

Understanding Unbelief: Initial Findings

Dr. Jonathan A. Lanman (Queen's University Belfast)

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Room 301, 3F, Building 10, Sophia University

While scholars from across the human sciences have long worked to improve our understanding of religion, much less has been done to understand its absence and alternatives. Yet such 'unbelief' is both widespread and growing. This growth has produced vigorous public debates about the personal and social impacts of religion, secularism, and atheism and the inclusion of nonreligious individuals and perspectives in education and public policy.

This presentation will outline the initial findings of the Understanding Unbelief programme (2017-2020), which examines the nature and diversity of atheism, agnosticism and other kinds of religious 'unbelief' around the world and from the perspectives of multiple disciplines. Our recently collected data will allow us to better answer a number of important questions about both the nature and diversity of unbelief.

For example, among those not believing in a God or gods:

- How stable, certain, and anti-religious is their 'unbelief'?
- How prevalent are beliefs in related phenomena such as an afterlife, magical causation, objective morality,

and ultimate purpose?

- In what meaning systems, rituals, and social identities do they participate?
- How important are their unbeliefs and alternative meaning systems to their lives and relationships?
- To what extent do the answers to the above questions vary across countries, religious backgrounds, and socio-demographic groups (e.g. age, gender, region, income, education, and ethnicity)?

I will argue that answering these questions will allow us to better develop and test hypotheses about the causes and effects of such 'unbeliefs' in future research.



Dr. Jonathan Lanman is a cognitive anthropologist and Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Cognition and Culture at Queen's University Belfast, working mostly on atheism and secularization as well as the impacts of ritual on social cohesion. He's currently a Principal Investigator of the

Understanding Unbelief programme.

This talk is organized by Dr. Tatsuo Murakami (Professor, FLA) in cooperation with Dr. Yutaka Osakabe, Research Fellow, Graduate School of Applied Religious Studies, Sophia University

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