

THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS
SEPTEMBER 2004, VOLUME 2, NUMBER 5

Houston Atheist Society applauds removal of bible display

HOUSTON ATHEIST SOCIETY

Members of the Houston Atheist Society praised Federal Judge Sim Lake's decision to remove the bible display from the west entrance of the Harris County Civil Courts building downtown.

Local real estate agent Kay Staley filed the suit against Harris County in August of 2003. The marble and granite monument was erected in the late 1950s as a tribute to William Mosher, a Christian philanthropist who supported the Star of Hope Mission. The display is unique in that it is the only one in the nation which features a complete King James bible under glass. The monument was maintained by the Star of Hope, but its upkeep was abandoned in the late 1980s, and the display case sat empty for 7 years. Passersby used it as a trash receptacle.

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'Commandments Judge' resurfaces on Capitol Hill

Jeremy Leaming
AMERICANS UNITED

Like an annoying ditty one can't erase from the mind, 'Ten Commandments Judge' Roy Moore continues surfacing in public forums to air his strident anti-First Amendment views.

For the second time in recent months, the former Alabama Supreme Court chief justice appeared before a congressional committee to tout a court-stripping bill he helped write, dubbed the "Constitution Restoration Act of 2004." The bill would strip the federal courts of their power to find government acknowledgments of religion a violation of the First Amendment. The measure also threatens

judges who do consider such cases with impeachment.

Moore, who was kicked off the Alabama Supreme Court in 2002 for refusing to follow a federal court order to remove a Ten Commandments monument from public display in the state's Judicial Building, offered his usual overwrought arguments in favor of the bill, H.R. 3799.

"For over 50 years, the federal courts have steadily eroded our first freedom, the freedom of conscience, and have attempted to replace the Godly foundation upon which this country was built with a foundation that espouses the philosophy of secular humanism, demanding people's ultimate allegiance to the state rather than God," Moore told the

House Judiciary subcommittee.

As is his wont, Moore blasted "anti-religious zealots" for spurring the federal courts to strip God from the public square. He also claimed that the Founding Fathers would take great offense federal court decisions that have barred school-sponsored prayer from classrooms, especially in light of all the federal government agencies and state governments that have in some form acknowledged God.

"You see, we're erasing our history right under your noses in this Congress, right under your watchful eye," Moore told the House panel.

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Rationally Speaking:

Monty Python's guide to philosophy

Secular humanists are often accused of not espousing a “positive” philosophy, of simply denying the existence of the supernatural while resigning themselves to a meaningless and joyless life. Indeed, I was once a guest on a radio talk show together with Skeptic publisher Michael Shermer, when the host incredulously observed that we seemed to be pretty happy people “for being skeptics.”



Dr. Massimo Pigliucci
ATHEIST ALLIANCE

I don't know where this stereotype comes from, other than the deeply entrenched prejudices of people who think that there is meaning in life only if somebody up there shows a keen interest in the details of their sexual practices. But I know how to once and for all debunk the myth: let us briefly examine the obviously humanistic philosophy embodied in the work of one of the most happy-going groups of people I've ever come across, the British comedians collectively known as “Monty Python” (Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Michael Palin). My analysis will be confined for the moment to the Monty Python (henceforth, MP) songs, leaving a detailed study of their movies and TV productions to a more appropriately academic venue.

Every philosophical analysis needs to

start with good questions, and MP does just that in the appropriately titled *The Meaning of Life* (from the homonymous movie):

“Why are we here?
What's life all about?
Is God really real,
or is there some doubt?”

And as any good philosopher would do, MP does not provide us with simplistic, canned, answers, but rather with alternatives to seriously ponder:

“Is life just a game where we make up the rules ...
Or are we just spiraling coils,
of self-replicating DNA?”

Which shows an understanding of both the problem of relativism in morality and of Richard Dawkins' concept of the selfish gene.

Monty Python does appreciate alternative, even religious, viewpoints, as we can evince from several passages of *Every Sperm is Sacred* (from the movie “*The Meaning of Life*”):

“I'm a Roman Catholic,
and have been since before I was born
And the one thing they say
about Catholics,
is they'll take you as soon
as you're warm ...
You don't have to have a great brain ...
You're a Catholic the moment
Dad came.”

Which implies a view of sex that one can find developed at length in several

Encyclicals by various Popes, or can be clearly summarized in MP's system as:

“Every sperm is sacred
every sperm is great
If a sperm is wasted
God gets quite irate.”

However, one could argue, make fun of God all you like, but in the end isn't it rather obvious that He is responsible for the beauty of creation, arguably one of the most important things that give meaning to our life? This is, of course, the well known argument from design, presented at length, for example, by William Paley in his 1831 book, *Natural theology: or, Evidences of the existence and attributes of the Deity, collected from the appearances of nature*. Naturally, David Hume had already debunked the argument in his 1779 volume, *Dialogues concerning natural religion*. Hume, pointed out that one needs to consider not just the good stuff that God allegedly made, but also the rest. Which MP summarizes very eloquently (and in a lot fewer words than Hume) in *All Things Dull & Ugly*:

“All things sick and cancerous,
all evil great and small,
all things foul and dangerous,
the Lord God made them all.”

Never was the argument from evil against the existence of God more aptly presented. But MP does not limit itself to what Francis Bacon called the *pars destruens* of their philosophy. They go on with a *pars construens* by elaborating an alternative view-

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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

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IRS reminds churches not to break law

Sam Felder
AMERICANS UNITED

In this heated election year, Jerry Falwell and his allies on the far right are working to confuse America's pastors about tax law. In late July, the Lynchburg, Va.-based televangelist wrote to churches telling them not to worry about federal tax law.

Under the headline, “NO CHURCH HAS EVER LOST ITS TAX-EXEMPT STATUS,” Falwell wrote, “Every American pastor, as a tax-paying citizen, is free to express his views and opinions.”

Falwell also claimed that the IRS rarely enforces the “no politicking” rule, implying that churches should not worry about it.

As the election draws near, a church in Tampa, Fla., has learned the hard way that Falwell is wrong. The First Baptist Church of College Hill was preparing to host a political forum but had to rethink its plan at the last minute. The Rev. Abraham

Brown had received a letter from the IRS earlier that day asking about political activity at the church on behalf of a Democratic candidate for public office.

This is just the latest evidence that the IRS takes seriously provisions of federal tax law forbidding partisan politicking by tax-exempt groups, including religious organizations.

Falwell certainly ought to know that. In 1993, his “Old Time Gospel Hour” was required by the IRS to pay \$50,000 in back taxes for diverting charitable contributions into a political action committee that sought to elect congressional candidates. The ministry also had its tax exemption revoked retroactively for the years 1986-87.

Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network suffered a similar fate in 1997.

The IRS provides clear guidance on this issue. Clergy should examine those simple guidelines and then obey them. It's in everyone's best interest.

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Studying Belief: Why would atheists study belief and religion?

Kim L. Cole

GUEST COLUMNIST

"I've never read the bible," someone once said to me. "I already know that it's not true, so what's the point?"

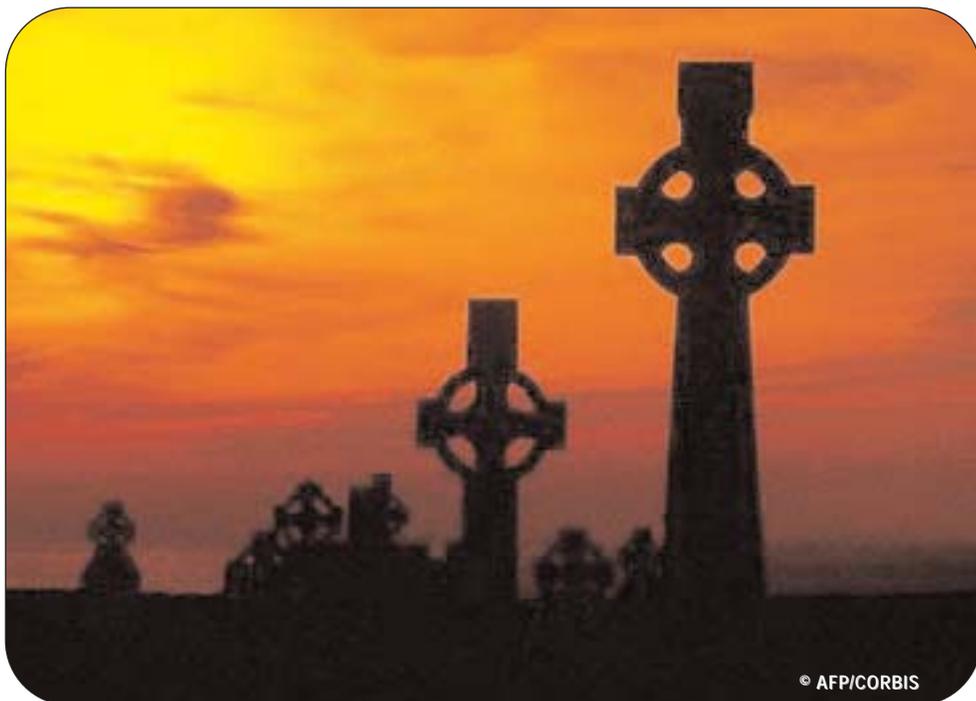
Interesting question. Why have I, as an atheist, read the bible? Why would I be interested in the details of beliefs that I don't share? The answer to that is tied in with the reason that I am fascinated by the legends and myths of ancient people. It is the same reason that I collect fairy tales and folk beliefs from around the globe. People are endlessly interesting. Their cultures and their actions are infinitely varied. Whether we like it or not, the reason for a large percentage of those actions is belief. Religion, even. Why did the ancient Egyptians bury their dead the way they did? Religion. Why did "witches" die in Salem? Religion.

These are two vastly different situations, but both motivated by the same desire to placate or entice a god or gods through their actions. Ever since men first believed there were divinities watching over them they began to adjust their behavior and their way of looking at the world. Therein lies the fascination. What is it that guides and shapes civilization? A ruler's whims? Riches or hardships? How much of the above is due in whole or in part to religion? We will never know unless we study people and their beliefs.

"But," I hear you say, "What does that have to do with the bible?"

For an atheist in the United States, everything. The population of our country is overwhelmingly religious. The reigns of government, both local and federal, are held mostly by Christians. Many of the Christians are, or profess to be, of a fundamentalist nature.

We encounter Christians on a daily basis. They make laws that govern our lives. They hold a multitude of positions that may or may not agree with our own. Reasonable discourse can be all but impossible if the people involved do not understand each other.



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I'm not saying that you have to believe what Christians believe. I don't. But I do think that you ought to at least know what they believe, and understand it. One reason is that I don't think knowledge is ever a bad thing. When you learn, you grow. Another reason is that Christians can begin to seem less menacing when you understand their motivations.

An example: It can be very frustrating for an atheist when someone (who knows your beliefs) tells you that they will pray for you. It comes across as if they are attempting to invalidate your beliefs in favor of theirs. I won't try to tell you that you shouldn't get upset. Your feelings are there, whether they should be or no. But it might help if you understand that they see prayer as a truly caring act that one does for

someone they are worried about, or whom they love. Most Christians would never view prayer, or the offer of prayer, as a hostile act.

It is my view that with this in mind it becomes easier to tell the Christian "No thank you," and perhaps to explain to them your view of the offer. It also becomes easier to debate with Christians, if that is an activity you enjoy. Debating

someone is always easier if you understand their point of view.

Finally, understanding helps to avoid that one truly terrible thing born of differences. Stereotypes. It's easy to say, "Christians are like this," and "Christians are like that." I've even fallen prey to this one a time or two. If you really understand Christianity in its varied forms, you come to understand that Christians are not one homogenous group with the same thought and behavior patterns. Christians are, like anyone else, individuals with their own thoughts and belief quirks.

So we see that there are many different reasons for studying religion and belief. The pathways that take mankind from belief to action are fascinating, and have infinite possibilities. It also helps you as a person, as a debater, and as a human being to have a greater understanding of those around us. This is especially true when those around us are often the ones in control.

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AU blasts backdoor effort to pass “Church Politicking” bill

AMERICANS UNITED

Religious Right allies in Congress are quietly trying to alter the tax code to permit church-based electioneering in advance of November's elections to help right-wing candidates, Americans United for Separation of Church and State has charged.

At issue is a 50-year-old provision in federal tax law that bars non-profit groups, including houses of worship, from endorsing or opposing candidates for public office.

U.S. Rep. Walter B. Jones (R-NC) has repeatedly introduced legislation to repeal the measure, but the House has shown little interest in it. The Jones bill was voted down in October of 2002, and Jones has not been able to engineer another vote since then.

Frustrated, Jones and his supporters are insisting that his measure be inserted into a corporate tax reform bill. According to a report in *The Hill* newspaper, 131 members of the House back the Jones effort and have written to Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) pressing for action. They want to put the change into the omnibus tax bill during conference negotiations.

Meanwhile, in the Senate, U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA) is also pushing for adoption of the change during the conference process.

“This is a backdoor ploy to recruit America's houses of worship into partisan politicking,” said Americans United Executive Director Barry W. Lynn. “Jones and his allies can't win on the floor of either house, so they're trying this scheme to circumvent the legislative process.”

Lynn noted that Jones has been upfront about the partisan nature of his goals: He believes repealing the no-politicking rule will lead to the election of more conservative Republicans.

In a column published in July, Religious Right leader Paul Weyrich observed, “Jones is...convinced that the passage of his bill means the difference between victory and defeat for the president and many Senate candidates. One prime example is his colleague Rep. Richard Burr, who is running for the seat vacated by Sen. John Edwards, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee.”

Lynn said that while Jones frequently wraps his bill in lofty rhetoric about free speech, his real goal is to use churches to engineer election victories for Religious Right candidates.

“This bill has nothing to do with free speech,” said Lynn. “It is merely a vehicle for Jones and his supporters to build church-based political machines. He would corrupt the mission of the church by changing the focus from the spiritual to the political.”

“This bill has nothing to do with free speech. It is merely a vehicle for Jones and his supporters to build church-based political machines. He would corrupt the mission of the church by changing the focus from the spiritual to the political.”

Barry W. Lynn
AMERICANS UNITED
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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Ask-an-Atheist: "What is the strangest claim that someone has made attempting to convince you that their religion is the right path to follow?"

I had a guy tell me that Buddha and Mohammed were both dead as a door-nail, but Jesus rose again. He's the only one who came back to life, so his must be the true belief.

–S.L.

I can recall the claim that the use of A.D. and B.C. were proof that Jesus was real, after all we wouldn't use them for our calendar if he wasn't. They thought this argument was quite brilliant until I pointed out the fact that he had just proved that the Roman and Norse gods were also real.

–S.C.

I was having a discussion with a fellow in my office about the existence of gods when he started getting frustrated. Then he looked out the window and pointed at a car on the street and asked, "did someone make that car?" I responded, "I'm pretty sure that car was constructed by men and machines in a factory somewhere." So he said, "well there ya go." And walked out as if that settled the argument.

Of course, I didn't let him get away with it. I followed him back to his office and took the argument to it's logical conclusion. Of course then they have to claim that their god is exempt from the rule and can therefore be the sole thing in the universe that didn't have a creator.

–R.C.

There just has to be something else" is the weirdest that anyone has said to me face to face. Of course, the response to that is, "Uh... No there doesn't."

–A.D.

I just had this conversation last week with a gal at work who tries to convert me on a regular basis. In exasperation (because I'm just so darned uncooperative), she finally asked me, "What would it take to convince you there's a God?" I told her it would take a bona-fide miracle. She asked me to give her an example. I said, "One person whose cancer goes into remission. That is NOT a miracle; it's the

nature of the disease. The whole cancer ward at the local hospital – instantly cured. That would be a miracle." She proceeded to tell me that if that's what it would take, that's what would happen. She promised that everyone in the cancer ward at the local hospital would be cured "within three years" and that she would at that point call me on the phone and say, "I told you so!"

I didn't ask her why, if it were possible to request – and receive – a miracle on the order of dozens being instantly cured of cancer, would she choose to use this power for the sole purpose of convincing one person of the existence of God rather than, for instance, as a humanitarian gesture to end the suffering of the sick and dying! (And she couldn't narrow the time frame down more accurately than a three-year span?)

I told her I wouldn't be holding my breath.

–L.M.

Just the other day, one of my co-workers said that "it's more about believing and not thinking." Hmm...I guess that's what they mean by "blind faith."

–D.R.

Yeah. One of my friends says "you don't need faith if you have facts" and "you don't need facts if you have faith."

Or how about Martin Luther's "Whoever wants to be a Christian should tear the eyes out of his reason . . ."

You must part with reason and not know anything of it and even kill it; else one will not get into the kingdom of heaven."

And, of course, my personal favorite "When you are sure you are right, you have a moral obligation to impose your will on anyone who disagrees with you," Thomas de Torquemada, grand inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition

–C.V.

I had to mention the guy that claimed that the earth was flat (like it says in the Bible) because we don't see people standing on their heads, and that that was logical proof.

But then, he was the same one who claimed that god used different color dirt to create the different races.

Of course, there are the ones that say that The Bible proves god's existence because (A.) the Bible is god's word, and it's god's word because (B.) it says so because, (back to A.) etc.

–C.C.

Once, when I was the host of the ACA's weekly public access call-in TV show, we had a caller insist that the story of Moses was true because, "they even made a movie out of it".

–J.D.

In a recent email conversation with a local pastor, I explained several ways in which theism appears to be inherently irrational. He couldn't refute my arguments, and he couldn't come up with any rational arguments favoring theism, so he took a drastic measure I never anticipated -- he redefined "rational"!

Some choice quotes:

"So the issue of rationality has to do with whether or not you are thinking spiritually."

"Keep in mind, the term 'real world' is alluding to the physical universe only. Not the spiritual (which is equally, if not more, real)."

"If you don't believe the Scriptures then whatever alternative you come up with is simply fascinating theory and therefore truly devoid of intellectual virtue."

–S.R.

I pronounce the judgement of God upon you! You will face His Bema Throne! The only way to stop this judgement is if you repent and turn to GOD ALMIGHTY in this hour!"

–M.W.

Most try to first run through the gamut of the ordinary you will bur in hell to Jesus loves you. Then they usually try to guilt you by saying they are only interested in helping you.

–E.P.

Book Review: How Whales Walked Into the Sea

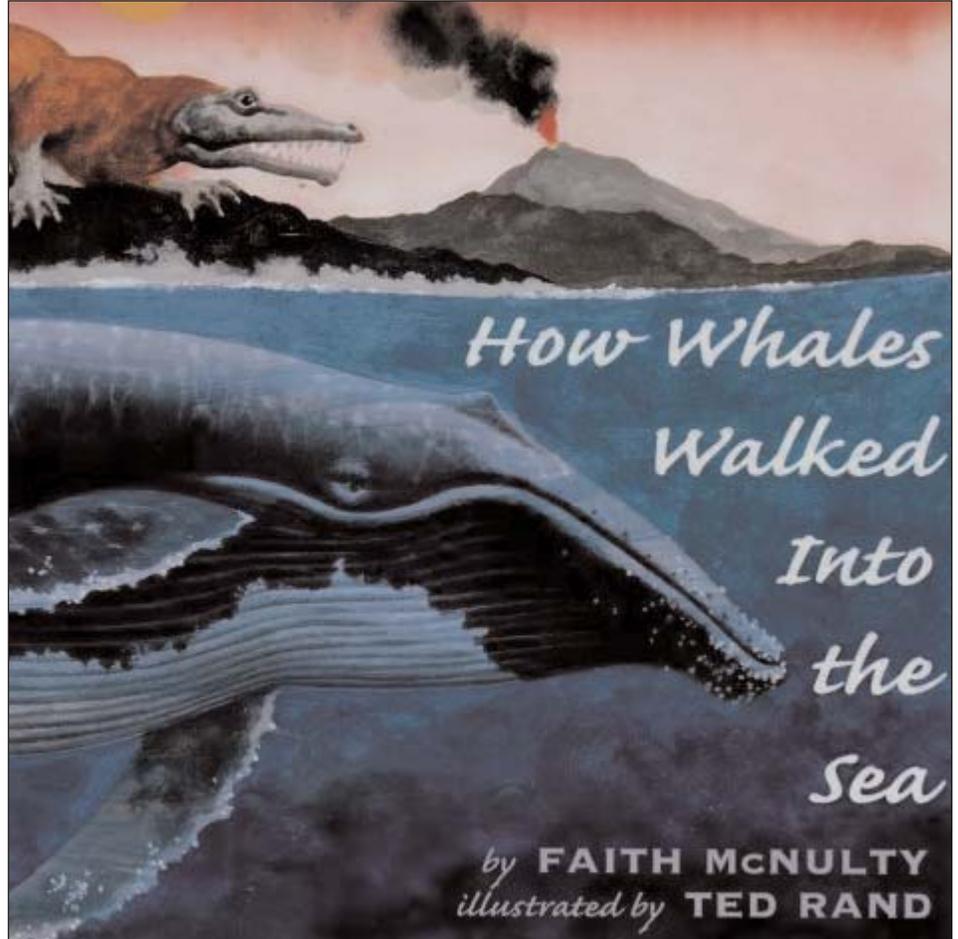
ATHEIST ALLIANCE

The terms “evolution” and “natural selection” are often used interchangeably, which confuses an already complex subject. Both ideas are challenging to understand, but in different ways, on different scales.

“How Whales Walked Into the Sea,” by Faith McNulty tackles the tougher challenge of explaining evolution itself - in kid terms, no less - by tracing the ancestry of a single modern animal, the whale, as it evolved from a wolf-like land mammal over the course of twenty million years.

Such a book would have been mostly conjectural just twenty years ago; the fossil intermediaries that filled in the blanks in whale evolution are brand-spanking new discoveries, mostly made in the 1990s in Pakistan and Northern Africa. This book, then, has the distinction of being a children's science book that's well ahead of many high school and college textbooks.

McNulty begins by noting that modern whales have always been a curiosity: warm-blooded, live-bearing, air-breathing creatures living in the sea. It's the ultimate fish-out-of-water story - or nonfish-IN-water story, I suppose. Each two-page spread takes a single, easy-to-follow evolutionary step, providing hypotheses for how natural selection may have spurred the development of each new form. Looking to supplement depleted resources on land, Mesonychid chases fish into ever-deeper water; those with broader feet swim further and deeper, securing a selective advantage that leads to offspring with ever-broader extremities. Mesonychid eventually evolves far enough to speciate to Ambulocetus, “the walking whale,” an animal more suited to water than land, then to Rodhocetus, “the hardly-walking whale,” whose



limbs are almost entirely flipper-like. The next fossil form, Dorudon, still has tiny vestigial hind legs, though they are utterly useless and destined to disappear with time. And perhaps most captivating of all in this clear sequence are the vestigial structures of the modern whale - still possessed of tiny leg bones, though now completely internal, and of a complete wrist/hand/finger skeleton within the front flippers.

The lexicon may seem too hard for kids - if you don't know kids. I have seen an entire preschool classroom of four-year olds gleefully spitting out “Diplodocus!

Euocephalus! Archaeopteryx!” as the teacher's pointer moved from one creature to another on a wall poster. For reasons I've yet to fathom, kids just lap up these massive Latin monikers without a hiccup. McNulty takes full advantage of this ability and of their magnetic attraction to pre-historic life, using accurate terms and underlining such critical elements as time scale and the logic of natural selection. The result is a book that is likely to send parents' voices trailing off in wonder as they are reminded just how lovely and compelling the evolutionary process is.

Are you searching for Atheists in the metroplex?

Join in the discussions at the DFW Atheist Talk group.
groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWatheistTalk/

Nuts in the news

VATICAN CITY

Coordinated attacks in Baghdad and Mosul killed at least seven people, wounded more than 30 and shocked the nation's Christian minority. Pope John Paul II said the attacks Roman Catholic churches in Iraq during worship services were deplorable.

"At the same time, I hope that all believers in one merciful God will unite in deploring every form of violence and will cooperate for the return of harmony in the tormented Iraqi land," said the pope.

NEW YORK, NY

Women rabbis in the Conservative branch of Judaism earn less than their male counterparts and hold fewer top jobs in synagogues, according to a new study on gender equity.

Male rabbis on average earn \$119,000 in salary and benefits, compared to women's average of \$77,000, the survey said. A salary gap persists when a more direct comparison is made between men and women rabbis in comparable jobs.

UBAHU-EZIKE, Nigeria

Nigerian police have arrested 30 witch-doctors in a raid on fetish shrines in Anambra state where over 50 decomposing bodies and 20 human skulls were discovered, a police spokesman said. The head, genitals and other vital parts had been severed from some of the bodies, found in a teak forest in Okija village, a sign they may have been killed for ritual.

Ritual killing is common in some parts of Nigeria where many people believe they can become instant millionaires by using human organs to make potent charms. Many Nigerians mix traditional religions with Christianity or Islam.

Police said preliminary investigations showed that the victims died after the sor-

cerers engaged them in an animist ritual. They said that a small group of "high priests" had exploited the traditional religion and turned it into a big money-spinning operation.

"They have been using the shrines to extort money from innocent people. They

ride the best cars in the community and build fine, fine houses. Nobody dares challenge them, not even the traditional ruler."

As part of the ritual, police said the victims pledged their property, including bank accounts, to a deity upon their death. Their relations were made to believe they would also die if they

refused to give up the property.

BLANTYRE, Malawi

A Malawian court convicted a Catholic priest and a nun of disorderly conduct Thursday after they were caught engaged in a sexual act in a parked car with tinted windows. Passers by alerted police at Lilongwe International Airport after the parked Toyota Corolla, which had tinted windows, began shaking in what police described as "a funny manner."

BELFAST, Ireland

A mechanical digger was smashed into a Catholic bar in a flash point district of Belfast, in an attack that local politicians blamed on Protestants.

Windows were smashed and some structural damage done, police said, but no one was injured. A fire started but was quickly put out. "A number of people were inside the bar at the time but they managed to get out," a police spokeswoman said. "A large crowd had gathered outside but police restored calm with the assistance of local community representatives."

"I have no doubt that the loyalist hooligans responsible for this attack set out to heighten tensions in the area between the two communities, and I am calling on people in my community to remain calm in the face of this aggression," he added.

LAGOS, Nigeria

Two policemen were shot and two more stabbed during a raid on an Islamic sect engaged in wife-swapping in the northern Nigerian state of Kebbi. Sect members armed with guns, daggers and bows and arrows attacked police and government workers who were sent to destroy the group's base.

"They were debasing the morality of our community and the teachings of Islam by prostituting their wives in such a way," said Kebbi State police spokesman. "They attacked the workers, and the police called in reinforcements. An hour-long battle commenced, two of our men were shot and two stabbed. Some of the members of the sect were also injured in the fight," he added.

LITTLE ROCK, AR

The Roman Catholic bishop of Little Rock has outlawed bingo in his diocese to comply with state law that deems most forms of gambling illegal. Bishop J. Peter Sartain wrote to pastors and administrators in his diocese of more than 100,000 Catholics, telling them to stop the games, which are banned by the state Constitution. Only pari-mutuel wagering at race tracks in Hot Springs and West Memphis are allowed.

"We're all stunned," said the Rev. Tom Byrne of Conway's St. Joseph Catholic Church and School, where bingo has supplemented the budget for 27 years. "We don't get any tax support. Tuition is never enough to meet the expenses. Doing without it or finding an alternative is going to be difficult."

The antigambling law until recently was widely ignored, with churches and charitable groups sponsoring games as police looked the other way. But the Randolph County sheriff recently started a crackdown, threatening to prosecute a Catholic church and another bingo operator in his area.



VANCOUVER, WA

A father who allegedly tried to circumcise his 8-year-old son in the bathroom after reading selections from the Bible has been charged with first-degree assault of a child.

Edwin Bruce Baxter, 33, was charged in a Clark County Superior Court. If convicted, Baxter faces at least 10 years in prison.

According to a probable-cause affidavit, Baxter told sheriff's deputies he tried to circumcise his son with a knife Friday after reading Genesis 17 and Exodus 4 - both passages refer to the procedure. Baxter told deputies he had no medical training.

Baxter, of Ridgefield, is married with nine children. The parents have been reported in the past for allegedly failing to enroll their children in school, said Doug Lehrman, Vancouver administrator for the state Department of Children and Family Services.

Atlanta, GA

Americans do not have a fundamental right to sexual privacy, a 2-1 decision of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said. The split panel upheld an Alabama law - nearly identical to one in Georgia - that made the sale of sex toys a crime punishable by up to a year in prison.

The decision extends an emerging division in the court over sexual rights, with Judges Stanley F. Birch Jr. and Rosemary Barkett leading opposing factions.

Birch maintains that although the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Texas law criminalizing homosexual sodomy, the justices have not decided fully that sexual privacy is a fundamental right protected by the Constitution.

Barkett claims that the court is refusing to apply the sodomy decision to laws that violate people's right "to be left alone in the privacy of their bedrooms."

TAMPA, FL

Three Tampa city council members Kevin White, Mary Alvarez and Rose Ferlita left their seats rather than listen to Michael R. Harvey, a member of Atheists of Florida who had been invited by council member John Dingfelder to offer the invocation.

Before Harvey spoke, White pushed to cancel the invocation.

"We have never had people of an atheist group represent Americans," White said. "And I don't think it is appropriate in this setting." White's motion to cancel the invocation failed 2-4, supported only by him and Alvarez, who called White "very brave" for making the effort. "I just can't sit here and listen to someone that does not believe in a supreme being," Alvarez said.

SPARTANBURG, SC

The Great Falls Town Council has agreed to fight a decision by a three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that bars using the name of Jesus Christ in prayers before meetings.

The council agreed unanimously Thursday to ask for a rehearing at the court. "I think we are doing what the majority of the people in our town would like for us to do," Great Falls Mayor H.C. Starnes said.

But legal experts say it's a long shot. "Unless the decision is further reviewed or altered, this is the binding constitution rule in this region," said Andrew Siegel, an assistant professor of law at the University of South Carolina School of Law.

In 2001, Darla Kaye Wynne, who practices the Earth-centered Wiccan religion, sued the Great Falls Town Council for invoking Jesus Christ during meetings. Wynne said council members used the prayers to draw attention to her religious beliefs and ostracize her.

Great Falls hasn't used the name of Jesus Christ in prayers since August when U.S. District Judge Cameron McGowan of Rock Hill ruled the prayers violated the First Amendment's establishment of a religious clause.

"We are not using the name of Jesus in our prayers now because of a judge's decision," Starnes said. "But we want to." The court decision has caused some local government leaders to deliberately disregard the decision.

ATHENS, Greece

A former Irish priest pushed Brazil's Vanderlei de Lima off the road when he was leading the Olympic marathon. The man was arrested and taken into custody.

"The man says he is Irish, he is also drunk. He had been to a taverna earlier," a police source told Reuters.

The prior Sunday, Horan was said to be wearing a kilt and beret and on a white shirt he had pinned the words "The Grand Prix Priest. Israel Fulfillment of Prophecy Says The Bible. The Second Coming is Near." He had a Star of David attached to his kilt.

After being pushed into the crowd, a grimacing De Lima got away from the spectator and rejoined the race, holding his leg, with around 15 minutes to run, and soon lost the lead to Italian Stefano Baldini. Baldini won the race and De Lima took the bronze.



TEMPTED?
www.metroplexatheists.org

Religious liberty cherished, not understood

Jeremy Leaming

AMERICANS UNITED

Religious Liberty Cherished, Not Understood

Although a clear majority of Americans cherish their religious liberties, too many of them don't recognize the importance of keeping government and religion separate, according to a new poll from a Virginia-based nonprofit.

The survey, released today by the Council for America's First Freedom (CAFF), finds that 52 percent of respondents ranked religious freedom above other fundamental

rights, such as freedom of the press and the right to assemble.

More than 80 percent of the respondents said they would not support a national religion and 84 percent said that religious liberty is as important or more so than when the right was first established in the late 1700s. Furthermore, 59 percent told the CAFF pollsters that it is important to understand other religions.

The same survey, unfortunately, reveals that a large number of Americans do not believe keeping religion and government separate is necessary to ensure religious liberty for all and are not aware of where

their fundamental right to religious freedom emanates from.

Almost half, 49 percent, said that there is either no need for maintaining church-state separation or that the doctrine should be less strictly interpreted. More than half, 53 percent, did not know that the Constitution ensures religious liberty. Forty-seven percent correctly answered that the First Amendment protected religious liberty for Americans, while 32 percent pointed to the Declaration of Independence and 9 percent said the source was the Ten Commandments.

Clearly, church-state separationists have a sizeable educational task ahead of them.

Python – From page 2

point based on what one could think of as the cosmic perspective. Consider, for example, the Galaxy Song (from “The Meaning of Life”):

“Whenever life gets you down,
Mrs. Brown ...
Just remember that you're standing
on a planet that's evolving
and revolving at 900 miles an hour ...
In an outer spiral arm,
at 40,000 miles an hour
of the galaxy we call the Milky Way.”

But why - you may ask - would astronomy matter to our sense of everyday life? Obviously, because it helps to:

“remember when you're feeling
very small and insecure
how amazingly unlikely is your birth.”

Which doesn't mean the cosmic perspec-

tive avoids scathing social criticism:

“And pray that there's intelligent
life somewhere up in space
Because there's bugger all down
here on Earth.”

Despite such apparently negative view of humanity, the optimistic character of Monty Python's brand of secular humanism emerges most clearly in Always Look on the Bright Side of Life (from the movie “Life of Brian”). Consider, for example, the following exhortation:

“If life seems jolly rotten
there's something you've forgotten
and that's to laugh and smile
and dance and sing.”

So much for humanists being a joyless bunch! And the song doesn't lack deep philosophical forais, as in:

“For life is quite absurd

and death's the final word ...
Enjoy it -
it's your last chance anyhow.”

Not to mention this quintessential, and rather mathematically accurate, summary of human life:

“I mean -- what have you got to lose?
You know, you come from nothing
you're going back to nothing.
What have you lost? Nothing!”

Something to ponder, the next time that road rage is about to overcome you because yet another jerk on an SUV cut you off without using a turning signal.

Dr. Pigliucci is an Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where he teaches ecology and evolutionary biology. For more information visit www.rationallyspeaking.org.

Are you searching for Atheists in the metroplex?

Join in the discussions at the DFW Atheist Talk group.
groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWatheistTalk/

Commandments Judge – From page 1

Joining Moore's call for the court-stripping measure, H.R. 3799, was former Republican Congressman William Danemeyer who lambasted the federal courts as out-of-control and lauded Christian right activist David Barton as one of the nation's foremost scholars on church-state separation. Barton is head of a Texas-based Christian Right group that argues for "the restoration of the constitutional, moral, and religious foundation on which America was built."

The subcommittee did hear testimony from two professors who said the bill is an affront to the separation of powers that is detailed in the Constitution.

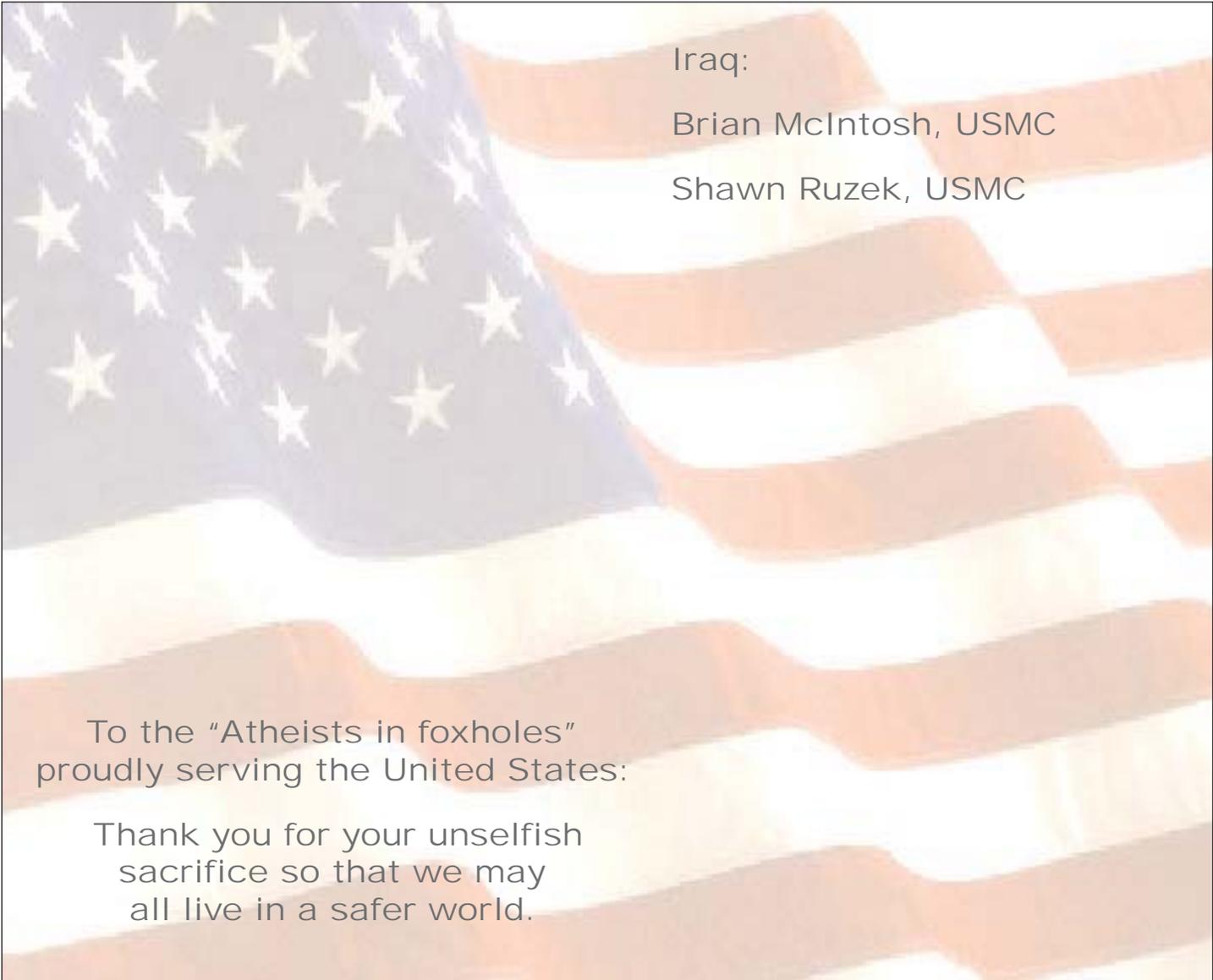
"This bill is a transparent attempt to diminish if not eliminate the status of certain constitutional decisions of Article III courts [federal courts] as constitutional law, to weaken the independence of the federal judiciary, and to subject certain constitutional claims and claimants to disparate treatment," said Michael J. Gerhardt, a professor at the William & Mary law school.

Arthur D. Hellman, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh law school, urged the subcommittee to reject the H.R. 3799, saying it would unjustly deny Americans access to federal courts.

"Ours is a pluralistic nation, closely divided on many issues," Hellman said. "Depending on the time and the circumstances, anyone can be part of a minority. The availability of an independent federal court, with power to hear everyone's constitutional claims, is a source of reassurance to all."

Chairman Lamar Smith, R-Texas, sided with the arguments presented by Moore, but scheduled no vote on the bill. The Associated Press reported that "virtually no chance" for passage of the measure exists this year.

In June, the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution heard from Moore during a hearing on alleged hostility toward religion in the public square.



Iraq:
 Brian McIntosh, USMC
 Shawn Ruzek, USMC

To the "Atheists in foxholes"
 proudly serving the United States:

Thank you for your unselfish
 sacrifice so that we may
 all live in a safer world.

Houston – From page 1

In 1995, County Judge Robert Eckels and District Judge John Devine, both Christian activists, launched a campaign to refurbish the display and placed a new bible in the case. They made clear their intent to “bring Christianity back to the law.” Judge Devine said that he considers the bible “a book of law.” “This refurbished display was clearly not a tribute to William Mosher,” said Keith McCaffety, founding president of the Houston Atheist Society. “Judges Eckels and Devine were very straightforward about their inappropriate intent to push their extremism into the courtroom. We are proud of Judge Lake for seeing this.”

“For all religious liberals and non-believers,” said Arthur Fay, a founding director of HAS, “this ruling is a tremendous victory in that it supports the cherished American belief that religious expressions belong on private property. Only the radical Christians and the Religious Right will have a problem with this decision as they seek to force their religious symbols on all the rest of us on public property.” “His

[Judge Lake's] decision is consistent with other verdicts upholding the constitutional separation of church and state,” said Jimmy Dunne, former president of the Humanists of Houston. “We should all be thankful that our constitution requires that government and religion be separate. Hopefully the county will not waste any more of our tax dollars appealing this proper decision to higher courts.”

“The county could appeal,” said attorney Randall Kallinen, who represented Ms. Staley, “but they really don't believe they'll win. They [Eckels and elected County Attorney Michael Stafford] are just doing this to keep themselves in the public eye and get reelected.”

“There is the possibility of reversal by the 5th Circuit, but I doubt it would happen,” said Erik Heymann, a founding director of the Houston Atheist Society and an attorney. “Judge Lake is one of the most respected judges in this part of the country, very well versed on law, and a devout Christian to boot, so there's no chance of trying to paint Lake as biased. Assuming the 5th Circuit sides with Lake, then the county will have to decide if it wants to appeal to the Supremes. My guess is that

the Supremes will not take the case, since it is fairly fact-specific.”

“Then it will be up to Eckels to see if he wants to stare down the feds and ignore the order,” said Heymann. “A very dangerous gambit, and I'll guess that Eckels won't have the stomach for it. After all, when the monument is removed, he can always hide behind the argument that, well, those meddling feds made him do it.”

“The real value of a suit like this,” said Keith McCaffety, “is getting the dangerous religious nuts to show their true colors, and this case definitely made that happen. Eckels and Devine are clearly not neutral when it comes to religion. They have repeatedly affirmed that they will use their personal religious beliefs while on the bench, and they have no business being there.” “Their [Eckels and Devine's] followers have already started making threatening phone calls and e-mails,” added McCaffety. “The Houston Atheist Society had nothing to do with this case. Kay Staley isn't even a member of ours, but the Christian Right will blame us nonetheless. I, for one, don't mind. We founded the HAS for this very purpose.”

Order your Atheist Textbook Covers for School

Atheism may be defined as the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a lifestyle and ethical outlook verifiable by experience and the scientific method, independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority and creeds.

—Marilyn Murray O'Hair

The study of theology, as it stands in the Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing, it rests on no principle; it proceeds by no authority; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and it adds to no conclusion.

—Thomas Paine, American Patriot

In those parts of the world where learning and science have prevailed, miracles have ceased, but in those parts of the world where ignorance and superstition are still in vogue.

—Ethan Allen, American Patriot

American Atheists, Inc.
www.atheists.org

An honest god is the noblest work of man.

—Richard Dawkins, Atheist, Oxford, England

Reason to conceive otherwise than that He, the infinite Father, expects or requires no worship or praise from us, but that He is worshiped above all.

—Benjamin Franklin, Founding Father

I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end... where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice.

—John F. Kennedy, U.S. President, 1961 - 1963

The Bible is not my Book and Christianity is not my religion. I could never give assent to the long complicated statements of Christian dogma.

—Abraham Lincoln, U.S. President, 1861 - 1865

We cannot permit any inquisition either within or without the favor or apply any religious test to the holding of office. The mind of America must be free.

—Calvin Coolidge, U.S. President, 1923 - 1933

The United States have advertised upon a great and noble experiment, which is believed to be the hazard of the absence of all previous precedent—that of total separation of church and state... religion established by law is a bitter enemy to the spirit of the American people... and the people are entitled to worship his own religion... such is the great experiment which we tried, our system of free government would be in perfect ruin.

—John Tyler, U.S. President, 1841 - 1845

Shake off all the fears of servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat and call on her tribunal for every fact, every opinion. Obey with boldness even the existence of a God, because, if he be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear.

—Thomas Jefferson, U.S. President, 1793 - 1803

As I understand the Christian religion, it was, and is, a revelation. Such a revelation happens rarely. The Bible's tales, legends, have been blended with both Jewish and Christian revelation that the most bloody religion that ever existed?

—John Adams, U.S. President, 1797 - 1801

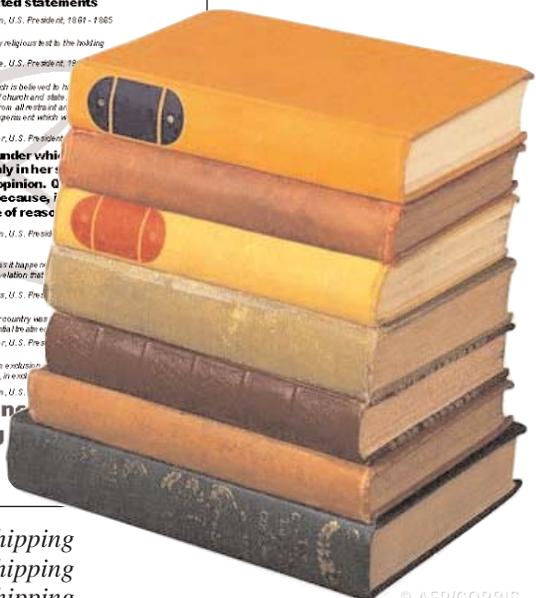
As an aid in favor of the government and a pre-er in school because our country was not built that no particular religious faith would have ascendancy over or preclude the other.

—Jimmy Carter, U.S. President, 1977 - 1981

Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in a certain religious way, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in a religious way?

—James Madison, U.S. President, 1791 - 1836

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Letters to the Editor

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

Despite the emotional rhetoric, “Traditional Marriage” is not under attack in America. “Marriage Protection” implies that expanding the legal definition of a civil union somehow harms conventional marriage. I think family is the bedrock of society and the foundation of civilization, of which traditional marriage has been a very important part. In light of the various statistics that put the divorce rate at around 50% and a 2003 Rutgers study that 40% of married Americans as not happily married, perhaps we need some alternatives. It just surprises me that traditional marriage has fallen to the point where it is in need of an amendment to the United States Constitution to prop it up.

The only thing being attacked here is the position that only certain configurations of family can be rewarded the government seal of approval. This is a religious issue that has once again been turned into a political one. I know for a fact that those who seriously advocate alternatives to conventional marriage are not in any way asking religions to alter their beliefs. Those religions that have a problem with the alternatives can choose, as a group, to simply not allow it “on their watch”.

It is wrong to write marriage doctrines and religious ritual into the constitution, thus forcing a particular version of family on the rest of society. Perhaps this is another case of organized religion believing that it has the only rational course for society to follow in order to produce positive results and using the power of the government to make sure everyone follows that course.

Families come in many forms and it should be the government's job to identify those structures that work, and not limit itself by religious doctrine. The alternatives available to establish family units are not going away, regardless of how much legislation is thrown in its path. To modify the Constitution of the United States to codify a religious view of what constitutes family is an insult to our Constitution and turning a blind eye to alternatives. Perhaps those alternatives could work to help some of the many victims created by our limited view of what constitutes a legal family. The improved definition of family should estab-

lish parental rights and responsibilities, grant next-of-kin status for such purposes as medical decisions, and insure legal rights with regard to property and taxes.

We should also be working harder to address those problems that make it hard for any family to be successful. Let's talk about getting families out of poverty, enhancing air quality, demanding cleaner food, better education for failing schools, affordable health care, and using our tax dollars wisely. Contemplate the possibilities for beneficial programs to help families in light of the expected \$200,000,000,000 (yes Billion) we are likely to spend in the Invasion/Occupation of Iraq in service of America's petroleum addiction.

If you have not registered to vote, do it tomorrow. Please be an informed voter and don't forget to ask for a receipt, you might need it.

BUDDY M.

“TRUE” CHRISTIAN

Why don't you guys believe in God?

Is it because you guys are so blind and you want to hang on to your fairy tales of that evolution crap!? I get tired of you people always making hate sites about my and our God!

We Christians don't go around making hate sites about Buddhists, Satanists, or Atheists. What are you people going to say when God judges you?

At the end of the world you all are going to be judged according to what you have done here on Earth. Not to mention scientists even found out there was and still is a Hell, are you going there? And don't say “Yeah I'm looking forward to it that's where I belong” or “I'm going to party forever” or even “There is no Hell!”

Because there is a Hell in the center of the Earth, and I certainly am not going there. Hell is a place of torments, did you know Jesus talked about Hell more than Heaven he took it very seriously.

And then you say if there is a God then he is supposed to be loving so he wouldn't throw me in Hell. Well guess what, He would because God is also holy so it would be unjust to let people with sin in Heaven. Besides what makes you think he will let you in Heaven when you say all of this blasphemy about him?

Here is what you would say when you get to heaven: “Please God let me into heaven I know I did wrong but can't a loving God give forgiveness for my sins!?” Here is God “Okay come in!”

Do you think its going to happen that way? No!

Here it is again: “Please God let me into Heaven I know I did wrong but can't a loving God give forgiveness for my sins!?” Here is God “Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels!!”

That is what he would say, he never knew you, and why would he know haters believe me I hate Atheists! But I'm E-Mailing you because I'm concerned for every soul out there!

By the way you should stop trying to make bible believing Christians believe there is no God because there is and they know it!

If you do convert a Christian to an Atheist then they weren't really a Christian! The Bible has NEVER EVER been proved wrong so stop trying no one can figure out God it's impossible! Only those with the Holy Spirit can possibly know what he says.

And I'm ending on this note: In the Apocalypse (end of the world) I fully intend to give my life for God in case I'm left here!

Well so long have a nice After-Life!

STEVEN HUNTER

DOWN UNDER

In Australia we are partly amused and partly frightened by the irrational piety that seems to permeate American society. Fundamentalism seems to be not limited to small backward sections of the population but has infiltrated the ruling elite. Scary, considering the immense power in the hands of your leaders.

That's why your courageous stand against religion is so welcome.

TED RIETHMULLER

LETTERS POLICY:

All submissions become exclusive property of The Atheist Voice. By e-mailing to the editor, you acknowledge & agree that any message you send may be made public. All letters may be edited for length or clarity. Please submit letters to editor@metroplexatheists.org

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

SOCIAL MEETINGS

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

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

Humanist Church of N. TX:

What: All the things you want in a church, without the gods.

Date: Third Saturday of the month

Time: 11:30 a.m.

Place: Unitarian Universalist Church of Oak Cliff
3839 W. Kiest Blvd, Dallas

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, Irving

CONFERENCE

TX Atheist & Agnostic:

What: Atheist Community of Austin

hosts a conference with special guest Michael Newdow. For more info. visit www.atheist-community.org/taac/

Date: October 8 - October 10

Time: TBA

Place: Holiday Inn Town Lake
20 North Interregional
Austin, 78701

MEDIA

Atheist Network:

What: Atheist internet radio. To listen visit: www.atheistnetwork.com

Date: October 8 - October 10

Time: TBA

Place: Wherever you have access to broadband internet

To have your events listed email:

The Atheist Voice Editor at
editor@metroplexatheists.org

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

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EVERY THIRD SUNDAY
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM



September 2004

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

October 2004

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

November 2004

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 Humanist
21 Reg. Meeting & MARG	22	23	24 J. Gilligan's	25	26	27
28	29	30	1 J. Gilligan's	2	3	4

***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 us.

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?