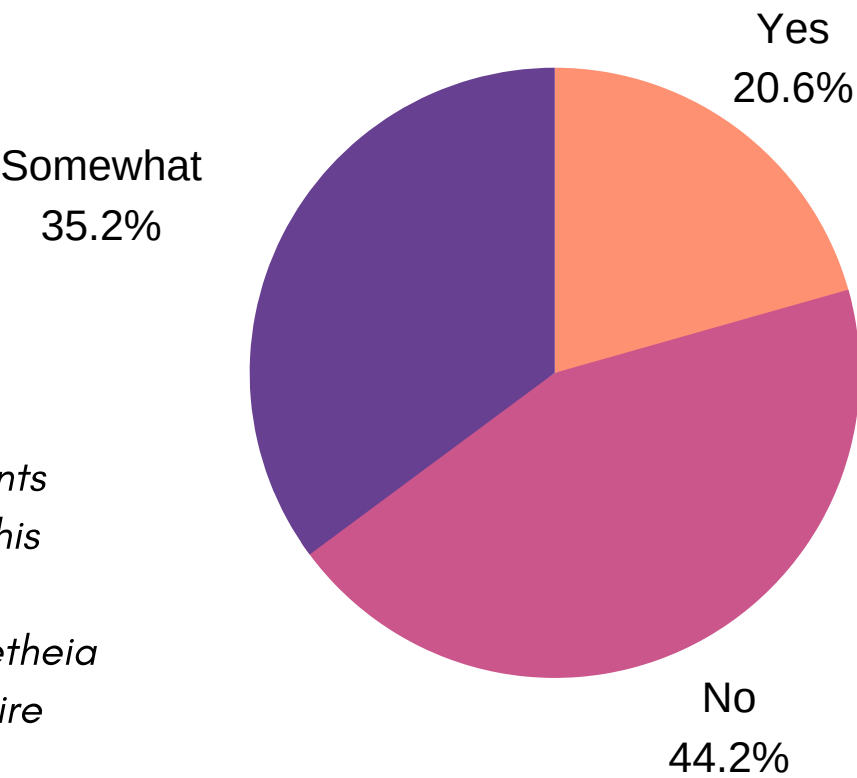
Religion at Lynbrook

How religious is your household?

1 = not at all / 5 = extremely



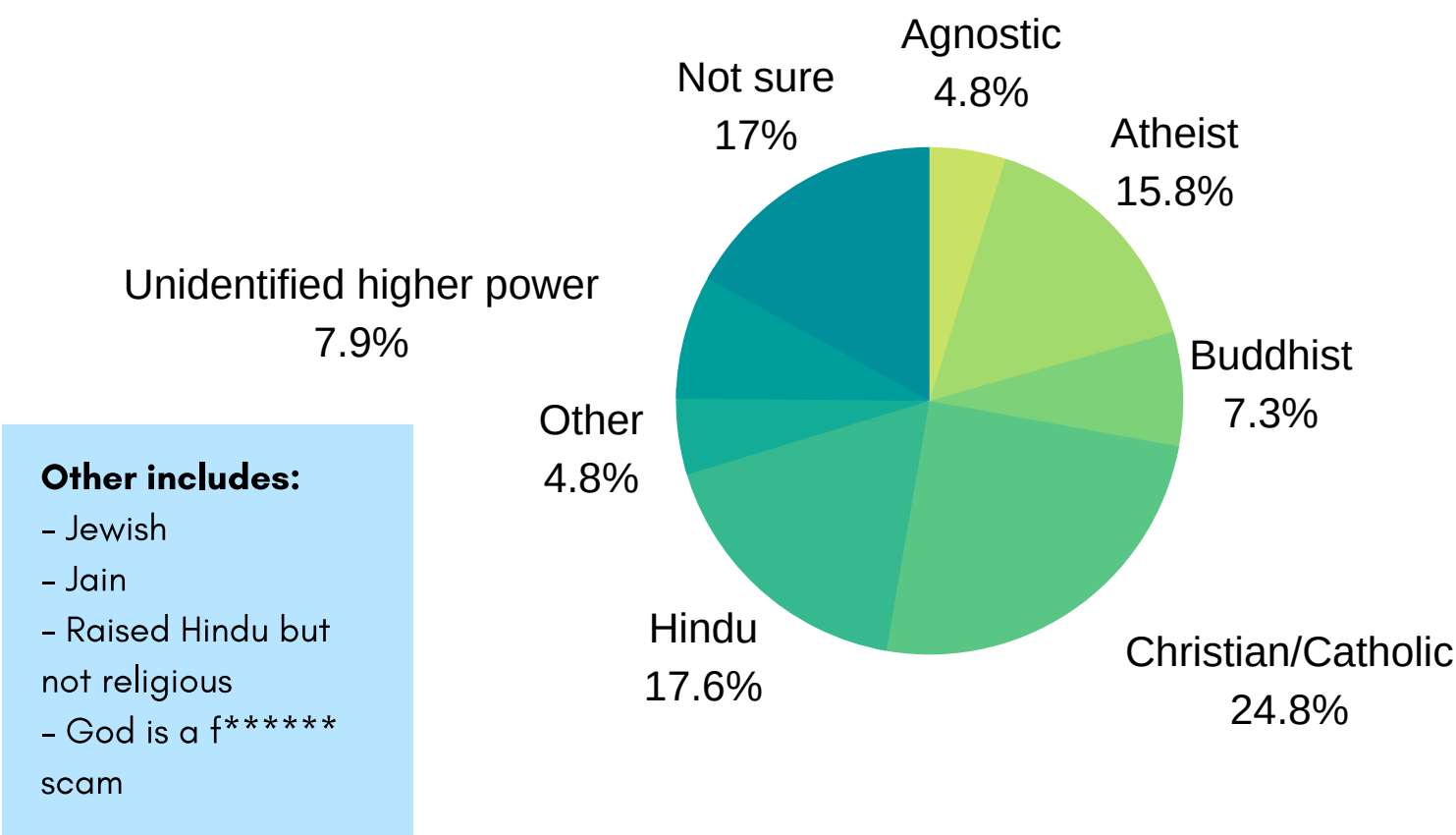
Are you religious?



165 out of 1851
Lynbrook students
responded to this
poll, which was
released by Aletheia
staff to the entire
student body.

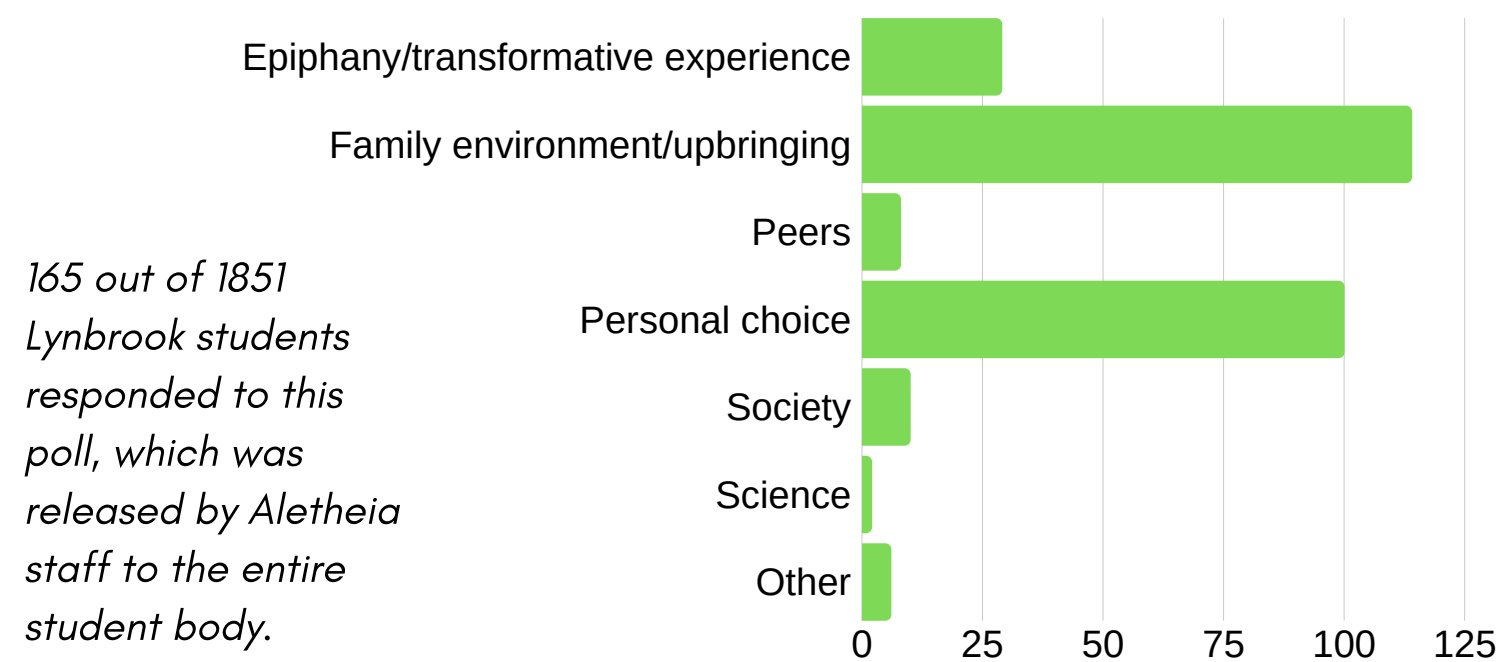
Religion at Lynbrook

What religious denomination are you?



Why or why not are you religious?

Students were allowed to choose more than one option.



INGRID HIGGINS

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Ingrid Higgins graduated with honors from Santa Clara University with a Masters of Arts in Counseling Psychology (an intensive 78-quarter unit Master of Arts program for students seeking to meet California Marriage and Family Therapy licensing requirements). She completed her undergraduate work at Bethany University earning her Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Addiction Studies.

In 2005 Ingrid became a Registered Addiction Specialist. In 2006 she became a licensed Marriage Family Therapist (MFC 43950). In 2011 she became a Certified Positive Discipline Classroom Educator. Ingrid is certified in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and skilled in treating trauma. Her variety of skills enables her to effectively treat a wide range of problems, including eating disorders, abuse, depression, anxiety, drug/alcohol use, low self esteem, trauma victims and self harming clients.

She has worked for non-profit agencies including Future Families, CHAC (Community Health Awareness Counsel), has provided mental health counseling on a school campus through PVPSA (Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance), volunteers for A Home Within and is now working in private practice in downtown Campbell.

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PROFESSIONAL ARTICLE BY
INGRID HIGGINS, MFT

First of all, I would like to say thank you to the students working hard to make Aletheia happen. The ability to express your feelings anonymously in a safe way is invaluable. I am honored to both be able to read the submissions from students and to share my experience.

I will share a portion of my personal experience with religion in the hope of helping those who struggle with this complex topic. Religion, for me, is a double-edged sword. I can see the benefits as well as the downsides of religion. I grew up in a conservative Protestant Christian home and was introduced to a punishing God who was to be feared. I was shown movies in my childhood prior to reaching the age of reason about the rapture. The movies depicted terrible predictions about the future according to the Bible. A dramatic story unfolds of how if you were “sinning” in any way when God returned, you would be left behind while all of your loved ones were taken up to heaven. I was told that the only way to redeem myself once that happened was to die a martyr’s death at the guillotine.

Now I would say that I am very similar to the student who wrote in about agnosticism. I believe in the science of the Big Bang Theory and of evolution. I also see such a perfect design that I have a hard time believing it was just random chance and no more. I feel a connection to a powerful life force that governs our world and connects us.

My advice to parents is to teach your children to be open to those who are different than you. I have a close friend who came to this country from South America. He thought that he was going to do an internship at a counseling center. Instead, he was taken to a Conversion Therapy Camp. He was not allowed access to the phone. He was not allowed to talk to the staff members. He was to work taking care of pigs and being alone until he was broken enough to become straight. This story forever changed my perspective on religion and how they can justify horrible acts for the sake of their own beliefs.

For parents who are trying to help their kids understand religion, I think it is best to talk about the positives and the negatives. If you are fearful of admitting mistakes, your children may begin to idealize religion and then be angry when they see mistakes as they grow up.

As a teen or parent reading this, if you need help navigating this difficult subject, there is help out there. My practice, Campbell Teen and Family Therapy, is a non-judgmental, accepting, and safe place for anyone who needs support. There are many churches and spiritual leaders in the area we live in, which is rich in culture and diversity.

The best advice I can give is to learn to think critically. Do not believe a religious or spiritual leader unless there are evidence and facts to back up what they say. Take into account the historical perspective and who the audience being written to was. Consider the number of translations the books you read have had, especially those that were originally passed down orally through many generations before they were written. Be willing to look with a curious and non-judgmental eye at people who have different beliefs than you do. Ask questions. Do research.

Thank you for sharing your experiences and for reading mine. I learned a great deal from this experience and was moved by the submissions.

Follow this link to read a longer version of this article: <http://tinyurl.com/yyendde3>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you feel you have been harmed by religion,
this website can offer help and support:
<https://www.recoveringfromreligion.org/religious-resources/>

The Human Rights Campaign has a website that provides resources that are “intended to help LGBTQ people, their families, friends, and allies, find powerful and transformative spaces to learn more about the intersection of their faith and LGBTQ issues.”
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/faith-resources>