

# AGE OF RELIGIOUS CONSENT

Open Letter to Parents, Teachers, Priests, Politicians, and Society to

Protect Children's Freedom of Thought

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## Age of Religious Consent: An Open Letter to Protect Children's Freedom of Thought

### Age of Religious Consent: Why Children Deserve Freedom of Thought Before Religion

**Age of Religious Consent** is a legal and ethical framework proposing that children and adolescents must reach cognitive and psychological maturity before being assigned a religious identity. Just as society requires informed consent for marriage, alcohol, tattoos, gambling, military service, and voting, it must also require informed consent for religion — the belief system that shapes the mind most deeply of all.

"Give them to us as young as possible and we will make of them anything we want!";  
"Corrupt them before they grow up."

— Jesuit instructions for children indoctrination and conditioning

Most debates about religion focus on theology, science, or politics. Almost none focus on the cognitive rights of children. Mainstream child-protection frameworks guard children from physical harm, sexual abuse, and emotional neglect. Yet they allow the unrestricted assignment of religious identity before a child can evaluate, question, or refuse. This article changes the conversation. It shifts the frame from religious freedom to children's cognitive freedom: the right to think before they believe.

### **A religion assigned before a child can think is not faith — it is programming.**

This open letter draws on 22 years of research in philosophy, evidence-based atheism, and applied psychology. It integrates the cluster evidence framework of **Evidence-Based Strong Atheism by Senad Dizdarević** with established international child-rights law to propose a concrete legislative action. Before proceeding to the evidence, explore the foundational materials:

- [Evidence-Based Strong Atheism — Four-Evidence Cluster Proof](#)
- [Is God Real for Teens — Critical Academic Review](#)
- [AIPA Method: Faith Deconstruction and Awakening Into Pure Awareness](#)
- [History of Faith Deconstruction — From Ancient Doubt to Evidence-Based Strong Atheism](#)
- [Is God Real? — The First Valid Evidence Why God Cannot Exist](#)

Every link above anchors this open letter to a verified body of evidence. Together, they form the intellectual foundation from which the proposed **Age of Religious Consent Act** emerges. This is not ideology, it is child protection.

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## **Part I: The Problem — What We Call Faith Is Often Programming**

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### **1.1 What Is Religious Consent, and Why Does It Not Exist?**

Informed consent requires three conditions: full information, free choice, and mental capacity to decide. Religion fails all three when applied to children.

Children receive religious instruction before they can read. They receive theological conclusions before they can question them. They are told what to believe about the nature of reality, the purpose of life, and the consequences of doubt. Intentionally, all before their frontal cortex is developed enough for critical reasoning.

In contrast, society protects children from other life-altering decisions precisely because cognitive and emotional maturity matters. Consider the consent framework below.

**Table 1: Consent Requirements Across Comparable Decisions**

Decision	Minimum Age / Requirement	Reason for Protection
<b>Alcohol consumption</b>	18–21 years (varies by country)	Cognitive and physical immaturity
<b>Marriage</b>	18 years (most countries)	Emotional and psychological

		maturity
<b>Military service</b>	18 years	Capacity to understand life risk
<b>Voting</b>	18 years	Capacity for political reasoning
<b>Tattoo or body modification</b>	16–18 years	Permanence and informed choice
<b>Gambling</b>	18 years	Risk evaluation capacity
<b>RELIGIOUS IDENTITY ASSIGNMENT</b>	No minimum age — zero protection	???

Religion shapes identity, moral values, worldview, and life decisions more profoundly than a tattoo or a vote. Yet it receives no informed-consent protection in any democracy on Earth. This is the central contradiction at the heart of child-protection law.

## 1.2 What the Evidence Says: Religion and Child Psychology

### Fear-Based Conditioning as a Documented Harm

According to Senad Dizdarević in Book 3 of the series **It's Finally PROVEN! God Does NOT Exist the First Valid Evidence in History**, religion systematically instills fear responses in children before they develop emotional coping resources.

The mechanisms include:

- Fear of hell and eternal punishment for normal childhood behavior
- Fear of divine surveillance and judgment for private thoughts
- Fear of social exclusion from family and community for doubt or questioning
- Fear of Satanic influence linked to curiosity, science, or secular ideas
- Obedience conditioning that suppresses independent reasoning

Research in developmental psychology identifies these as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) when they create chronic anxiety, shame, guilt, or dissociation.

"Girls who wear mini-skirts go to hell."  
— Jesuit priest Wild

The condition known as Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS), documented by psychologist Marlene Winell, describes a recognizable cluster of symptoms resulting from exposure to high-control religious environments in childhood.

Read about the devastating effects of the religious indoctrination to children and teens in [Senad Dizdarević's](#) story on Vocal.media, [72 Virgins](#), and learn about the deadly consequences that could be prevented.

## Religious Trauma Syndrome: Key Symptoms

Symptom Domain	Manifestation in RTS
<b>Cognitive</b>	Black-and-white thinking, difficulty with uncertainty, critical thinking impairment
<b>Emotional</b>	Chronic guilt, shame, anxiety, fear of abandonment
<b>Behavioral</b>	Self-suppression, compulsive rituals, social withdrawal
<b>Identity</b>	Inability to trust own judgment, dependency on external authority
<b>Relational</b>	Fear of intimacy, difficulty with boundaries, submission patterns

### 1.3 The Generational Cycle: How Abuse Reproduces Itself

According to Senad Dizdarević in Book 3, clergy and religious parents are not primarily malicious actors. Most of them were themselves subjected to the same religious conditioning in childhood. They were programmed to believe the programming was necessary as they were manipulated in thinking they are bad, weak, and need “protection”. They pass it forward because they do not recognize it as harm.

THE INVISIBLE CHAIN — A GENERATIONAL MODEL
Generation 1: Indoctrinated in childhood → experiences fear, guilt, and identity suppression.
Generation 2: Raised by Generation 1 → receives the same conditioning as love and care.
Generation 3: The cycle repeats.
The chain is invisible because each generation genuinely believes it is protecting the next.
Breaking it requires legal and educational intervention, not moral condemnation.

This model explains why religion-related psychological harm is structurally resistant to change within communities. The cycle requires external intervention — specifically, legal protection for children at the point of earliest exposure.

"If we want to act safely in all things, we must adhere to the following principle: what is white to me, I will believe in black if the hierarchical Church so determines."

— Ignatius of Loyola, **Rules for Thinking with the Church** (1535)

#### 1.4 The Hell Problem: Fear Conditioning as a Rights Violation

The threat of eternal torture is the most powerful behavior-control tool ever deployed against children. No other social institution may legally tell a child that they will burn forever if they question authority. Yet this message is delivered to hundreds of millions of children globally every year.

"When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion, it is called a Religion."

— Robert M. Pirsig

A child told that doubting the faith will result in eternal suffering is not receiving religious education. That child is experiencing fear-based psychological conditioning. The fact that this conditioning is described as spiritual care does not change its psychological effect.

Religious conditioning uses physical violence to ground mental indoctrination with emotional pain. James Dobson, a known Christian psychologist from hell, demanded from parents to regularly and severely beat children.

"Pain is a marvelous purifier... the spanking should be of sufficient magnitude to cause the child to cry genuinely."

— Dare to Discipline, 1976

Regular and obsessive physical punishment can cause severe personal disorders like sadism, masochism, and OCD, requesting pain and suffering.

Mother Teresa, the bride of Jesus, said, "Pain and suffering must have come into your life, but remember that pain, sorrow, and suffering are only Jesus' kiss - a sign that you have come so close to him that he can kiss you." Mother Teresa, the bride of Jesus, said, "Pain and suffering must have come into your life, but remember that pain, sorrow, and suffering are only Jesus' kiss - a sign that you have come so close to him that he can kiss you."

— Senad Dizdarević, **Book 3 of God Does NOT Exist book series**

Japan's child-abuse guidelines now recognize forced religious activities and threat-based religious conditioning as potential forms of child abuse. This is the closest any national legal framework has come to implementing the Age of Religious Consent principle.

We have to stop religious mental, emotional, and physical abuse of children, and protect their rights of growing up freely until they are capable of understanding religious harms, and independently decide accordingly.

### 1.5 A Live Example: Commercial Apologetics Marketed Directly to Children:

The mechanisms described above are not abstract. They are actively published, marketed, and sold to children today.

Lee Strobel's *Is God Real? for Teens* presents itself as an investigative journalist's even-handed inquiry, yet its publisher openly states the book's purpose is to "equip your teen with the confidence to know: God is real."

A book that announces its conclusion before the investigation begins is not exploring a question. It is assigning an answer to a child who has not yet developed the cognitive tools to evaluate or refuse it. Lee Strobel's book is causing the harm this open letter exists to prevent.

A full academic review and evidence-based comparison of the book, the first critical analysis to appear anywhere in the search results for this title, is available here: [Lee Strobel's Is God Real for Teens Book Review and Evidence Comparison with God Does NOT Exist by Senad Dizdarević](#) with presentation of correct, open, and honest approach to teens education.

The Age of Religious Consent Act exists precisely to expose, restrict, and ultimately prevent this style of fear-and-confidence marketing from reaching children before they can think for themselves.

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## Part II: The Legal Foundation — What International Law Already Says

### 2.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) creates the strongest existing legal foundation for Age of Religious Consent legislation. Three articles are directly relevant.

**Table 2: UNCRC Articles Supporting Age of Religious Consent**

Article	Right Protected	Relevance to Religious Consent
Article 14	Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion	Children have this right — not only their parents.
Article 13	Freedom of expression and access to information	Children must access secular and evidence-based information.

<b>Article 19</b>	Protection from mental and emotional abuse	Fear-based conditioning may constitute abuse under this article.
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Article 14 creates a direct contradiction in current law. It states that children possess the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. It also states that parents may guide children according to their evolving capacities. However, it does not give parents the right to permanently assign a religious identity before a child can exercise the right for themselves.

This contradiction is unresolved in international law. The proposed Age of Religious Consent Act resolves it by establishing 18 as the minimum age for formal religious enrollment, baptism, and compulsory religious instruction.

## 2.2 Existing National Precedents

Several countries and jurisdictions have already moved partially in this direction. The precedents are limited but significant.

- **Japan** (2022 — Unification Church investigation): New child-abuse guidelines recognized religious coercion and hell-threat conditioning as reportable harm.
- **Iceland** (2015): Proposed legislation to classify circumcision of minors as a human rights violation — a related body-autonomy argument.
- **Denmark and Norway**: Parliamentary debates have addressed whether parents have unlimited rights to assign religious identity to children.
- **Germany**: Courts have addressed forced baptism and religious instruction complaints, though no binding minimum-age legislation exists.

None of these precedents constitute a full Age of Religious Consent law. Each, however, confirms that the legislative direction is not radical. It is the next logical step in child-rights jurisprudence.

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## Part III: Senad Dizdarević's Analysis — The Cognitive Rights Framework

### 3.1 Why Existing Child-Protection Law Has a Structural Blind Spot

Current child-protection law identifies harm through observable physical and behavioral markers — bruises, malnutrition, neglect, and sexual abuse. Psychological harm is legally recognized only when it is severe, documented, and directly attributable to a specific actor.

Religious conditioning does not meet this evidentiary standard, yet. Not because the harm is absent, but because the harm is culturally normalized. Only in a twisted society, abnormal is normal, Evil is Good, mental illness is mental health, and children molesting is care.

A child who experiences chronic anxiety because they believe they will burn in hell for doubting God is not flagged by any child-protection system. The same anxiety caused by any other source would trigger intervention.

This is a structural blind spot in child-protection law. It protects children's bodies more effectively than it protects their minds.

### Another Lie in the Classroom

We don't need no indoctrination

We don't need no blind control

No dark dogma in the classroom

Priests, leave us teens alone

—Inspired by "Another Brick in the Wall" by Pink Floyd (1979)

## 3.2 The Four-Evidence Cluster and What It Means for Children

Evidence-Based Strong Atheism, as developed by Senad Dizdarević, establishes through four independent lines of evidence that a creator-God cannot exist within an eternal, conservation-bound cosmos. These are:

THE FOUR-EVIDENCE CLUSTER (Evidence-Based Strong Atheism by Senad Dizdarević)
1. First Law of Thermodynamics: Energy/Matter cannot be created or destroyed.
A creator cannot create something from nothing in a conservation-bound Closed System cosmos.
2. Creation Ex Nihilo Collapse: The claim that a deity created the universe from nothing directly violates the First Law. The premise is physically impossible.
3. Kalam Inapplicability: The Kalam Cosmological Argument assumes the universe began.
In an eternal cosmos, it does not apply.
4. Via Negativa Paradox (Reductio ad Nihilo → Reductio ad Abstractio → Reductio ad

Absurdum):

Negative theology strips all attributes from God until nothing remains.

The concept dissolves into logical incoherence.

These four lines of evidence mean that teaching children that God exists is not spiritually neutral instruction. It is the systematic inculcation of a claim that is physically impossible and logically incoherent. Children assigned a religious identity based on God's existence are taught a factually wrong belief as an absolute truth, before they have the cognitive tools to evaluate or question it.

This is the strongest evidence-based argument for the Age of Religious Consent. Children do not have the right to be taught falsehoods as certainties before they can think for themselves.

### 3.3 The AIPA Method: What Freedom Actually Looks Like

The AIPA Method (Awakening Into Pure Awareness), developed by Senad Dizdarević over 22 years of research, provides a structured, evidence-based process for adults deconstructing faith and leaving religion. The method guides individuals from inherited belief through critical evaluation to stable identity reconstruction.

The existence of the AIPA Method reveals an important structural problem. Adults require a structured deprogramming process to recover from childhood religious conditioning. The depth of the AIPA process is a direct measure of the depth of the original harm. What requires years to undo in adults could have been prevented entirely by protecting children from coercive religious assignment in the first place.

The Age of Religious Consent Act is, in effect, a primary prevention measure. The AIPA Method is a secondary intervention after the harm is done. Society should prefer prevention.

### 3.4 The Evangelical Precedent: Consistency Demands the Same Standard for Religious Identity

A revealing precedent already exists inside the religious right itself. Major evangelical institutions, including the Southern Baptist Convention, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and prominent apologetics ministries, have argued forcefully that minors lack the cognitive maturity, life experience, and informed-consent capacity to undergo gender transition.

Their stated reasoning is consistent: **a minor cannot fully grasp an irreversible, identity-defining change, so society must wait for adulthood before allowing it.**

This is, point for point, the same logic this open letter applies to religion.

Every human being is born without religious belief. Atheism, in the sense of simply not yet holding a god-claim, is the default, natural starting condition of every child. It is the state a newborn is actually in before anyone speaks to them about gods, sin, or salvation.

Baptism, mandatory catechism, enforced religious identity, and fear-based doctrine assigned to a child are not neutral. They are an irreversible, identity-defining transition imposed on that child, away from their natural starting state and into a specific, lifelong belief system, years before the child can evaluate the claims involved.

If the cognitive-maturity argument is sound enough to justify restricting irreversible gender transition for minors, it is sound enough to justify restricting irreversible religious transition for minors.

A society that accepts one argument and rejects the other is not applying a principle. It is protecting one ideology while exempting another from the same standard.

The Age of Religious Consent Act (ARCA) applies the evangelical right's own consistency standard to religion itself, and forbids assigning a permanent religious identity to a child who has not yet had the chance to remain, simply, a child.

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## Part IV: Open Letter — To Each Pillar of Society

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**This letter is addressed directly to the five groups who hold the power to protect children.**

**Each group has a specific role. Each bears a specific responsibility.**

**The letter is written with good intentions with a strong appeal to protect children rights. It is written with urgency for the immediate adoption of new legislation.**

### **To Parents: Guide, Do Not Program**

You love your children. No one doubts that. Your decision to raise them in your faith comes from the same love that shapes every other decision you make for them.

But consider this question honestly: Is teaching your child that they will burn in hell if they doubt the faith an act of love? Is it love to condition a child to suppress their questions, their doubts, and their natural curiosity in order to remain safe within the family belief system?

You have the right to share your beliefs with your children. You do not have the right to punish them for thinking differently. You do not have the right to make a small child responsible for their own eternal damnation, especially, when you don't have any valid evidence to claim that.

Guide your children. Answer their questions honestly. Tell them what you believe and why. But also tell them that you respect their right to think and decide for themselves when they are old enough to do so.

A child raised with cognitive freedom will not automatically reject your faith. But they will arrive at their own conviction, and that conviction will be genuine, stable, and theirs. That is far more valuable than a belief maintained through fear.

### **To Teachers: Teach Critical Thinking, Not Obedience**

You have daily contact with children. You observe them closely. You see the ones who are anxious, self-suppressed, unable to question authority, or visibly burdened by religious obligation.

You have a professional responsibility. Secular education exists to develop independent thinkers, and not to complement religious instruction. Your role is not to balance religious content with scientific content. Your role is to teach children how to evaluate claims, how to ask for evidence, and how to think for themselves.

Do not treat religious belief as off-limits in critical thinking education. Logic applies to all claims equally. A child who learns to ask for evidence in science class must also be able to apply that skill to religious claims. Your professional integrity depends on teaching this consistently.

### **To Priests and Religious Leaders: Leave Children to Develop First**

You were once a child in the system you now administer. According to Senad Dizdarević in Book 3 of **It's Finally PROVEN! God Does NOT Exist**, the cycle of religious conditioning is most visible in the lives of clergy who were themselves shaped by high-control religious formation before they had the cognitive tools to consent to it.

You do not need to be a malicious person to perpetuate a harmful system. Most of you are not malicious. Most of you believe deeply in what you teach. But belief in the truth of what you teach does not make the method of teaching it to children ethically acceptable.

Children cannot consent to baptism.

Children cannot consent to formal religious enrollment.

Children cannot consent to a theology of eternal punishment.

These procedures are performed on children who have no capacity to understand or refuse them.

The most honest and courageous act available to you is this: wait. Let children grow up. Invite them to your faith when they are adults. If your message is true, they will find it. If you must capture them before they can think, that is not faith. That is recruitment.

### **To Politicians: Pass the Law**

You have the power to act. You have the legal tools. You have the international framework. You need only the political will.

The Age of Religious Consent Act is not anti-religious legislation. It does not ban religion. It does not restrict adult belief. It protects children from having a belief system imposed on them before they can evaluate or refuse it.

You already protect children from every other form of life-altering decision before they reach cognitive maturity. This is the only remaining category in which you do not. Closing this gap is not ideological. It is consistent.

The parents who will oppose this legislation are the same parents who could not consent to their own religious assignment. They are repeating what was done to them. Your job is to interrupt that cycle with law.

### **To Society: Propose the Law**

This letter is ultimately addressed to you — the public. Politicians respond to public pressure. Laws change when people demand them.

You do not need to be an atheist to support the Age of Religious Consent.

You need only to believe that children have the right to think before they are told what to believe.

You need only to believe that fear is not an appropriate tool for raising children.

You need only to believe that the freedom of thought you enjoy as an adult should not have been denied to you as a child.

If you experienced religious trauma in childhood — if you were taught to fear, to suppress, to obey without question — then you already know what this law would have protected you from.

Tell your story. Support this legislation. Protect the next generation from what you experienced.

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## Part V: The Proposed Age of Religious Consent Act (ARCA)

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### ⚠ IMPORTANT FRAMING NOTE

This proposed act is not anti-religious legislation.

It does not ban religion. It does not restrict adult religious practice in any form.

It protects children's freedom of thought — the prerequisite for any authentic faith.

Its model is child-protection law, not atheism legislation.

### 5.1 The Act — Full Text Proposal

#### PROPOSED LEGISLATION: THE CHILDREN'S RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND COGNITIVE CONSENT ACT

(Also known as: The Age of Religious Consent Act)

**PREAMBLE:** Recognizing that children possess the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience, and belief as established under Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; recognizing that religious identity assignment before the development of critical cognitive capacity may constitute a form of psychological conditioning; recognizing the documented psychological effects of fear-based religious instruction on minors; this Act establishes minimum age protections for the religious enrollment of children.

**ARTICLE 1 – DEFINITIONS:** For the purposes of this Act: (a) 'Religious

enrollment' means the formal assignment of a child to a religious community through baptism, naming ceremony, religious registration, or equivalent ritual. (b) 'Mandatory religious instruction' means any structured religious education program required by parents, guardians, or institutions that presents religious claims as factual certainties. (c) 'Fear-based religious conditioning' means the repeated use of threats of eternal punishment, divine judgment, or supernatural harm to modify a child's behavior, suppress inquiry, or enforce compliance.

**ARTICLE 2 – AGE OF RELIGIOUS CONSENT:** No person under the age of 18 years shall be formally enrolled in any religious community without their own informed, documented, and freely given consent. Formal enrollment includes but is not limited to baptism, religious naming ceremonies, confirmation, bar or bat mitzvah, and equivalent rites of formal religious membership.

**ARTICLE 3 – PROHIBITION OF FEAR-BASED CONDITIONING:** It shall be unlawful for any parent, guardian, religious institution, clergy, or educational institution to subject a person under the age of 18 to repeated, systematic fear-based religious conditioning. Specifically prohibited is the use of threats of eternal punishment, hell, divine violence, or supernatural harm directed at a minor as tools of behavioral control or belief enforcement.

**ARTICLE 4 – RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:** Academic instruction about the history, sociology, philosophy, and comparative study of world religions shall remain permitted and is encouraged. Such instruction shall be presented in a balanced, evidence-based, and critically open framework. It shall not present the claims of any single religion as factual certainties.

**ARTICLE 5 – PARENTAL RIGHTS:** Parents and guardians retain the right to practice their own religion, to share their beliefs with their children, to expose their children to religious community and culture, and to provide religious education as defined in Article 4. This Act does not restrict these rights. This Act restricts only the formal, irreversible enrollment of a child in a religious community without the child's own informed consent.

**ARTICLE 6 – ENFORCEMENT:** Violations of Article 3 shall be reportable to child protection authorities and subject to the same intervention framework applied to other forms of psychological child abuse. Violations of Article 2 shall render any formal religious enrollment of a minor without consent legally null and void upon the child reaching the age of 18.

**ARTICLE 7 – INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION:** States Parties to this Act shall cooperate with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to develop implementation guidelines, monitoring frameworks, and educational programs that support this Act's objectives without infringing on adult religious freedom.

## 5.2 Anticipated Objections and Responses

Table 3: Objections and Evidence-Based Responses

Objection	Response
<b>This violates parents' religious freedom.</b>	Parental religious freedom does not include the right to make permanent identity decisions for a child without the child's consent. Parents cannot consent to a marriage on behalf of a child. This is structurally identical.
<b>Children will lose their cultural connection.</b>	Cultural identity and religious enrollment are different things. Children can participate in cultural and community life without formal religious assignment. Adult conversion and enrollment remains fully available.
<b>Religious education benefits children.</b>	Academic religious education — comparative, balanced, evidence-based — is not prohibited. What is prohibited is the unilateral assignment of a religious identity and fear-based conditioning.
<b>This is anti-religious legislation.</b>	The Act does not restrict adult religious practice in any form. It extends to religion the same consent framework already applied to marriage, military service, and voting.
<b>This is impossible to enforce.</b>	Japan's 2022 child-abuse guidance shows this is practically achievable. The Netherlands, Nordic countries, and Germany already have enforcement frameworks for psychological child abuse that could be extended.
<b>Faith is good for children's mental health.</b>	Some aspects of community belonging may benefit wellbeing. Fear-based conditioning does not. The Act targets the latter specifically, not the former.

## Part VI: The Scale of the Problem — Evidence and Statistics

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### 6.1 Global Religious Assignment of Children

Approximately 85% of the global population identifies as religious. The overwhelming majority of these individuals were assigned their religious identity before the age of five. They were indoctrinated before the development of abstract reasoning, before the capacity for critical evaluation, and before any possibility of informed consent.

- 2.4 billion Christians worldwide: most baptized as infants with zero capacity for consent
- 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide: most enrolled in religious instruction before age 7
- 1.1 billion Hindus worldwide: most assigned caste-linked religious identity at birth
- Over 4,000 distinct religious traditions currently operate on Earth

### 6.2 Psychological Impact: What the Research Shows

While dedicated large-scale epidemiological studies on childhood religious trauma remain underrepresented in mainstream psychology literature, the following evidence base is established:

- **Religious Trauma Syndrome** is documented as a clinical pattern by psychologist Marlene Winell, with symptoms meeting criteria for complex PTSD in high-control religious environments.
- Studies on **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** consistently identify chronic fear, shame, and identity suppression as major risk factors for adult mental health disorders.
- Research on high-control religious groups (cults, fundamentalist communities) documents consistent patterns of cognitive suppression, identity dissolution, and exit trauma.
- **Faith deconstruction forums** and support communities report millions of active members globally, a direct measure of unmet psychological need.

These figures represent an enormous and largely invisible public health burden. They are the direct consequence of involuntary religious identity assignment before the age of cognitive consent.

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## Part VII: Worldwide Action Plan — How to Pass This Law

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### 7.1 The Campaign: Five Audiences, Five Messages

#### Table 4: Campaign Messaging by Audience

Audience	Core Message	Primary Channel
<b>Parents</b>	Love your child's mind, not just their soul. Guide — do not program.	Social media, parent networks, family psychology platforms
<b>Teachers</b>	Cognitive freedom is a professional obligation. Teach evidence, not compliance.	Education unions, teacher training, school boards
<b>Clergy</b>	Authentic faith cannot be assigned. It can only be chosen. Wait for consent.	Religious press, interfaith dialogue, pastoral conferences
<b>Politicians</b>	Close the last gap in child-consent law. The legal framework already supports it.	Parliamentary submissions, human rights committees, legislative petitions
<b>Public</b>	Protect the child's right to think. You had the right to think. So do they.	Petitions, journalism, documentary content, academic platforms

## 7.2 Legislative Pathway

The most effective path to legislation follows a proven sequence:

1. **Step 1: Build the Evidence Record.** Academic and journalistic publication establishes the evidence base.
2. **Step 2: Coalition Building.** Child-rights and secular organizations adopt the framework and request government inquiry.
3. **Step 3: Pilot Legislation.** A parliamentary petition or member's bill is introduced in a single jurisdiction as a model.
4. **Step 4: Public Hearing.** Media coverage of expert testimony and survivor accounts creates public awareness.
5. **Step 5: International Precedent.** If the pilot law passes, it provides international precedent for adoption in other countries.

## 7.3 Why This Will Succeed

History shows that child-protection law evolves consistently in one direction: toward the child's rights and away from unchallenged adult authority. Every generation expands the protection. Every expansion was once called radical, then became obvious.

- Child labor was once defended as education and family tradition.
- Corporal punishment of children was once standard and legally endorsed.
- Child marriage was once universally practiced.

- Sexual abuse by clergy was once systematically concealed and institutionally protected.

Each of these protections was expanded through the same process: evidence, activism, legislation. The Age of Religious Consent follows the identical pattern.

The evidence exists. The activism is beginning. The legislation is next.

## Part VIII: Frequently Asked Questions — Age of Religious Consent

### What is the Age of Religious Consent?

The Age of Religious Consent is the proposed minimum age — 18 years — at which a person can formally enroll in a religious community. Below this age, no binding religious identity should be assigned without the individual's own informed, documented consent.

### Why is an Age of Religious Consent being proposed?

Because children currently receive no legal protection from religious identity assignment. Every other life-altering decision requires informed consent and cognitive maturity. Religion — which shapes identity, values, and worldview more profoundly than any other system — does not. This legislation closes that gap.

### Can a child give informed consent to religion?

No. Informed consent requires full information, free choice, and cognitive capacity. Children below the age of approximately 12 lack the abstract reasoning required to evaluate theological claims. Children raised entirely within a religious community lack the information necessary to evaluate alternatives. Neither condition for informed consent is met.

### What is the difference between religious education and indoctrination?

Religious Education	Indoctrination
<b>Presents multiple perspectives comparatively</b>	Presents one perspective as absolute truth
<b>Encourages questioning and critical evaluation</b>	Discourages or punishes doubt
<b>Evidence-based where applicable</b>	Assertion-based; evidence is secondary to faith
<b>Respects the child's developing autonomy</b>	Requires compliance and identity adoption
<b>Teaches about religion as a human phenomenon</b>	Assigns a religious identity to the child

### **Would an Age of Religious Consent violate parents' rights?**

No. Parental rights do not include the right to make legally binding, identity-defining decisions for a child without the child's consent. Parents cannot consent to their child's marriage, their child's military service, or their child's vote. Formal religious enrollment is structurally identical: a permanent, identity-defining commitment made on behalf of a person who cannot yet evaluate or consent to it.

### **What is Religious Trauma Syndrome?**

Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS) is a recognized psychological condition documented by psychologist Marlene Winell. It describes a pattern of psychological harm resulting from high-control religious environments in childhood. Symptoms include chronic anxiety, guilt, shame, identity confusion, difficulty with critical thinking, and complex trauma responses. RTS is a direct result of the absence of religious consent in childhood.

### **Should rituals performed on infants have legal significance?**

No. Baptism and equivalent rituals performed on infants have no basis in informed consent. An infant cannot evaluate, understand, or refuse a religious commitment. These rituals may have social and cultural meaning for families. However, they should carry no binding legal or institutional religious membership status until the individual confirms them as an adult.

### **Have any countries proposed similar laws?**

Japan (2022) introduced child-protection guidelines recognizing religious coercion and hell-threat conditioning as reportable harm. Several Nordic countries and Germany have engaged in parliamentary debate on children's religious autonomy. Iceland proposed legislation related to non-consensual body modification of minors. No country has yet enacted a full Age of Religious Consent law. The path is open.

### **What would society look like if religion became an adult choice?**

Adult converts to a faith are, by definition, individuals who chose that faith with full information and mature judgment. Religious communities composed entirely of adult converts would be smaller but more committed, more intellectually serious, and less dependent on childhood conditioning for survival. Faith retained through choice is fundamentally more authentic than faith maintained through fear and early assignment.

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## **Conclusion: The Last Unprotected Frontier of Childhood**

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Society has progressively expanded its protection of children across every domain of life. Physical safety. Nutritional standards. Educational access. Protection from labor. Protection from sexual abuse. Protection from chemical harm.

One frontier remains. The frontier of the mind.

Children's freedom of thought is the final unprotected right in child-protection law. The Age of Religious Consent Act closes this gap. It protects children not from religion, but for authentic

cognitive development which is the foundation from which any genuine faith, or genuine non-belief, can honestly emerge.

**A child raised with freedom of thought may choose to believe.**

**A child raised with freedom of thought may choose not to believe.**

**Either outcome is valid.**

**What is not valid is making that choice for them, before they can make it for themselves.**

This letter is addressed to parents, teachers, priests, politicians, and society. It closes with a single request: protect the child's right to think. Everything else follows from that.

### **About the Author of the Age of Religious Consent Act**

**Senad Dizdarević** is an independent researcher, philosopher, journalist, and author based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. He is the founder of **Evidence-Based Strong Atheism** as a named intellectual paradigm and the developer of the **AIPA Method (Awakening Into Pure Awareness)**.

His philosophical paper *Can a Creator-God Exist in an Eternal Cosmos?* is currently under peer review at **Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science** (submission #29753).

His four-volume series **It's Finally PROVEN! God Does NOT Exist** presents the first evidence cluster to demonstrate the logical impossibility of a creator-God.

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