

THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS
SEPTEMBER 2003, VOLUME 1, NUMBER 4

Cathedral pushes to refurbish with federal funds

Flashline

AMERICAN ATHEIST

The nation's oldest Roman Catholic cathedral is applying for up to \$4 million in government grants to refurbish its facilities in time to celebrate its 2006 bicentennial.

The Baltimore Basilica is spending \$25 million to repair the historic landmark which was conceived by Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820), noted engineer and architect who was appointed by Thomas Jefferson as a surveyor of public buildings. Latrobe went on to design the south wing of the original federal Capitol, remodeled the White House, and rebuilt the Capitol structure after it was destroyed by the British in 1814.

The Baltimore church was erected under the aegis of John Carroll (1735-1815), the founder of Georgetown College and later Archbishop of Baltimore.

But the application for federal and state

Continued on page 10



© AFP/CORBIS

Cardinal William Keeler (L), Archbishop of Baltimore, MD; Cardinal Francis George (2nd L), Archbishop of Chicago; and Bernard Law (C), Archbishop of Boston, MA, walk in a procession before Mass in the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Philadelphia, PA. Law is at the center of the controversy over the Catholic church's handling of the sex-abuse scandal.

Alabama commandments are down, but are they gone?

Flashline

AMERICAN ATHEIST

An unconstitutional monument of the Ten Commandments was removed yesterday from the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building, bringing the state into compliance with a federal court order.

Hundreds of "anguished" protesters chanted and prayed as the 5,280-lb. granite marker was secured by a moving crew and rolled from the foyer to an unidentified "private place" somewhere else in the building, said news accounts. It is not clear exactly where the Commandments display

is, nor is it known if any subsequent location for the controversial monument will be accessible to the public.

The Commandments rock was erected two years ago on the orders of Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore, who justified the monument as a public acknowledgement of God. Moore had garnered national attention while a judge in Etowah County, where he displayed a hand-carved wooden plaque representing the Decalogue in his courtroom. He frequently began court proceedings with a Baptist invocation led by clergy.

When he ran for the state's highest elect-

ed judicial bench position, he promised to carry his crusade for public display of the Commandments and other religious symbols to the capital in Montgomery.

Some critics, including those who had filed suit to have the Commandments removed, were pleased with the situation. Barry Lynn of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State called today's developments "a tremendous victory for the rule of law and respect for religious diversity."

"Perhaps Roy Moore will soon leave the bench and move into the pulpit, which he

Continued on page 9

Philosophical Tour of Atheism:

Part IV - Pascal's Wager



David Penn
METROPLEX ATHEISTS

The ever-present question to the atheist is “What if you are wrong?” If there is a god, atheists are supposed to be in deep do-do. This is part of a challenge to atheism known as Pascal's Wager (PW), a popular argument that gets its name

from Blaise Pascal. He was a French mathematician who first packaged the idea in his posthumously published *Pensées*. I do not pretend to be a Pascal scholar or even plan to interpret his *Pensées*. Instead, I'll just give him credit for coming up with the common name of the argument. We can always consider the merits of alternative arguments without considering the original intentions of Blaise.

Here is Pascal's Wager: The human situation is one of a state of inexorable ignorance about god and the cosmos. Natural human reason or experience will not lead us to knowledge of

god. This predicament forces the individual to live life as a sort of cosmic betting game, Pascal says. Since one cannot know whether there is a god, one can only consider the two possibilities: god either exists or not. Consider that god does not exist. The atheist would be correct, and gains a finite benefit by living a non-religious life. The religious believer would be wrong, only a finite loss by making the religious sacrifices of life. However, if there is a god and the atheist is wrong, there is an infinite loss in the form of eternal punishment.

Prudence, then, will motivate sane people to cut possible losses by being religious.

Doesn't that sound good? Why throw away the possibility of infinite reward in heaven when acknowledging god and being faithful aren't that hard anyway? Most atheists have a hard time fitting in with folks that insist on “acknowledging god.” I also wonder about the truth of the “infinite reward” that is promised. Pascal's Wager starts to sound like a scam at some point. Would you buy a lottery ticket where the vendor said you have a 50-50 chance of winning a million dollars, and the cost of the ticket is a dollar? Win a million, or lose a dollar. So why not throw in a dollar? Because there is no need to waste

the religious life;

(3) god either exists, or does not, therefore there is an 50-50 chance that “god exists” is true;

(4) that god punishes non-belief with eternal damnation.

Of course it is probable that a religious person will modify one or more of the statements after hearing criticism of the argument.

The wager says that if you live the religious life and there is no god, then there is really nothing lost. This is obviously a matter of opinion. Atheists usually there are many problems with the religious life. The believer must submit to the authority of the church and priestly dominance. Sunday sermons are commonly a call

to more religious commitment. There is never enough. There is always more prayer needed, more devotion needed, more tithing needed...There is a loss of freedom of thought with the commitment to faith. Holding religious faith is like putting on blinders to the world. One is restricted in thought. The fragile religious theory must be maintained at all costs. The delusion of oneself and others must be maintained.

The wager states that there will be big trouble for those that do not believe, if god exists. This is really just assuming that if there is a god, it is the christian

variety. But this is not argued anywhere in PW's wager. Pascal just sneaks in christianity as an assumption. Why would an all-powerful god need the worship of little humans? That sounds narcissistic on god's part. It also seems inconsistent that an all-good being would punish a human for not believing when there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of the god. Also, the magnitude of the punishment (eternal damnation) doesn't match the supposed offense of a temporal negligence. In the usual sense of justice, a small crime is bal-



a dollar on a scam. Enough of that, let's get down to some serious criticism.

The theoretical problem with the wager is several unwarranted assumptions that are essential for Pascal's Wager to make sense, even if it finally found to be unsound. If any one of these assumptions is thrown out, then PW is not complete. Once any of these assumptions are scrutinized, their truth becomes questionable.

(1) the statement “god exists” cannot be rationally determined to be true or false;

(2) there is little or no cost in living

anced out by a small punishment, the more severe punishments are reserved for the more serious crimes. In the Christian dogma, an finite crime (living a life of a non-believer) is answered by an infinite punishment (eternal damnation). This is analogous to a death sentence for petty theft.

The wager states that either there is or is not a god. Depending on how you interpret Pascal, there is an even chance that there is or is not a god, or Pascal neglects the issue of probability altogether. The statement "there is or is not X" is a truism. It is true no matter what you substitute for "X." On any given day, it will either rain or not rain in Phoenix, Arizona, but that doesn't mean that it will probably rain, just that it might. As we all know, it probably will not, since Phoenix is a desert. There is or is not a god, but that really says nothing about the probability of there being a god. Indeed, if the probability is close to nothing, then there is no point in being religious or fearing god.

Each one of the assumptions can be considered individually and to found to be

lacking. But note an internal inconsistency between (1) and (4). At the beginning of the argument, there is the agnostic assumption of human cosmic ignorance, but PW also assumes that god punishes non-belief. This last assumption (4), implies knowledge about the nature of god. Both assumptions are an essential part of PW, yet both cannot be true simultaneously. It might be argued that (1) and/or (4) is not purported to be knowledge, but a probability, and therefore not logically contradictory. However, the more probable (4) becomes, the less likely (1) becomes, and vice versa. But if (1) is not probable, then one would be less likely to characterize life as a wager.

The wager has serious practical limitations: it doesn't tell you what to do. The wager doesn't really solve the problem posed by the agnostic assumption (1): It does not indicate which god or religion to follow. Thus risk is introduced by becoming devoutly religious: since one can't believe all the religions, one must choose the correct god to avoid damnation. Indeed, if

a false god is chosen, the more devout one becomes, the more divine ire is raised by the true god, according to (4).

It is here that the hidden motivation is revealed. The wager is usually stated by a believer in order to bolster their own faith, their own brand of religion. Pascal only spoke of Roman Catholicism he believed in. This strongly points to the origins assumption (4) above.

Another practical limitation is that even if one believe the wager to have some merit, it hardly leads to anything resembling real religious faith.

The argument is special in that it is supposed to provide a motivation for believing, rather than evidence to believe in god. The argument is that there is a benefit in believing, not that what you believe is true. At no point does PW assume or conclude that the phrase "god exists" is true, but it attempts to motivate one to the religious life. (Another motivational argument was made by William James (d. 1910) in his essay "Will to Believe." It is worthy of investigation, but I will not pursue it now.)

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Officers

John Hattan – Chairperson
David Penn – Vice Chairperson
Shelly Hattan – Secretary
Colin Swards – Treasurer

Board of Directors

John Hattan
Colin Swards
James Hardwick
Sammi Ruth Fowler
Richard "Dick" Hogan

Librarian

Carolyn Holland

Editor

Edward Penton

AAI Representatives

Sammi Ruth Fowler
Colin Swards

GET YOUR *WWJD* GEAR

WHAT
WOULD
JEFFERSON
Do?

BUY
WWJD
GEAR,
OF
COURSE!



<http://www.metroplexatheists.org/shop/index.htm>

Exposing DFW Confederate Christians – Part I

Ed Sebesta
GUEST WRITER

William Murchison is a regular columnist in the Dallas Morning News (DMN). He is the voice selected by the DMN to be the conservative voice on many issues, in particular race, religion, and sexual issues. His byline given is that he is a regular contributor to “Viewpoints,” or a journalism professor at Baylor University.

What isn’t given is his real identity: William Murchison is a leading figure in the Neo-Confederate movement. He is listed as a member of the board for the Texas division of the League of the South (LOS) and has a column at their website.

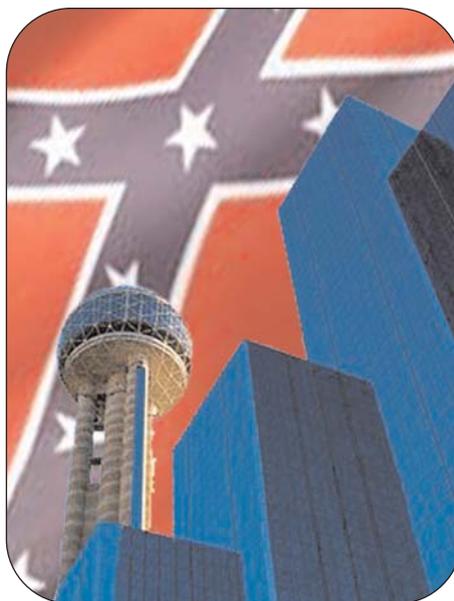
He is a contributing editor for the Rockford Institute, an extremist conservative institute in Rockford, Illinois, which publishes *Chronicles* magazine. They advertised in the *Southern Patriot*, the official publication of the LOS, that every editor was a member of the LOS, and that the publication was full of articles by members of the LOS. William Murchison is a regular columnist for the Neo-Confederate *Southern Partisan*.

He started contributing articles in 1992. In addition, in 1994, Murchison was interviewed about the launching of a publication, *Texas Republic* magazine. (This is not to be confused with the Republic of Texas groups.) It was a sort of Texas version of the *Southern Partisan*.

The first issue was devoted to M.E. Bradford, who was kicked out of conservative *National Review* magazine for his views on Lincoln, and was George C. Wallace’s presidential campaign director for the state of Texas. One issue was devoted to whether Texas would have been better off not ever joining the United States. Another issue, in a book review, tells the viewers that the Texas state flag is a Confederate flag. Murchison’s contributions to these

publications are what are considered more mainstream conservative viewpoints.

Murchison well understands that his articles can’t contain explicit Neo-Confederate content, or he would be unmasked and his agenda exposed. However, in his columns he can occupy a position against various initiatives of social justice, but from more mainstream viewpoints, incorporating occasional-



ly some subtle Neo-Confederate points. He can also give the prestige of his name and submit his articles to Neo-Confederate publications, which have a great need for both.

John J. Dwyer’s Confederate sympathies are fairly upfront on his website. His latest offering is “The Christian Character of Robert E. Lee.” Formerly he published what was a major local Christian paper, the *Dallas Fort-Worth Heritage* which he later sold. Since its sale the paper has stopped publication, has been re-launched, and maybe dead entirely by the time you read this article. In its heyday, it had links to websites of pro-slavery R.L. Dabney from the 19th century and defenses of the Confederate flag. All the leading local religious right institutions had advertisements in it. William Murchison who was listed as a Consulting Editor as early as 1993, contributed articles. Dwyer also was on the masthead of the publication *Texas Republic* as a contributor.

Dwyer teaches at Coram Deo Academy, a

Christian school in Flower Mound, which is a part of the “Classical” education movement lead by Douglas Wilson, who runs a Confederate Christian website out of Idaho. Wilson has an article on “Classical” education in the Sept. 2003 issue of *Chronicles*. Dwyer has published a couple Civil War novels glorifying Confederate leaders. Dwyer is also a contributor to “Faith in Gods and Generals,” a book published in the religious right movement inspired by the recently released movie of the same name. His most significant project is his new book “The War Between the States: The Uncivil War,” a text book for Christian schools, in which the Civil War is presented as a theological war. He lists as contributing editors, Rev. Steve Wilkins, founding board member of the League of the South, and Douglas Wilson, co-author with Wilkins, of “Southern Slavery as It Was,” an apology for slavery.

Dwyer is actively working to mainstream his ideas. A look at his fall schedule shows him at B. Daltons booksellers, a Home Schooling book fair, Weir’s Furniture Village in Dallas, and the Family Christian Store among others. A fall schedule hasn’t been published. Incidentally the online schedule has his attendance at the Neo-Confederate Southern Heritage Conference run by Rev. Wilkins.

There is a real possibility that Dwyer may well mainstream Confederate Christian history into the religious right through private Christian schools. The high school history books used by local Christian schools have many troubling aspects and often seem to be pre-civil rights. Dwyer’s book could well get widespread acceptance in religious right circles.

One interesting thing about the *Dallas Fort-Worth Heritage* newspaper was the number of conservative African American religious leaders who didn’t mind being in a pro-Confederate Christian publication.

William Murchison and John J. Dwyer are just two figures in the local Neo-Confederate movement.

Ed Sebesta is an engineer and researches the Neo-Confederate movement. His work has been published academically and he has been featured in alternative newspapers. He is also an information resource for numerous journalists, authors, and organizations.

Referred Websites

Murchison’s article at the League of the South:
<http://www.dixienet.org/dn-gazette/gwtw.html>

Rockford Institute:
<http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org>

John J. Dwyer:
<http://www.johnjdwyer.com>
<http://www.coramdeoacademy.org>

Southern Heritage Conference
<http://www.pointsouth.com/southernheritage/index.htm>

ROGER WILLIAMS

EDUCATIONAL LECTURE SERIES

Carolyn Holland

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Roger Williams was born in London, England in 1603 or perhaps 1604, just at the end of the reign (1558-1603) of Elizabeth I and the turn of the sixteenth century to the seventeenth century. These two centuries were definitely not a time of freedom from religion. Religious persecution was a part of the theology and the culture of the day.

Roger Williams' genius is that he somehow came to see this situation as a problem and managed to call the problem to the attention of others by speaking and writing about it. Also, he established a colony where people of different beliefs could live together with freedom of religion and some freedom from religion. Intellectually, Williams moved from the very conservative teachings of the Anglican Church to the Seekers, a religious sect which rejected the Christian Bible and organized churches. I think this intellectual journey of Williams' is at least the equivalent of the intellectual journey of a Christian person of today becoming an Atheist.

Roger Williams' life story appears to be that of one of those rare individuals who observe things and events around them and change their thinking about cherished beliefs they have been taught, based on these observations. This, as usual, makes for a complex individual with a complex life story. First, some background on this story.

The British Queen or King in Roger Williams' time was the absolute ruler of both the civil and the ecclesiastical government. Henry VIII, crowned King in 1509, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. Between 1529 and 1536, Henry induced Parliament to enact a series of statutes denying the pope any power or jurisdiction over the Church of England. Henry, and all British monarchs to follow him except Queen Mary I, became the head of the Church of England, also called the Anglican Church. At first this new church was so like the Roman Catholic Church which preceded it that British subjects noticed little difference and, accustomed to being taxed to support the Catholic Church, were willing to continue to pay taxes to

support the new Anglican Church.

But the Protestant Reformation was taking place. Edward VI, the only son of Henry VIII, was briefly king of England and began to introduce Protestant practices into the Anglican Church. The British noticed the differences and trouble began to brew.

Queen Mary I who reigned from 1553 to 1558 attempted to bring England back to the Roman Catholicism her father, Henry VIII, had rejected. In her zeal, she had hundreds of Protestants put to death, earning herself the nickname of Bloody Mary. Mary was followed



by Elizabeth I, another daughter of Henry VIII, was less likely to persecute for religious reasons but, as head of the Church of England (Anglican Church), she put to death Catholics and Puritans who she saw as opposing her.

In England, the turn of the sixteenth century into the seventh century was the beginning of a dark period of religious persecution and religiously induced civil war. The church supported the state in persecution. Church officials saw themselves as the single custodian of Christian truth. They were convinced that dissent was dangerous because it disgraced God's worship and endangered the souls of innocent victims tempted by erroneous ideas. So persecution became an act of Christian charity. Church officials believed religious persecution protected the state by preventing the wrath of God because God might punish everyone for the actions of a few. Also, religious non-conformity was political dissent since the head of the Church was also the King or Queen. Persecution was embedded in the culture of the state and Christian doctrine.

This was the culture Roger Williams

must have absorbed when he studied divinity at Cambridge. There he was considered to be a brilliant student and graduated in 1627. Cambridge at that time was considered to be a stronghold of Puritanism. The Puritans were a subset of Anglican church who wanted to perfect that Church by ridding it of all vestiges of Catholicism. This may seem innocent enough to the modern reader, but questioning anything about the church was political dissent.

1629 was a very eventful year for Roger Williams. He took holy orders as a minister in the Anglican Church, married Mary Barnard, and accepted his first position as a chaplain in the home of Sir William Masham. Masham's family had wide connections in Puritan circles so Roger Williams and his wife, Mary, were marked as Puritans, political dissenters.

This was a bad time for Roger Williams to join the Puritans who were being vigorously opposed by William Laud the powerful and ambitious Bishop of London. Laud was a strong proponent of uniformity of worship as defined by the Anglican church.

Roger and Mary Williams found it advisable leave England so they joined a group of Puritans who were planning to go to America. Roger Williams participated in plans with this group to form a colony where they would build a more pure Anglican Church to bring back to England as a model for the Anglican Church there. These Puritans signed the Cambridge Agreement in 1629 which gave them the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company, an English trading company. By the same agreement, the Puritans were to settle a colony and have control of the government of that colony. In 1630, Roger and Mary Williams and the other Puritans sailed for New England where they formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony which was eventually headquarters in the town of Boston.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony was near The Colony of New Plymouth which was formed in 1620 by a Separatist group of people later called "Pilgrims" by historians. These Separatists felt the Anglican Church

Continued on page 6

Roger Williams – Continued from page 5

was so bad that it could not be salvaged and another church should be formed in its place.

These Puritans and Pilgrims who migrated to America were Europeans. They carried with them European culture. Both groups expected uniformity of worship as they defined it. They were very sure they knew God's word so they knew what uniformity of worship should be. Liberty of worship was to be forbidden. Freedom from religion was unthinkable. They considered dissent to be false and dangerous, to be dealt with by drastic measures. The doctrine of persecution had arrived in America nearly undiluted.

In February, 1631, Roger Williams' arrival in America was recorded by the Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor, John Winthrop who described Williams as a "Godley minister". Williams apparently seemed a perfect Puritan minister at first — exactly what the colonists wanted to form their new church in Boston. But then the trouble started.

Roger Williams rejected the call to serve the church in Boston as a teacher (or we would say a minister). The reason he gave was that he believed that the church agreements and ordinances were corrupted by conventions of men and had become unclean and debased in the sight of God. This was Separatism like that of the Plymouth Colony. This upset the Massachusetts Bay Colony authorities because they strongly disagreed with the Separatists. Also, Separatists were political trouble. As Puritans, they were in enough political trouble already.

But Roger Williams probably more greatly alarmed the authorities when he announced that it was "unlawful" for the political officers of the settlement to do any thing to punish religious offenders. The civil magistrates from England were expected to establish a correct and uniform worship of God in the New World and to punish any breach of God's commandments there just as they did in England. God might punish the whole colony if they did not enforce religious law.

Roger Williams had come to see a different world than the other Puritans did. As biographer, Irwin H. Polishook, explains this situation, Williams saw the government of the Church as "entirely spiritual; its methods of advocacy did not call for the weapons of the temporal world. It was this metaphysical separation between church and state that under-

lay the first controversies between Roger Williams and Massachusetts. As years went by, the theory would mature and he would extend it to support the proposition that every man should enjoy the liberty of conscience."

Williams quickly left Boston and briefly took a temporary position filling in for an ill teacher in Salem, Massachusetts. Here the leader was the fiery John Endicott who was more of a Separatist and more sympathetic to Williams. After working in Salem, Williams found a position at the Plymouth Colony where he stayed from 1631 to 1633.

While at the Plymouth Colony, he began a series of close contacts with the Algonquin Indians of the area. He learned their language and experienced aspects of their culture such as the sweat lodge. He made friends with a local chief he called Canonicus and the two spent many hours discussing such things as religion and government. Their friendship may have saved Williams' life later when he was banished to the wilderness in the winter. While traveling in 1643, he wrote *A Key into the Language of America*, a book on the language and culture of the Algonquins. This book was much more accepted in Europe than America and is used today by anthropologists to reconstruct what the Algonquin people of that area were like.

Williams' anthropological / theological study of Native Americans gave him a religion to compare to Christianity. He concluded that the Algonquins and other indigenous Americans should not be converted to Christianity because Christianity was not a part of their culture and they would just have learn it by rote without understanding. Williams thought the religion they had was right for them because it did as much to make them moral people as Christianity did for Northern Europeans. He thought Indian land ownership should be respected so that any land gotten from them should be bought and not taken by force. These were radical ideas at the time.

In 1633 Roger Williams left the Plymouth colony and returned to Salem for a stormy two years where he found himself on a collision course with John Cotton, another refugee from William Laud.

Also in 1633 in England, John Cotton, a powerful and influential Puritan priest, was summoned before the Court of High Commission in London. This court was headed by William Laud, who had become Archbishop

of Canterbury and a favorite of the King's Court. Because of Laud's political power and reputation for persecuting Puritans for their lack of Anglican uniformity of religious beliefs, Cotton fled England for Massachusetts. John Cotton had a wide reputation for learning and piety in England and Massachusetts so he was soon ordained teacher of the First Church of Boston, a post he held until his death in 1652. Cotton staunchly upheld the right of Puritan magistrates to enforce uniformity of religious beliefs.

Roger Williams was still staunchly opposed to the intervention of civil officers in any matter of conscience, including John Cotton's uniformity of beliefs. Williams opposed other aspects of the Massachusetts Bay Theocracy such as the use of the word "God" in oaths and religious tests for office holders. But the biggest problem was that Williams questioned the right of the colonists to take the Indians' land from them merely on the legal basis of the royal charter.

This questioning of the royal charter by Williams actually challenged the authority of the English king, Charles I. All this was happening when King Charles I, Bishop William Laud, and other powerful people in London were plotting to take over the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. At that time the colonists, fearing for their survival, were simultaneously building fortifications and trying to establish the best of relations with the King's Court in London. (A brewing civil war in England distracted the King and his henchmen and saved the colonial charter.)

In 1635 Williams was found guilty of spreading "new authority of magistrates" and was ordered to be banished from the colony. They tried to forcibly put him on a ship to England but he was warned by his friends and slipped away into the wilderness. He survived by living briefly with friendly Indians whose language and culture he had studied and learned.

In 1636, Williams founded the "Providence Plantations" in what was to be the colony of Rhode Island. The city of Providence in the present day state of Rhode Island is named for the site. This was at first an informal colony but later Williams and his colonists managed to obtain two separate colonial charters from separate governments in a civil war racked England.

Thus Roger Williams was the first leader residing on the North American Continent to set up a governmental entity where the

church and the state were separate and there was great freedom from religion. Some examples of the freedom from religion the people of the Providence Plantation enjoyed were no taxes to support the church, no religious test to hold office, and no requirement of an oath in court in the name of God. In the Providence Plantation, Roger Williams put to practical use his theological ideas he developed from his theological concept of Freedom of Conscience.

In 1637, Roger Williams created an Indian trading post near the Narragansett tribe. This trading post, along with farming, gave him a means of earning a living. That is when his work as head of the colony and his trips to Europe to get charters allowed him to attend to his livelihood.

The Providence Plantation colony attracted and provided a safe haven for other critical thinkers, such as the Quakers, who challenged the repressive brand of Puritanism that flourished in Massachusetts. Roger Williams welcomed to the Providence Plantation the Baptists, who had been persecuted and sometimes publicly whipped by the Massachusetts Puritans. Williams briefly became a Baptist, thinking he had found the perfect church he had been searching for. Williams helped to establish the first Baptist church in North America and remained friends with John Clark, a Baptist minister in

his colony. But he moved on, disappointed and continuing his search for the perfect church.

One of the most interesting of the critical thinkers who found haven with Roger Williams' colony was Anne Hutchinson (1591 - 1643). She was a mid-wife and theologian who preached a doctrine of salvation realized through the intuition of God's indwelling grace. This and other ideas of Hutchinsons were a serious challenge to the foundations of the Puritan social order as well as the authority of the Massachusetts clergy. She and her following of about 80 people were banished in 1637. She led her following to Roger Williams and he helped them purchase land from the Indians on what is now the island of Rhode Island where they formed a settlement and lived for a short time, spreading their influence.

It is a testimony to Roger Williams' diplomatic skills and persistence that he was able to obtain, on two separate occasions, colonial charters for the Providence Plantation and Rhode Island. Both charters uphold freedom of conscience. The first of these charters in 1644 came from the Parliament of the Oliver Cromwell government and the second in 1663 from King Charles II. The Charters were very important because they legally established the religious freedom for the people of one British colony in what, in the coming centuries, was to be

the United States of America.

Roger Williams was a fairly prolific writer. His extant works fill seven volumes and much of his work has been lost. He evolved in his thinking throughout his life. Late in his life he became known as a Seeker although he was not a member any Seeker group. The Seeker sect renounced the Bible because they thought the original texts had been lost and in other ways thought organized churches to be wrong. Religious historian, R.T. Handy states, "Williams became convinced of the apostasy of the churches since Constantine had engulfed Christendom and that until God raised up new apostles the true church could not be discerned." He had journeyed far from the ridged Anglican church of his day.

Roger Williams was never fully reimbursed for the cost he incurred in making trips to Europe to obtain colonial charters and his house was burned in 1676 in an Indian war. As a result, he was in poverty when he died in 1683.

Historians vary in their assessment of Roger Williams. But at least some free-thinkers think Roger Williams deserves more credit than he gets. Rob Boston writing in the news letter, Church and State, calls Roger Williams the "forgotten founder". Kimberly Blaker says that his contribution to the "Constitution and Bill of Rights has been underplayed historically".

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

COME
JOIN
US

EVERY THIRD SUNDAY
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM



Pioneering and Secular Heros

Dale McGowan

ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL

"Dad?"

It was my seven year old, Connor, at the dinnertable. When he starts with "Dad?" and goes no further, I know something pretty interesting is coming.

"Yeah Con."

"You know what? NOBODY outside of our family doesn't believe in God."

Oh boy. "Wow. Really? Nobody?"

"That's right. I think everybody else believes in God."

How fortunate, I thought to myself, to have it presented so clearly. This is what kids do beautifully early on – they say what they think, so you really know and can really respond. Things would be easier if everyone did that. Imagine a coworker who, instead of treating you like dirt for years, just came out and said "I think you're lazy. Is that accurate, or no?"

Why, you could address it then and there. But no, soon enough we learn to beat around the bush, to hide our prejudices and perceptions lest they be challenged and corrected. Here, in my boy's honest and understandable perception, was an opportunity to (a) correct this misconception, (b) to praise his openness, and (c) to make it more likely, rather than less likely, that he'd do the same again.

So I said, "What a stupid thing to say! Where did you hear such garbage?"

Okay, I didn't say that. First of all, I'm not

an idiot, and second, it really wasn't stupid at all. The religious profile in this country is so high, it's accepted as a default. Sometimes it seems that there's a cross around every neck and a church on every corner, a veritable conspiracy of reality denial posing as "Wisdom." If you believe, you are encouraged in a hundred ways to trumpet that belief; if you don't, you are discouraged in just as many ways.

So what did I say? Well, I started by validating the observation: "Boy, it sure seems like that sometimes, doesn't it?" I shoveled in another forkful and pretended to ruminate. "Except for people like... Thomas Edison."

His eyes went saucer-sized. "Really??"

"Yep." It's true: Edison was an outspoken atheist in a time and place (19th and early 20th century America) that was hardly friendly to atheism. And I know that Edison is a hero for my

boy, and realized that I'd never even casually mentioned his atheism. That's probably just as well in retrospect: Connor was able to develop the admiration independent of that fact, then the later knowledge that Edison was a disbeliever caused disbelief itself to rise meteorically in my boy's eyes. [Author's note: What kind of a crazy expression is 'rise meteorically'? Meteors fall, don't they?]

I went on. "Oh and, uh...also Einstein." Okay, now I started to feel a little dirty. This

is just too easy. But it's true: Einstein vehemently denied belief in a personal god of any kind, preferring what might be called a mild and abstract pantheism. "And Thomas Jefferson, of course." Okay okay, Jefferson was a deist, which means he believed in the concept of a beneficent deity with no personal connection to humankind. The point is that he was an articulate opponent of religious literalism, and completely renounced Christianity. I'm not going to split hairs with a seven-year old. I continued. "And Stephen Jay Gould (who he knows via dinosaurs)..."

"So, all of the smartest people didn't believe in God!"

Now I've got to draw the line there. It's not that simple. "Actually no. There are a lot of smart people who believe in God, but it's important to know that there are also a lot of smart people who didn't, and don't."

"Well Einstein was the smartest person ever, and he didn't believe..."

And off we went into a terrific discussion of intelligence and belief and a hundred other things. My main intention all along was to encourage a view beyond his surface impressions, to use his existing heroes to debunk the myth of religious unanimity, and, just as important, to keep the question open, always open. That means open in BOTH directions: telling him that all smart people are atheists is just absurd. There are good explanations for intelligent believers, of course, though none lend any credence to the religious perspective itself. But it is a powerful remedy to that myth of religious unanimity to make a habit of pointing out which of the people your kids already admire are also, incidentally, disbelievers in God.

So I'll forgo the opportunity to indoctrinate them to particular outcomes, since there's no need. The process is the thing. I teach my kids to love knowledge, to value critical thinking as the best route to real understanding, and to dislike self-deception and its ability to derail us. If they embrace those values – and so far, so good – I'll be a happy dad.



Do you know of any Church/State separation violations?

Some things to look for are the posting of the ten commandment in public (government) buildings including public school buildings, city parks, municipal buildings, and libraries.

To voice your concerns, please email the Metroplex Atheist Director:
director@metroplexatheists.org

Cathedral – Continued from page 1

grants to repair a facility still being used for sectarian religious services is raising concerns among state-church separationists and even religious groups who warn that it sets a dangerous, unconstitutional precedent.

“No matter what political guise it falls under, any government funding of the activities or buildings of religious organizations corrupts the integrity and independence of both institution,” said David Condo, Maryland State Director for American Atheists in a statement to news media. “If a congregation wants to repair their church, they are more than welcome to do it with their own money, but not mine.”

Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists added that the effort by Baltimore Catholic Church officials was a “blatant attempt to use public money to promote and prop-up organized religion.

“It ignores the Constitution and the very essence of state-church separation. It also means that every Atheists, Freethinker and other nonbeliever in the country is going to be picking up the tab to repair not just the basilica but other ‘historic’ houses of worship across the country.”

Ironically, the restoration of the basilica is being promoted as both a way of preserving “historic” houses of worship, and recognizing the role which the structure allegedly played as a monument to religious freedom. Maryland was an important player in the development of religious pluralism, starting when Roman Catholics fled nearby colonies and the persecution of the Church of England. But the Baltimore basilica played no role in any of this. The Maryland Constitution of 1776 did, when it stipulated that no individual shall be compelled “to maintain any particular place of worship, or any particular ministry.”

Critics of the disestablishment of religion nevertheless inserted a provision permitting the legislature to “lay a general and equal tax, for the support of the Christian religion.” In 1783, the governor promoted a measure “placing every branch of the Christian Church upon the most equal and respectable footing,” and the following year another bill proposed taxation to aid all Christian sects, exempting anyone pro-

fessing to be a “Jew or Mohometan, or (declaring) that he does not believe in Christian religion.” Newspapers crusaded against these and similar proposals, warning that they would again lead to the Establishment of religion, and that any compulsory support of churches violated religious freedom.

The matter was finally settled — at least for the next two centuries or so — when the legislature enacted a constitutional amendment that outlawed “an equal or general tax or any other tax ... for the support of any religion.”

Some religious groups are suspicious today of using public money for the restoration of churches, even if they do boast an impressive historical pedigree.

Providing government funds for renovation “is a way of extending the reach of the federal government into the sanctity of the house of worship,” warned Rev. C. Welton Gaddy, President of the Interfaith Alliance.

“Religion has been best for this nation when religious institutions have ... spoken to the nation as a voice of conscience,” Gaddy told the Baltimore Sun newspaper recently. “If you lose that independence, you begin to compromise your integrity.”

But Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives says that the basilica is like many other “treasures” in America which are “in sacred places.” Towey argues that President Bush considers any restrictions on the use of funds to rehabilitate architectural or historic places to be a case of discrimination against religion.

“It’s very hard to tell the story of the 18th and 19th-century America without including places like the basilica,” Towey told the Sun.

The battle over the use of public monies to “restore” or “preserve” houses of worship is spreading throughout the country.

At the behest of the White House, federal agencies are re-writing regulations which in the past restricted the use of funds

to rehabilitate churches that may have historic or architectural value, especially if they housed active congregations. One potential source of money, for instance, is the “Save America’s Treasures” program launched in 1998 by then-President Bill Clinton. Money was made available for a number of projects involving religious sites, such as a \$75,000 grant to the preservation of San Esteban del Rey Mission located near Santa Fe, NM.

In June, 2003, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton announced sweeping changes in other federal guidelines concerning the repair of “historic” churches and other sectarian properties. The Old North Church of Boston, Mass. received \$317,000 in public funds to repair and restore windows, and render the building more accessible to the public. The constitutionality of the award has yet to be challenged; but Norton justified the grant by citing the fact that Old North was the oldest church building in Boston, and

that Paul Revere spotted two lanterns hung from the church as a signal of the advancing British troops.

“This new policy (giving money to houses of worship) will bring balance to our historic preservation program and end a discriminatory double-standard that has been applied against those religious properties,” Norton declared.

The new guidelines gut rules in place since the 1970s governing the disbursement of public money for the rehabilitation of churches and church-controlled assets.

In the wake of the Old North Church grant, Jim Towey of the WHOFBCI said that religious groups could not be part of the grant mix in the \$30 million-a-year program operated by Save America’s Treasures.

The use of public money to aid religion under the guise of “historic preservation” surfaced during the 2000 presidential campaign, and is sure to be on the issue roster with candidates in 2004. One unabashed supporter of this precedent — along with President Bush — is Sen. Joseph Lieberman.

“If a congregation wants to repair their church, they are more than welcome to do it with their own money, but not mine!”

David Condo
MD STATE DIRECTOR OF
AMERICAN ATHEISTS

During a December, 2001 address to an obscure but influential group known as Partners for Sacred Places, Lieberman justified the use of taxation to repair houses of worship.

“We can’t tell American history ... without talking about the history of our sacred places,” Lieberman gushed. “We can’t have a strong future for our community without safeguarding the buildings (that are used for worship).”

AANEWS noted: “Lieberman suggested that President Bush’s faith-based initiative ... could play a key role in the rehabilitation of dilapidated churches, synagogues and mosques across the nation.”

The presidential hopeful also told his audience that houses of worship “are anchoring centers of community service and moral leadership.”

The idea of using public money to repair and maintain religious properties as a venue for administrating religion-saturated social programs was proposed by John DiIulio, the first White House faith-based project czar.

Addressing the Partners group in December, 2001, DiIulio excoriated Americans who were “behind the curve in thinking of our older religious properties as civic assets.”

DiIulio also linked public funding of church repairs and preservation to the wider issue of President Bush’s faith-based

initiative.

“When those buildings crumble, when the deferred maintenance catches up, the preschool and the prison ministry and the day-care center and the after-school latchkey learning program ... crumble and go away, too. They just don’t move to the Ramada Inn.”

DiIulio also revealed that the Bush administration would challenge the 1995 administrative regulation that banned the use of federal money controlled by the National Park Service for maintaining or rehabilitating any religious properties. He said that the White House considered those sorts of constitutional and administrative guidelines an example of “unfriendly” social policy directed against religious groups.

Behind the scenes, the Bush administration and Towey’s White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives have been quietly working to dismantle what they see as “barriers” to the funding of religious groups, especially where historic preservation or the fate of religion-oriented social projects are involved. A host of federal agencies can now open their budgets for church repair and “historical” celebrations.

They include agencies and projects funded by the Department of the Interior, including the National Endowment for the Arts, National Park Service, the Institute

for Museum and Library Services, and the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. Also affected are such diverse programs as the National Capital Planning Commission, the Smithsonian Institution, Commission of Fine Arts, Bureau of Land Management, National Gallery of Art and even the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. These and other agencies/projects may be used as funding conduits to repair or assist “historic” houses of worship, provided some sort of minimal rationale for the subsidy can be presented.

Other cases of religious groups benefiting from the constitutionally-suspect government grants are beginning to surface.

In Atlantic City, NJ, a local Baptist congregation seems to be benefiting from a sudden availability of government funding to landscape the sidewalk area in front of the church. Meanwhile back in Baltimore, the pastor for St. Vincent de Paul Church has filed an application for a state credit. Rev. Richard Lawrence told the Baltimore Sun he wants to recoup up to \$250,000 from the state for repairs to the church rectory which dates to the early 1800s.

Delegate Samuel I. Rosenbert, a Baltimore Democrat is on board with the project, and declares that it would be “unfair” to exclude faith-based groups from receiving government assistance.



*Attention DFW
area
atheists and agnostics!*

HUMANIST CHURCH
of NORTH TEXAS

Scheduled first service:
Saturday October 18th, 11:30 a.m.
1111 Cordell
Denton, TX

www.humanistchurch.org/





© Reuters NewMedia Inc./CORBIS

Workers work to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from the rotunda and moved to a undisclosed area of the Alabama Judicial Building where Superior Court Justice Roy Moore had refused to take it down, in Montgomery, Alabama. Justice Moore has been suspended from the Judicial Review Board pending a review for not complying with the federal order, drawing protests from Christians who wanted to keep it there.

Alabama – Continued from page 9

while the removal of Moore's monument was "an ominous sight," he was "quite surprised the movers simply transferred the monument; I had assumed they would ship it away from the site altogether. Apparently, the easily-offended plaintiffs who sued to have the monument removed will not be offended if it remains at the courthouse, as long as they can't see it."

Falwell added that he would be "honored to have the monument prominently placed at Liberty University campus until — hopefully — the U.S. Supreme Court eventually hears the case and rules in his favor.

"But I'm glad it is remaining there in Montgomery, for now."

The recent events, especially Moore's defiance of a clear federal order to remove the commandments, has resulted in a slight cleft within America's agitated evangelical and fundamentalist community.

Both Falwell and fellow televangelist Pat

Robertson criticized Moore for defying the order, although they continue to support the unconstitutional display of the Ten Commandments. In the past, Robertson especially has suffered because of reckless statements, such as calling for "rebellion" against federal judges.

Others, including religious right activist Gary Bauer, head of the Campaign for Working Families, told media today, "While there is deep division over Moore's strategy, it is increasingly clear that the public's patience is wearing thin with our rogue courts."

Bauer continued to hammer away at what is an emerging agenda with religious conservatives, namely, curbing the authority of federal judges they increasingly describe as "sinister secularists in black robes."

"For decades now, unelected judges have gone unchallenged while they ripped out every vestige of faith from the public square and tore down every symbol of our

most deeply held beliefs," Bauer told Falwell's newsletter. "Whether it's prayer in the public schools, banning the Ten Commandments and Pledge of Allegiance, or inventing 'rights' to partial-birth abortion and homosexual sodomy, unelected judges have shown incredible disdain for public opinion, majority rule and the laws written by our elected representatives. Our representative democracy is in danger of becoming a robed oligarchy."

A similar reaction was echoed by those demonstrating on the steps of the Judicial Building today. Many had camped out, others were on a "Minuteman" response list.

"Put it back, put it back!" one agitated man screamed as fellow demonstrators tried to calm him down.

Rev. Robert Schenck of the National Clergy Council told reporters, "It is a lamentable day in Alabama and the United States."

Patrick Mahoney of the Christian Defense Coalition spoke out against Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor.

In the past, Pryor has supported Justice Moore and the public display of the Ten Commandments, but declared that the state had an obligation to obey the federal court order to remove the monument. About 150 of the Commandments supporters tried to march into the Statehouse hoping to meet with Pryor, but were blocked by a cordon of state police. Several representatives of the group managed to have an audience with Pryor's chief deputy, though.

According to WSFA television news, several state employees say they were threatened by the agitated demonstrators.

And the anxiety increased when it was learned that with the removal of the monument, a lawsuit filed in Mobile claiming that such an action would violate freedom of religion would not be heard by a federal judge later in the day.

Larry Darby, Alabama State Director for American Atheists, was pleased with the removal of the unconstitutional Commandments monument, telling news reporters, "It's about time. Justice Moore has made a mockery of the judicial system.

"He has disgraced the bench and the bar and has embarrassed the state of Alabama worldwide. I'm only disappointed that it will not be out of the building and off of taxpayer property."

UPCOMING EVENTS

BUSINESS MEETING

Regular Monthly Meeting:

What: Meeting to decide general business of the group and to discuss current events.

Date: Third Sunday of the month

Time: 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Place: Heritage Park
217 Main St. at Second St.
Irving, TX 75060

SOCIAL MEETINGS

J. Gilligan's:

What: "My dinner with Atheists," social

time with a bunch of heathens.

Date: Every Wednesday

Time: 6:30 PM - 9:00 PM

Place: J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill
(Meet on the grill side)
400 E. Abram Street
Arlington, TX 76010

Atheists Meetup Day:

What: Meet with other local Atheists to talk about your beliefs.

Date: Third Tuesday of the month

Time: 7:00 PM

Place: TBA; For locations near you visit: atheist.meetup.com

MARG:

What: The Metroplex Atheists Reading Group discusses selected books. For the latest book, visit:

www.metroplexatheists.org/read/

Date: Third Sunday of the month

Time: After the regular meeting

Place: Heritage Park
217 Main St. at Second St.
Irving, TX 75060

Do you have a special event?

Submit it to:
editor@metroplexatheists.org

September 2003

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	1	2	3 J. Gilligan's	4	5	6
7	8	9	10 J. Gilligan's	11	12	13
14	15	16 Atheist Meetup	17 J. Gilligan's	18	19	20
21 Reg. Meeting & MARG	22	23	24 J. Gilligan's	25	26	27
28	29	30	31 J. Gilligan's			

October 2003

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7 J. Gilligan's	8	9	10
11	12	13	14 J. Gilligan's	15	16	17
18 Reg. Meeting & MARG	19	20 Atheist Meetup	21 J. Gilligan's	22	23	24
25	26	27	28 J. Gilligan's	29	30	31

***THE ATHEIST VOICE* is a bi-monthly publication of Metroplex Atheists.**

For more information, please visit our website: www.metroplexatheists.org

To submit an article or letter to the editor, please email *The Atheist Voice* Editor: editor@metroplexatheists.org

THE ATHEIST VOICE
c/o Metroplex Atheists
Box 48116
Watauga, TX 76148

Deliver to:

"Because we must. Because we have the call. Because it is nobler to fight for rationality without winning than to give up in the face of continued defeats. Because whatever true progress humanity makes is through the rationality of the occasional individual and because any one individual we may win for the cause may do more for humanity than a hundred thousand who hug superstition to their breasts."

— Isaac Asimov, when asked why he fights religion with no hope for victory

WHY DO WE FIGHT?