

This was published 4 years ago

# Shaun Micallef sees a religious zeal in atheism



By [Kerrie O'Brien](#)

January 13, 2017 – 12.30pm

The meaning of life has fascinated writer/comedian Shaun Micallef for some time. His commitment to exploring the question led him to make the series *Shaun Micallef's Stairway to Heaven*, in which he tries to get inside the minds of various believers. He embeds himself with Mormons in Salt Lake City, Christian doomsday preppers in the US and faith healers in Brazil.

He is intrigued by "this need for magic in people's lives, this desperate need to have a man or woman in the sky, a magic fairy, this idea of fate or being pre-ordained". While there are millions of people around the world devoted to particular religions, Micallef is also struck by the rise of militant atheism. Led by Professor Richard Dawkins, who wrote *The God Delusion*, it's an anti religion philosophy that, ironically, is religious in its passion. "It's almost like a religion of non-believers," says Micallef. "They KNOW what you believe is wrong. I don't know whether that's a very good thing."



Shaun Micallef explores the world of religion in his show on SBS.

Atheism has been around for a long time but the fervour with which this non-believing is pursued is a recent phenomenon. "There's a case I think for answering somebody with zeal with that sort of argument but I'm not sure you can go and pick a fight. You can use this as an armour rather than a weapon. It's a bit

similar in a way to this objection people have to same sex marriage. Hang on – what's it got to do with you? It's not going to affect you. It's not going to devalue whatever love you have with someone."

Despite his best efforts, Micallef came away from the series a firm non-believer. Rather than any particular set of beliefs, he argues the greatest gift you can give your loved ones is to encourage them to be curious. "Encourage them to be really interested in other people. Anyone, if you look closely, who does that is fascinating. Our job is to find the good and see that, rather than what's wrong. You can't build on what's wrong. Build on the good stuff and make that your life's work."

*Shaun Micallef's Stairway to Heaven* airs on SBS on January 18.



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