

# THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS  
JANUARY 2005, VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1

## LEGISLATURE

### Religious right prepares to go “nuclear” over judiciary fights



#### American Atheists

##### FLASHLINE

Proposals on Capitol Hill to speed approval of President Bush's nominees to the federal judiciary system could alter the way Congress does business, and even threaten the constitutional balance of powers.

Dubbed "the nuclear option" both by critics and supporters, the changes include making it easier to end filibusters (a practice where a minority of legislators hold up proceedings.) Even more radical are calls to divide obstreperous courts such as the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and render select legislation enacted by congress having to do with religion essentially "off limits" to judicial scrutiny.

Several factors are fueling the mostly-Republican orchestrated initiative.

Supporters of the proposals claim that liberal Democrats are intent on stopping President Bush's court nominees at any cost, and despite losses in the November election. Critics point out, though, that the Senate confirmed more than 200 appointments to the federal judiciary in the first term of the Bush administration, and that troubling questions surround several "extreme" nominees such as Charles Pickering and Priscilla Owen.

"Nevertheless, it's the (10) blocked nominations that peeve the Republicans," noted Associated Press writer Jesse J. Holland.

Stoked by complaints from conservative Christians and fears of environmental, gay rights, separationist and other groups, nominees are increasingly "vetted" concerning their views on hot-button issues

*Continued on page 8*

## EDUCATION

### PA parents file challenge to I.D. in public schools

#### AMERICANS UNITED

The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and attorneys with Pepper Hamilton LLP filed a federal lawsuit at the end of the year on behalf of 11 parents who say that presenting "intelligent design" in public school science classrooms violates their religious liberty by promoting particular religious beliefs to their children under the guise of science education.

"Teaching students about religion's role in world history and culture is proper, but disguising a particular religious belief as science is not," said ACLU of Pennsylvania Legal Director Witold Walczak. "Intel-

ligent design is a Trojan Horse for bringing religious creationism back into public school science classes."

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United Executive Director, added, "Public schools are not Sunday schools, and we must resist any efforts to make them so. There is an evolving attack under way on sound science education, and the school board's action in Dover is part of that misguided crusade. 'Intelligent design' has about as much to do with science as reality television has to do with reality."

The lawsuit challenges a controversial decision made in October by the Dover Area School Board to require biology teachers to present "intelligent design" as an alternative to the scientific theory of evolu-

tion. "Intelligent design" is an assertion that an intelligent, supernatural entity has intervened in the history of life. The lawsuit argues that such an assertion is inherently a religious argument that falls outside the realm of science. At the time of the October vote, district science teachers opposed the policy and three school board members have since quit in protest of the decision.

"The members of this school board have made their own religious beliefs part of the high school's science curriculum," said Eric Rothschild, a partner at Pepper Hamilton, a law firm headquartered in Philadelphia. "This policy is not only unconstitutional, it is bad science."

*Continued on page 5*

## RELATIONSHIPS

# Dating Christians: Doomed from the start?

Deanne Dice

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Living in the Bible Belt of Texas for the past thirteen years has given me a fairly extensive understanding of dating dynamics between Christians and atheists. I have always been the atheist half of the relationship, and [insert random man's name here], the Christian (of varying degree) half. I say half guardedly, as the religion issues seem to grow proportionately larger the longer the relationship endures. What usually starts as a minor difference in life philosophies ends up ruling - and ruining - the relationship for both of us.

*Him: "Other than not eating pork and not working on Saturdays, my religion is pretty much the same as mainstream Christianity."*

*Me: "Oh, that doesn't sound too bad."*

I am older and wiser now.

In the conversation above, I was probing the beliefs of a (now former) boyfriend . . . let's call him Joshua. At the time, I was twenty-two years old, and I hadn't had much experience with dating. Naively, I thought that differences in beliefs could still produce a viable relationship. Years of frustration, arguments, heartache, and vows never to date a Christian again have helped me glean more insight into the phenomenon I call "dating someone who has an invisible friend he likes more than me." The gist of the insight: the relationship ain't gonna work.

Rehashing my own atheist/Christian dating experiences is a good place to start as I consider the pitfalls of dating outside our own system of fundamental beliefs about



life, the world, our origins, and our futures. These nostalgic escapades through my dating past provide me with hours of laughter, then sadness, then a grim resignation. If relationship after relationship has failed due to religious differences, and I have to live in the Bible Belt in Texas for the foreseeable future, is there any hope of finding a life partner? Talking with other atheists has led me to believe that this problem is almost universal in the atheist community. How can atheists meet other atheists? How can we know whether religious differences will get in the way in relationships? When is the right time to tell a new love interest that we are atheist?

On a funny note: I often tell (with a little grin/sneer on my face) men I am not interested in that I am an atheist - it scares them away. But then, I meet someone to whom I'm attracted, both physically and intellectually, and I dread "the talk" because more often than not, the words "I'm an atheist"

signal the beginning of the end.

Back to my old boyfriend Joshua. He was a member of the Worldwide Church of God. In case you've never heard of that particular sect, the faith relies mostly on Old Testament teachings (similar to Jewish beliefs) and holidays, yet believes in the Jesus Christ of the New Testament. The adherents to this particular religious camp believe in following the strict laws of Leviticus - no eating pork or shellfish, no working on the Sabbath, no working on religious holidays, no celebrating certain holidays... the list goes on and on. I remember, in my blind youth, being "so in love" with Joshua that we could "overcome our differences." Joshua is married to someone else today and I have not seen or heard from him in over eight years.

The woman he did marry was a Christian, albeit another faith than he, and she was

*Continued on page 7*

## Do you an Atheist & Christian relationship story to tell?

Have you managed to make an atheist/Christian relationship work? You may contact Deanne Dice at [editor@metroplexatheists.org](mailto:editor@metroplexatheists.org) with your own anecdotes. Perhaps you see yourself in the relationships described here, and perhaps you'll see your relationship described and your advice offered to readers of future columns.

**Next Time:** William's story (he's actually married to a Christian!) and the story of my gay atheist friends and how they managed to managed to meet and stay together for over five years! If they can do it...

# METROPLEX ATHEISTS

## Officers

David Croft – Chair  
 Vincent Lundgren – Vice Chair  
 John Hattan – Secretary  
 Colin Swards – Treasurer

## Board of Directors

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

## Librarian

Linda Sharlow

## Editor

Edward Penton

## Membership Chair

Shelly Hattan

## Sergeant at Arms

John Hattan

## AAI Representatives

Sammi Ruth Fowler  
 Colin Swards

## About

Metroplex Atheists is affiliated with both American Atheists and Atheist Alliance International and is organized exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes, including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

## TEN COMMANDMENTS

# Judge bears decalogue on robe

## AMERICAN ATHEISTS

Alabama Atheists across Alabama reacted to news that a Circuit Court Judge in Andalusia was wearing a judge's robe embroidered with the Ten Commandments.

Blair Scott, the Alabama State Director for American Atheists said the move by Circuit Judge Ashley McKathan to embroider the Decalogue on judicial robes would make citizens feel that Christian defendants would stand a better chance or that the jury would be swayed by the presence of the Decalogue.

“The Ten Commandments on the judicial robes sends a clear message that preference is given to Christian defendants, even if the judge does not have that intention. The appearance of preference in a court is unacceptable. A judge is supposed to be unbiased in his or her rulings and the Decalogue prevents that from happening,” Blair Said.

Judge McKathan is required to rule

fairly and judiciously without bias. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and Article I, Section 3

of the Alabama State Constitution make it clear that Judge McKathan's robe is unconstitutional.

“The Judge is a representative of the state and as such cannot endorse or promote any specific religion, Christian or otherwise. Non-Christian defendants and legal professionals in the judge's courtroom will feel they cannot get a fair trial,” said Blair.

Judges are required to provide the jury with information on the law, and the Decalogue is not a part of Alabama's laws. Judge McKathan said the Decalogue was truth and you can't separate the truth from the law. Judge

McKathan's job is to uphold the law - not a personal opinion of truth. The Decalogue may be truth for some but it is not part of the law and directly endorses a particular religion by a representative of the state.

## CHUCKY D IS HERE!

And he is available on T-shirts, mouse pads, and more. If you want to order one and have it shipped right to your door, check out our Web Store!



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

# Nuts in the news

## Paramaribo, Suriname

Police have detained a "miracle worker" for conspiring to smuggle cocaine, police said. The man was arrested following the arrest of two cocaine smugglers at an airport. In Suriname, clients consult miracle workers, or miracle doctors, to obtain exceptional powers like magic protection in the form of amulets.

The miracle worker reportedly had given the smugglers the power to go through customs without being detected. The drug couriers were arrested with 4.4 pounds of cocaine.

## Indianapolis, IN

The State House of Representatives is considering a bill that would create Indiana license plates with the words "In God We Trust" on them. Lawmakers say the license plates haven't been designed, but they won't be affiliated with any religion. The House made changes to the legislation that include prohibiting the license plates from containing religious emblems.

## Orem, UT

A woman apparently felt the message of God she delivered to a post office would carry more weight if she were naked. The 49-year-old Provo woman wore nothing but boots and eyeglasses when she strolled

through the doors of the post office. "After checking her mailbox, she stepped into the lobby long enough to tell everyone to repent," police said. The woman has a history of mental illness but not lewdness. She left the post office, got into her car and was later stopped. The arresting officer asked the woman why she wasn't wearing the overcoat on the passenger seat and she repeated her desire to call people to repentance.

## BEIJING, China

Security guards are protecting senior BBC executives after phone threats were made by campaigners irate over last night's screening of the allegedly blasphemous Jerry Springer musical, the Opera features a nappy fetishist, a tap dance routine by the Ku Klux Klan, and Jesus and the devil locked in a swearing match. Critics allege the show, which was shown uncut on BBC2, features more than 8,000 swear words and are angry at scenes showing Jesus in a nappy, admitting he is "a bit gay". BBC director general Mark Thompson defended the move to air the musical,

saying that as a practicing Christian he found nothing in the show he believed to be blasphemous.

## Oviedo, FL

A Presbyterian minister collapsed and died in mid-sermon after saying "And when I go to heaven...", said a member of his congregation.

The Rev. Jack Arnold was near the end of his sermon at Covenant Presbyterian Church when he grabbed the podium before falling to the floor. In his sermon, Arnold quoted the 18th century Bible scholar, John Wesley, who said, "Until my work on this earth is done, I am immortal. But when my work for Christ is done ... I go to be with Jesus," Beates said in a telephone interview.

Several members of the congregation tried to revive the minister until paramedics arrived. Arnold apparently died on the scene.



## DEBATE

# Role of religion in public life to be discussed in forum

Sue Stevens

UT-ARLINGTON

Four of the country's leading experts will participate in an intellectual discussion of public life and religion, an issue cited by many as playing a significant role in the recent presidential election. The forum, "Religion in the Public Square" will be held from 12:30-1:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 20 in the sixth floor parlor of The University of Texas at Arlington Central Library.

Taking a more skeptical view of religion in public life will be Joe Barnhart and Ron Flowers. Both are prolific authors. Barnhart is a member of the editorial advisory

boards for The Humanist, and Free Inquiry. He is also a member of the University of North Texas Philosophy and Religion Studies Department. Barnhart will be joined by retired Texas Christian University Religion Professor Ron Flowers, an expert in church and state relations. Flowers is a long-time leader in Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

Taking a more accommodating view of religion in public life will be Frank Guliuzza and Ron Overton. Frank Guliuzza is a member of the Political Science and Philosophy Department at Weber State University in Utah. He is author of Over the

Wall: Protecting Religious Expression in the Public Square published by State University of New York Press. Ron Overton will round out the panel with practical expertise on church-state issues from his experiences growing up as a military dependent, attending public university, and recently founding The Church, Arlington, Texas.

UT-Arlington Associate Professor of Political Science Allan Saxe will moderate. The forum is sponsored by a broad coalition including UTA's Faculty/Staff Christian Fellowship, North Texas Skeptics, and Grace Community Church of Arlington.

## Design – From page 1

The school district policy mandates that Dover public schools treat “intelligent design” as a bona fide scientific theory competing with the scientific theory of evolution in order to develop a balanced science curriculum. Teachers are also required to read a statement to students in ninth grade biology classes that includes the following language:

*Because Darwin’s Theory is a theory, it is still being tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested explanation that unifies a broad range of observations.*

*Intelligent design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin’s view. The reference book, *Of Pandas and People* is available for students to see if they would like to explore this view in an effort to gain an understanding of what intelligent design actually involves. As is true with any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind.*

The lawsuit argues that teaching students about “intelligent design” in public school science classes entangles government with religion and violates the separation of church and state. *Of Pandas and People*, the alternative book available for students, was authored by advocates of so-called creation science and published by a Chris-

tian think-tank that aims to preach “the Christian Gospel and understanding of the Bible.”

“As a parent and a person of faith, I want to share my religious beliefs with my own children,” said Dover resident Bryan Rehm, one of the parents involved in the lawsuit and a high school physics teacher. “But as a teacher, it would be a great disservice and fallacy to teach students that a perfectly valid faith constitutes scientific knowledge.”

The lawsuit also states that teaching students that there are “gaps” in the scientific theory of evolution while not presenting any such gaps with “intelligent design” would lead students to believe that the theory of evolution is false and that the truth lies in the religious beliefs advocated through “intelligent design.”

“I believe it is wrong to introduce a non-scientific ‘explanation’ of the origins of life into the science curriculum,” said Dover resident Tammy Kitzmiller, another parent represented in the lawsuit. “This policy was not endorsed by the Dover High School science department. I think this policy was approved for religious reasons, not to improve science education for my child.”

Ever since the famous 1925 Scopes “monkey trial,” in which the ACLU

defended a Tennessee teacher convicted of teaching evolution, opponents of the scientific theory of evolution have attempted to forbid, limit, or otherwise undermine the teaching of biological evolution in public schools. Challenges have included laws or policies to prohibit the teaching of evolution, requiring teachers to make statements or disclaimers questioning the validity of the scientific theory of evolution, and requiring teachers to present anti-evolutionary views, including religious views not based on scientific evidence.

In 1987, the Supreme Court ruled in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, that the belief that a supernatural creator was responsible for the creation of human kind is a

religious viewpoint and cannot be taught in public schools along with the scientific theory of evolution.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania. Representing the parents are Eric Rothschild, Stephen G. Harvey, Joseph M. Farber, Benjamin M. Mather and Thomas B. Schmidt of law firm Pepper Hamilton; Witold J. Walczak and Paula K. Knudsen of the ACLU of Pennsylvania; and Ayesha Khan, Richard Katskee and Alex J. Luchenitser of Americans United.

*“I believe it is wrong to introduce a non-scientific ‘explanation’ of the origins of life into the science curriculum,”*

**Tammy Kitzmiller**  
RESIDENT



**TEMPTED?**  
[www.metroplexatheists.org](http://www.metroplexatheists.org)

## EVANGELISTS

# Fifth Dementia? Ordinary occurrence is divine event to 70s singers

William McEwen

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Marilyn McCoo, formerly of the 1970s group The Fifth Dimension, visited Dallas to appear on the DayStar Network. During her Nov. 11 appearance on Marcus and Joni Lamb's Celebration program, Marilyn reported she almost didn't make it to Dallas.

McCoo and her husband (Billy Davis Jr., who was apparently also a member of the Fifth Dimension) have been relatively silent since they left the group in 1975. They had one hit as a duo, You Don't Have To Be a Star, Baby, then dropped out of view.

They are singing again, as a Christian group. Their CD is called *Spiritual: Songs of the Soul*. They no longer fill arenas, as they did with the Fifth Dimension, but as a couple they now fill church sanctuaries as they sing and witness for the Christian god. Their autobiography, "Up, Up, and Away," hit stores in October.

According to McCoo, God intervened in early November as she and Billy were driving to the Los Angeles airport. Here's how she described it.

Marilyn: We had a praise report about coming to Dallas. We were on the freeway on our way to the airport and we had a blowout on the freeway. And we pulled off and pulled over and right nearby was an Earl Scheib car painting place. And we went over there and asked if there was somebody who could help us change a tire. A man came over, changed our tire, we got back on the road, and we made our flight!

*Joni: Wow.*

*Marilyn: Now is that a miracle?*

*Joni: That's amazing.*

*(Audio of applauding audience is played.)*

Then the two sang a Christian song that was boring and lifeless. It was a disappointment. Marilyn used to be able to belt 'em out with gusto. Remember Will You Marry Me, Bill?

Her lackluster performance brings to mind a commandment ordered in 1761 by the Methodist John Wesley: "Sing lustily and with good courage. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor



more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan."

*Sing with me now (to the tune of "Up Up and Away")  
Would you like to ride next to Marilyn McCoo  
Would you like to fly next to Marilyn McCoo  
If you're not a worthless girlyman like Billy D  
Then you can fly  
You can fly*

*Marc and Joni Lamb await Miss Marilyn McCoo  
DayStar fans are waiting for Marilyn McCoo  
If you believe that little things are the hand of god  
Then praise Earl Scheib  
Saint Earl Scheib*

*Up up and away, next to Marilyn, yes, Marilyn McCoo*

Now, a personal message to Marilyn. All I have to say is this: If you want a real man, I'm in the book. Yeah, yeah, I'm an atheist. But your monogram would remain the same. Plus I can change a tire, and I've even opened the hood and added windshield washer fluid.

## AAI CONVENTION 2005

### Featuring:

*Penn & Teller* – To receive the Richard Dawkins Award for outstanding work in the Cause of Atheism

*Michael Newdow* – Brought the case of "under God" to the Supreme Court

*Andrea Bradley* – Creator of the website: Betty Bowers, America's Best Christian  
*Dr. Bruce Flamm* – Quoted in Time Magazine as the man whose persistent inquiry proved the Korean-Columbia fertility study to be fatally flawed

*March 25 - 27*

*in Los Angeles California*

*Children's programs are available*

**For more information visit:**

[www.atheistalliance.org/convention2005.html](http://www.atheistalliance.org/convention2005.html)



## Dating – From page 2

better able to accept his strict guidelines than I was. To me, the beliefs were cute at first, and two years later, they were absurd and utterly ridiculous - a statement I often made directly to Joshua.

I was not blameless in the breakup; in fact, if I were Joshua, I would have dumped me MUCH sooner. As his tenets grew to be more and more of an imposition on my time, I became an ugly, critical, nitpicky b\*\*\*\*. The correct thing to do would have been to stop the relationship as soon as I realized our incompatibility. In fact, after recovering from that painful breakup, I vowed never to date a religious person again.

I have broken that vow in every single relationship I have been in since Joshua. Why? There don't seem to BE any atheists around to DATE!

I have tried atheist newsgroups and email lists on the Internet. I have joined atheist organizations and attended meetings and groups. I was once told that, if I want to meet an atheist guy, attend an atheist get-together, where "the odds are good" that I

will meet someone, but "the goods are odd." (Sorry, guys. I'm sure that doesn't pertain to you.)

I love being with people who share my beliefs and lifestyles, but it seems that every guy whom I meet and in whom I am interested in *that way* is a darned Christian. So, I set out to be nice at first, then gradually attack his beliefs and try to make him see the error of his ways, and eventually drive him screaming from my life.

I guess Christian men just can't handle being told that they are "ignorant" and "believe in a make-believe person who doesn't exist." Is it my job to tell them this? No. Do I do it anyway? Yes. Like all women (I've heard), I think that if I like a guy enough, I can change him. Even if that change means convincing him that Christianity is a bunch of bunk. Even though the odds are slim to none of my being successful.

So here I am, thirty-six years old and still single (I had a brief marriage in my late teens but that doesn't count). Even now, I struggle with dating new people, because I am never sure when to have "the talk" about my atheism. I don't want to be iden-

tified as "Deanne the Atheist" as if that's all I am, but I also need to let potential dates know from the relative get-go that I belong to a minority group here in the Bible Belt. Most men are startled at first (yes - a really scary atheist lady - that's me!), and then they ask me when I "decided to be an atheist." I tell them that we're all born atheists and ask when he "decided to be a Christian." And hence, another relationship doomed from the start.

Let's revisit Joshua and what should have happened in the very beginning:

*Him: "Other than not eating pork and not working on Saturdays, my religion is pretty much the same as mainstream Christianity."*

*Me: "You're obviously a freak who bases his ridiculous rules for living on nonexistent beings and wishful thinking. And you don't eat pepperoni on your pizza."*

I am older and wiser now. And still alone. Hmm.

# ATHEIST TEXTBOOK COVERS ARE HERE!

**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.**

Mildred Murray O'Hair

The study of theology, as it stands in the Christian church, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing, it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authority; it has no data; it can do nothing; and it admits of no conclusions.

Thomas Paine, American Patriot

In those parts of the world where learning and science have prevailed, miracles have ceased, but in those parts of it as are barbarous and ignorant, miracles are still in vogue.

Ethan Allen, American Patriot

**American Atheists, Inc.**  
[www.atheists.org](http://www.atheists.org)

**An honest god is the noblest work of man.**

Reverend August 18th Century Cleric

No man conceives otherwise than that He, the infinite Father, expects or requires no worship or praise from us, but that He is even infinitely above it.

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 law 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 has we are pledged upon a great and noble experiment, which is believed to be the noblest in the absence of all previous precedents - that of the separation of church and state - a religion established by law is a step away us. The conscience is left free from all restraints and an individual is worship his own gods, his own judgments... Such is the great experiment which we tried, our system of free government would be in perfect without it.

John Tyler, U.S. President

**Shake off all the fears of servile prejudices, under which slaves squinch their minds; be fearless, and call on her tribunal for every fact, every opinion. O 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

As I understand the Christian religion, it was, and is, a revelation. But how has it happened that in these religious, have been observed with both Jewish and Christian religion that the most bloody religion that ever existed?

John Adams, U.S. President

Be not in favor of the government in sending a prayer in school because our country was not that no particular religious faith would have ascendancy over or preference to all other religions.

James Madison, U.S. President

Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all others?

James Madison, U.S. President

**American Atheists, Inc.**  
[www.atheists.org](http://www.atheists.org)

To order visit:  
[www.metroplexatheists.org/cover-order.htm](http://www.metroplexatheists.org/cover-order.htm)

10 for \$10 + Shipping  
20 for \$15 + Shipping  
30 for \$20 + Shipping

## Nuclear – From page 1

like abortion rights, school prayer and other First Amendment concerns. Questions about religious faith and its role in government policy also contribute to a growing divide when a number of names are suggested to fill vacancies on federal benches, and especially the U.S. Supreme Court (SCOTUS).

"Republicans are loaded for bear, spoiling for a confrontation with Senate Democrats over judicial appointment," notes Norm Ornstein of the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "This has really become an issue that leaves them passionate."

Memories of what Democrats did to SCOTUS nominees like Robert Bork (getting "Borked" has entered beltway parlance as a description of nominees being rejected after a fierce committee fight) now drive much of the agenda to change rules on Capitol Hill. Adding to the fracas is the likelihood that Mr. Bush could end up replacing two or even three aging or infirm justices on the high court. Religious conservatives see that as an opportunity to return the country to its "Christian roots" and even overturn rulings like *ROE v. WADE* or decisions restricting school prayer and Bible reading.

Rulings by the Supreme Court and lower jurisdictions about the status of religion in public life have enraged politicized fundamentalist-evangelical Christians and led to charges of so-called "judicial activism." Former Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore, who placed an illegal monument of the Ten Commandments in the state's judicial building, has become a folk hero to many religious conservatives. Prominent evangelists like Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson frequently echo Moore's warnings of "black robbed tyrants," and charges that court rulings banning unconstitutional religious practice threaten the nation's Christian heritage.

The specter of out-of-control judges and "judicial activism" is proving to be an attractive rallying cry for politicians looking for contentious issues on which to further their careers. Leading the charge on Capitol Hill on behalf of the "nuclear option" is new Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) who is already being mentioned as a potential GOP presidential candidate in 2008.

"One way or another, the filibuster of judi-

cial nominees must end," Frist blustered to a speech last month before the Federalist Society. "The Senate cannot allow the filibuster of circuit court nominees to continue, nor can we allow the filibuster to extend to potential Supreme Court nominees."

Indeed, the use of the filibuster has been described as both a check on majoritarian power and, according to Frist, "nothing less than a formula for tyranny by the minority."

Democrats have used the procedure to block some Bush administration judicial appointments. That means that 60 votes are required in the 100-member Senate to end a filibuster. Republicans held 51 Senate seats before the November election; they gained four, giving the chamber 55 Republicans, 44 Democrats and one independent. Democrats would thus require seven more votes to defeat any nomination.

### JUDGES TARGETED

Much of the flap over "judicial tyranny" involves decisions by courts that have struck down unconstitutional religious practices, everything from coercive school prayer (beginning with a string of ruling in the early 1960s) to display of the Ten Commandments on government property. These rulings have outraged religious evangelicals, who insist that the First Amendment separation of church and state is a "myth," and that judges who rule against such practices are "making law."

"It's a way of demonizing court decisions that don't go their way, and that protect the rights of Atheists and even religious minorities," argues American Atheists president Ellen Johnson.

"They don't talk about 'tyranny' when government meddles in people's personal lives in the name of religion, though," Johnson added.

Several other proposals have been advanced in an effort to stop any further secularization of the country.

The U.S. Ninth Circuit remains a key target for conservatives and the religious right. The latter is outraged by a decision striking down recitation of the religionized version of the Pledge of Allegiance that includes the words "under God." California Atheist Michael Newdow had challenged the recitation, arguing that it violated the separation of church and state, and interfered with his right as a parent to oversee his daughter's

education. The daughter, the center of a custody dispute between Dr. Newdow and the girl's mother, was forced to recite the Pledge in her public school classroom.

The U.S. Ninth Circuit agreed, with a panel judge noting that the law approved by Congress in the 1950s to add "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance violated the First Amendment and was an explicit statement on behalf of monotheistic religion.

Disgusted with separationist and other rulings from the Circuit, several groups under the banner of Coalition for a Fair Judiciary have proposed dismantling the court and establish a new 12th and 13th District.

"The Ninth Circuit seems to wield an awful lot of power, and it is the most reversed in the nation," Kelley Beaucar Vlahos of CFJ told Fox News last week. "There's some serious judicial activism going on there."

Rep. Rick Renzi of Arizona said that the rulings from the Circuit were "contemptuous judgments" and "tear at the moral fabric of our nation, disregard the will of the people and force a corrupt ideology upon our society."

The U.S. House of Representatives agreed, and in October passed a little-noticed amendment authored by Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) to the obscure Bankruptcy Judgeship Act that would dismantle the Ninth Circuit. The measure passed 105 to 194.

According to critics, the amendment to dismantle the Ninth Circuit is a dangerous and unwarranted move.

"It would be inappropriate to undertake such a momentous transformation of our nation's judicial system with little opportunity for debate and consideration," warned California Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) added that the effort to break up the court was "ideologically driven."

### RELIGIOUS EXCEPTIONALISM

Still another effort to undermine decisions that affirm the separation of church and state is the flurry of bills on Capitol Hill that seek "carve outs" from judicial scrutiny.

Proposed legislation such as the Ten Commandments Defense Act would restrict any review by federal courts of practices that involve religion, such as display of the Decalogue, recitation of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, even

government grants to discriminatory groups like the Boy Scouts of America that denies admission to gays and Atheists.

"These bills elevate religious practices above the U.S. Constitution and review by the federal courts," said American Atheists Ellen Johnson. "The representatives introducing these measures know that they are unconstitutional and would never pass legal muster, but these proposals cater to the demands of the extreme right, and mislead the public into thinking that our courts need to be 'reined in' or ignored."

How likely are these measures to become law?

Even with Republicans in control of both ends of the Hill and the party's extreme evangelical right wing ensconced firmly, even some conservatives are warning that "going nuclear" may not be a good thing.

Veteran strategist Paul Weyrich says that he supports most of the "nuclear option" but cautions that changing Senate rules to restrict the filibuster option is "dangerous." Weyrich recalled the mid-to-late 1960s when there were only 33 GOP Senators trying to stop Lyndon Johnson's budget revolution known as "The Great Society."

"The only weapon we had to stop this juggernaut was the filibuster ... the day may come again when we are down to that many Senators. They don't want to put themselves in the position where they can't stop the initiatives of a Democratic President if need be."

## BOOK REVIEW

# The Tree of Life: The Wonders of Evolution

## ATHEIST ALLIANCE

"During a recent trip to the library, I noticed that, while there were many books retelling biblical creation stories, there were relatively few books on evolution for younger children. Those books that attempted to explain evolution did so in a way that, though scientifically accurate, conveyed none of the wonder and excitement of this concept. THE TREE OF LIFE is my attempt to help young children understand the beauty and power of this great idea." [from the Author's Note]

I don't know what I could possibly add to that. It is right on all counts: although evolution is the single most awe-inspiring idea in human history, it is notoriously hard to capture accurately in a nutshell - even for adults, much less kids. That's not to say the idea is terribly complex - on the contrary, it is elegant simplicity itself. But whereas "God made you, isn't that neat?" takes a mere six words, describing the marvel of evolution by natural selection takes a daunting three to five minutes - a commitment of attention that's just too darn high for too many folks.

So most kids' books either bypass reality in favor of fable or wring all the wonder

out of evolution in the service of dogged accuracy. Ellen Jackson walks that tightrope beautifully in *The Tree of Life*.

She acknowledges this dilemma, admitting that absolute precision is necessarily compromised to some extent by simplification, but rightly suggesting that the preservation of wonder demands that small trade-off. The broad strokes of evolution are presented in an admirably-paced sequence of stages and processes that gets all the concepts right, serving knowledge and wonder in equal portions.

The central metaphor, unfortunately, gets in the way just a tad. Kids are apt to trip on the reference to the "tree of life." Since the book revolves around life of various types, my audience was confused, thinking at first it was a reference to an actual tree. It took some explaining, which then distracted from the main thesis. And the illustrations fall a little short of the four-color wonder evoked by Old Testament retellings, perhaps as much a matter of production costs as any design philosophy.

All in all, this is a marvelous effort too seldom made. After a few rereadings, your kids will have a better grasp of the process of evolution than 99% of the kids - and 97% of the adults - in town.



## Attention DFW area Atheists and Agnostics!

### HUMANIST CHURCH of NORTH TEXAS

Scheduled services are held every third Saturday  
at 11:30 a.m. within the sanctuary  
of the Denton Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

1111 Cordell Street  
Denton, TX 76201

[www.humanistchurch.org/](http://www.humanistchurch.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, TX

400 E. Abram Street  
Arlington, TX

### 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, TX

**Date:** Fourth Monday of the month

**Time:** 6:00 p.m.

**Place:** TBA, for location visit:  
[DallasBrights.org](http://DallasBrights.org)

## Events

### BENNY HINN DOMESTIC MIRACLE CRUSADE:

**What:** Taking the Saving, Healing Power of Jesus Christ to the World. For more info visit:  
[www.bennyhinn.org/events/event\\_details.cfm?eid=545](http://www.bennyhinn.org/events/event_details.cfm?eid=545)

**Date:** February 25 - 26

**Place:** Houston, Texas

### GODLESS AMERICAN MARCH ON WASHINGTON:

**What:** March of solidarity near the grounds of the capitol

**Date:** November 11

**Place:** Washington, D.C.

## Social Meetings

### ATHEIST 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: [atheists.meetup.com](http://atheists.meetup.com)

### METROPLEX ATHEISTS READING GROUP:

**What:** The Metroplex Atheists Reading Group discusses selected books. Come join in, even if you didn't read the selection. For the latest book, visit:

[www.metroplexatheists.org/read/](http://www.metroplexatheists.org/read/)

**Date:** Third Sunday of the month

**Time:** After the regular meeting

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

### 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)

### DALLAS BRIGHTS:

**What:** For those with a naturalistic world view

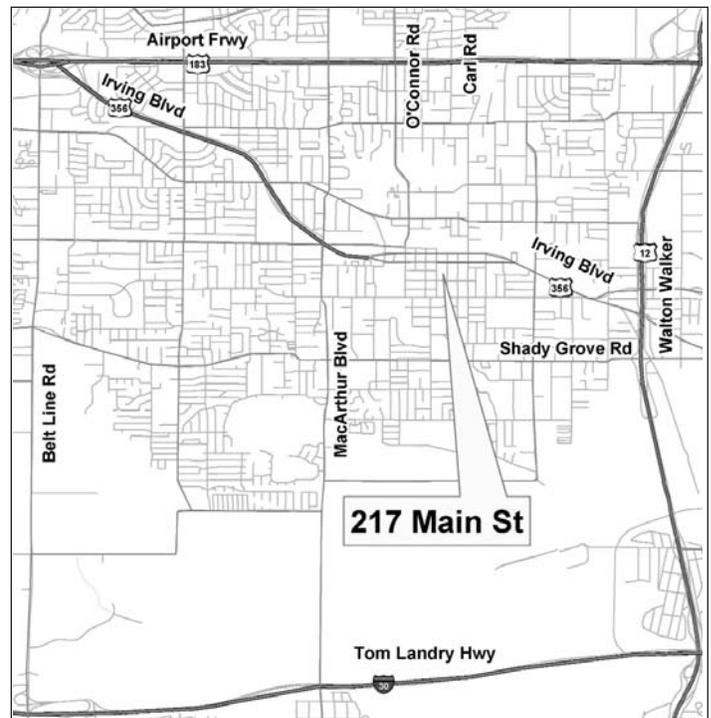
To have your events listed email:

*The Atheist Voice* Editor at  
[editor@metroplexatheists.org](mailto:editor@metroplexatheists.org)

## METROPLEX ATHEISTS

COME  
JOIN  
US

EVERY THIRD SUNDAY  
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM



## January 2005

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

## February 2005

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

## March 2005

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

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

For more information, please visit our website: [www.metroplexatheists.org](http://www.metroplexatheists.org)

To submit an article or letter to the editor, please email us.

*The Atheist Voice* Editor: [editor@metroplexatheists.org](mailto:editor@metroplexatheists.org)

*THE ATHEIST VOICE*  
c/o Metroplex Atheists  
3333 Southlake Park Rd.  
Southlake, TX 76092

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?*