

THE ATHEIST VOICE

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SOCAS

Federal court rules against 'Under God'

AMERICANS UNITED

A federal district court decision against use of "under God" in public school recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance shows respect for religious diversity, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton ruled today in Sacramento, Calif., that public school sponsorship of the Pledge violates students' right to be "free from a coercive requirement to affirm God."

"The court's decision was correct as a matter of Establishment Clause jurisprudence," said Americans United Legal Director Ayesha Khan. "The Constitution forbids government to intervene in religious matters.

"America is a very diverse nation," Khan continued. "We have some 2,000 different

denominations and faith groups, as well as many Americans who choose no religious path at all. It is wrong for public schools to ask students to affirm a religious belief in order to express their patriotism."

Khan noted that some religious traditions use different names for the deity, while other faiths believe in more than one god. Others regard governmental appropriation of God as theologically unacceptable.

"America faces many challenges today," Khan concluded. "We can best meet those challenges if we are united as a people. Americans should never be made to feel excluded from our national life because they have the 'wrong' views about religion."

Today's decision came in a lawsuit brought by Michael Newdow on behalf of three California parents and their children.



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SOCAS

Judge Roberts' radical views may jeopardize religious liberties

Americans United Report

JEREMY LEAMING

Watchdog Group Says High Court Nominee's Radical Views Would Jeopardize Religious Liberty Rights, Especially For Minorities

Supreme Court nominee John G. Roberts has consistently sought to roll back constitutional safeguards protecting religious liberty, according to a report issued by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The 19-page report, "Religious Minorities At Risk," concludes that Roberts throughout his legal and political career has opposed Supreme Court decisions

upholding church-state separation and ensuring freedom of conscience for all Americans.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, said, "Religious liberty is a cornerstone of the American way of life, and John Roberts simply does not understand that concept. He has been a faithful soldier in the far right's campaign to roll back the church-state safeguards protecting all Americans, especially religious minorities.

"I urge every senator to read this report and then vote against Roberts' confirmation," Lynn added. "I understand why Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson support Roberts' confirmation. I don't understand why anyone else would."

The Americans United report, drafted by AU Legal Director Ayesha Khan, finds, "At every step of his legal career, Roberts has advanced an exceedingly narrow reading of the constitutional provision that ensures a healthy separation of church and state. He has time and again in his writings advocated a legal standard that jettisons longstanding protections against over-reaching religious majorities."

The report charges that Roberts has opposed high court decisions barring government-sanctioned sectarian prayers at public school ceremonies, favors display of religious symbols in public school classrooms, supports government funding of

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COLUMN

My Religion

Denise Prendergast
METROPLEX ATHEISTS

My only religion is science. I think that one of the most significant differences between science and religion is that science is always changing, evolving. Its truths shift and sometimes even reverse. In science, the absolute truth is unknowable, unreachable. Scientific truth is an approximation of the natural world, an ever changing, imperfect interpretation by humans. Science is built on the findings of the past, human civilization's shared experiences over time, passed on through the generations, a growing body of knowledge as experienced and interpreted by humans, affected by the limits of our brains, our senses, our understanding of the infinitely complex universe. Religion tends to reject changing truths. There are rules which never change and facts that are absolute, uncompromising. Infinity can be reached, achieved. The future is predictable and known. Everything has a meaning (no worries). This is a major comfort for followers of conventional religions: steadfast facts which can be relied on in our frantic, scary, random, unpredictable, painful existences.

Outdated religious beliefs are frequently clung to, despite a growing body of evidence of their invalidity (Human evolution? Ridiculous! Birth control? An abomination!). How exciting and logical is the evolving world of science, while the static nature of religion often rejects reason and growth. To know one's mortality is enough to propel one into the false comfort and security of believing a lie, the utmost in wishful thinking. But there's a price to pay for living a lie, as all things are connected in the world, with actions and consequences, some kind of equilibrium being sought. Considering humans not to be animals, but rather as outside of nature, has consequences. I think one of the current prices being paid for the

“How exciting and logical is the evolving world of science, while the static nature of religion often rejects reason and growth. “

luxury of believing in modern-day religions is the loss of biodiversity. The human population is massive, and we continue to multiply rapidly, consuming the earth's resources at an alarming rate. Mass extinctions are occurring around the world as our unchecked growth, our so-called progress, replaces other species, both plants and animals, with the biomass of homo sapiens, our food crops, and our waste products.

Most current religions hold that man is the only species that counts, the only children of God (made in his image) who control nature, have the final word, decide on a whim who lives and dies. Man is the steward of the land, God's pinnacle of achievement, superior to all other species and therefore exempt from responsible behavior such as limiting our growth and consumption and letting other species exist (maybe even thrive). Having a perfect heaven to live in after death can result in less concern with the surrounding world, while an atheist is more earthbound, limited to the here and now, and in general more involved in the natural world. Having only one life to live makes one's present actions more significant. Who needs the mystical when the natural world is so inexplicable and fascinating? Why are ghosts and astrology so intriguing when one can study the beautiful mysteries of cacti and insects? Who needs heaven when you can hike in the Col-

orado Rocky Mountains (what's left of them)? I'll take the concrete word around me; it's all the truth and beauty I need.

Afterthought: I believe in striving for honesty, being kind and respectful toward all (most!) living creatures (regardless of species), being tolerant of others' differences, seeking new experiences, love, long-lasting meaningful relationships, the concept of right and wrong, the power of positive thinking and laughter, that life has meaning and joy even if there is no religious higher purpose or afterlife. I do not need a god to ensure that only good things happen to me or to provide easy answers to difficult questions. Some people might think that having no religion means that I am without hope. That is not true. Even without any god on my side, I will hope for a good life and for the best, while accepting that life is scary, unpredictable, filled with mishap (bad things happening to good people for no good reason), and will ultimately (this is the total bummer) culminate in my own personal extinction. Oh, the inevitability and finality of death. We are compost in the end. I refuse to worry about this thing that I cannot change. I have no problem with the concept of a world before my existence, and I will not worry about a world after I'm gone. I will just try to enjoy and make the most of the time I have here on this big beautiful planet Earth. Amen.

Comments may be sent by e-mail to the editor of The Atheist Voice: editor@metroplexatheists.org



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PUBLIC RELATIONS

GMA host to apologize to Atheists

AMERICAN ATHEISTS

An Atheist civil rights group today announced that it is pleased that Good Morning America host Bill Weir and the ABC television network will be making an on-air apology this weekend, retracting remarks aired on September 4, 2005

In a news segment that aired on September 4, 2005 about the devastation in New Orleans, Mr. Weir stated: “There are no atheists in foxholes and hurricane zones.”

American Atheists contacted Mr. Weir, ABC and the parent Walt Disney Company urging a retraction. The group also mobilized Atheists across the country urging them to speak out, and ask Mr. Weir and ABC to disavow the earlier comments.

On Thursday evening, September 15, Mr. Weir personally contacted Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists and apologized for his on-air statement.

“We are absolutely delighted with Mr. Weir’s gracious handling of this matter,” said Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. “I think it takes someone of character and integrity to do this, and we have nothing but praise

for Mr. Weir and the Good Morning America Weekend show.”

Johnson added that the willingness to issue a public retraction shows that major media is now more sensitive concerning a segment of the American population which consists of Atheists, Freethinkers, Secular Humanists and others of no religious belief.

“Surveys show that about 13% of Americans have no religion. Remarks that stereotype us, or any other segment of people in this country, can be inaccurate, unfair and hurtful.”

Johnson noted that her group will be hosting an Atheists In Foxholes rally on Veterans Day in Washington, D.C.

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that Bill Weir “has done the right thing, and deserves to be congratulated for retracting his earlier remarks.”

“It is a testament to his integrity as an individual and a leading electronic journalist and public personality.”

American Atheists is a nationwide movement which defends the civil rights of non-believer, works for the separation of church and state, and addresses issues of First Amendment public policy.

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www.metroplexatheists.org/shop/index.htm

COMIC BOOK REVIEW

The Atheist

John Hattan

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Now here's an interesting departure from the typical superhero comics you see. "The Atheist" is an angry black condescending cynic who's the comic-book equivalent of Dr. Gregory House from the TV medical drama "House". . . only not as warm.

The Atheist is as quick as James Randi to tell people that their beliefs are utter hogwash, and his hostage negotiation technique boils down to giving the hostage-taker advice on the most effective way to shoot himself in the head.

If The Atheist was on the cast of "Scooby Doo", he would not only figure out what character is pretending to be a ghost in the first minute of the show, but he'd unmask him, convince him to plead guilty, and then spend the rest of the show berating the rest of the cast for not seeing the obvious facts. There's nothing Antoine Sharpe, dubbed "The Atheist" by his associates in the police, can't handle.

Or so it appears.

Issue one of "The Atheist" opens with a scene that most folks in the atheist movement can identify. A bombastic preacher at a tent rally wanders about healing nebulous ailments and providing amazing radio-assisted facts about his faithful followers.

Suddenly, he goes off the script that's being fed into his earpiece. He starts providing facts about dead relatives that aren't on the cards. He also states that we'll be seeing our dead relatives sooner than expected. Not because we'll all be dying soon, but because they're all coming back.

Flash to a few scenes of scenes of folks suddenly acting very unlike themselves,



Written by Phil Hester
Illustrated by John McCrea

mainly because they have stopped being themselves. In fact, they have taken on the personalities of long-dead criminals. The police, of course, are baffled. They call in their number one arch-skeptic, The Atheist. Upon interviewing one of these newly-reincarnated murderers, we learn that folks in the afterlife have banded together and figured out a process that allows 'em to take over living bodies again.

Has The Atheist bitten off more than he can chew? Can the man who revealed the feral homeless people who were behind his city's "bigfoot" attacks find a rational explanation behind deceased murderers inhabiting the bodies of the living?

We'll just have to wait and see. Only two issues have been printed so far. And those

two issues have been mostly setups for the story and characters. Whether we'll get a well-crafted and tight story-arc that tells a story and reaches a satisfactory conclusion (like "Moonshadow") or we get a story that starts out strongly but then spends forty issues trying to regain its direction ("Bone", "Preacher") remains to be seen.

As it stands, all we've got are character introductions and story setup. The characters are strong but are, with one exception, nothing we haven't seen on every other TV cop drama. We've got the gruff protagonist who knows that there's a rational explanation somewhere. We've got the submissive partner who's befuddled by the situation and must defer to the protagonist on everything. We've got the police commissioner

Are you searching for Atheists in your solar system?

Join in the discussions at the DFW Atheist Talk group.

groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWAtheistTalk/

who tries to reign in his loose cannon detective but must defer to his infallible judgement. And we've got the brilliant scientist who's slowly metamorphosing into a shapeless, but immortal, blob due to one of his experiments gone wrong.

Well, maybe that last guy isn't someone you see in cop shows.

My biggest worry with "The Atheist" is that the story setup pretty-much excludes the possibility of a rational explanation for what's happening. This story is unlikely to have the Scooby-Doo ending where the alleged reincarnated murderers were hired by the owner of the haunted amusement park and were just trying to scare people away. The series establishes that the supernatural and an afterlife exists, whether The Atheist likes it or not.

Of course, comics take place in alternate comic-universes, so some suspension of disbelief is expected.

My only other complaint is that The Atheist is wearing a lemon-yellow suit on the cover of episode one. The rest of the comic is black & white, so this could just be a choice of the comic publisher to make it stand out on the comic racks, but to me it didn't seem appropriate that the most rational cynic around would dress like a 70's era pimp.

Yellow suit aside, The Atheist could be a lot of fun. I'm looking forward to episode three to see where the author's headed.

FUND RAISING

Atheists contribute to Katrina aid effort

AMERICAN ATHEISTS

While some government officials are calling for prayer and trying to focus public attention on the work done by some religious groups, America's diverse community of non-believer - Atheists, Freethinkers, Humanists and others - are joining the effort to support relief operations in New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Coast.

American Atheists is one such organization, and has called upon the country's Atheists to generously donate to emergency efforts. The organization is using its web site at <http://www.atheists.org> to list charitable groups that do not include religious preaching and proselytizing in their relief efforts.

"We're getting reports of how some religion-based 'aid' groups are trying to fly evangelists into the stricken areas and how U.S. Army Chaplains are carrying Bibles - not food or water - to "comfort" people at the New Orleans Superdome," said Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. "People need material aid, medical care and economic support - not prayers and preaching."

Johnson also said that Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco and President George Bush "should not be violating the Constitution by telling people to pray for the victims of Hurricane Katrina."

"It's unconstitutional for government officials to be promoting religion; and besides, judging from the speed of some relief efforts, officials should be busy working instead of preaching."

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, compared Hurricane Katrina to January's Asian tsunami which claimed thousands of lives. "It appears that despite all of the outbursts of public religiosity and prayer, 'God' was once again asleep at the wheel."

"Only human beings can deal with the calamities of the natural world," said Silverman. "God doesn't seem to be much help when it comes to rushing food, water, or antibiotics when people are suffering."

Ms. Johnson said that her group is spreading the word to encourage Atheists to contribute money to relief organizations that do not proselytize as part of their rescue efforts.

"People need material aid, medical care and economic support - not prayers and preaching."

Ellen Johnson,
AMERICAN ATHEISTS
PRESIDENT



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SOCAS

Austin Altar Call: Texas Governor courts clergy

Jeremy Leaming
AMERICANS UNITED

Late last week, several hundred ministers and their wives gathered at an Austin hotel where the political and religious rhetoric was as heated and overwrought as any given by Sinclair Lewis's fictional Baptist minister.

The event, dubbed the "Pastors' Policy Briefing," is one of many coordinated by something called the Texas Restoration Project, a Religious Right-driven campaign to reelect Republican Gov. Rick Perry and dominate politics in the state.

The Austin Chronicle described the two day-gathering as having the "trappings of an evangelical-style political rally designed to rally the flock on two fronts - the Nov. 8 ballot on same-sex marriages, and the March primary in which Perry hopes to recapture the Republican nomination for governor."

The newsweekly also noted "the fever-pitched gay-bashing theme of most speeches."

As he does frequently, Columbus, Ohio-based pastor Rod Parsley -- a leading figure in the similarly named Ohio Restoration Project -- was on hand to blast gays. As is his wont, he also derided Islam. Perhaps even more incendiary was Dwight McKissic, an Arlington, Texas, minister who recited his understanding of the Bible story of Sodom and Gomorrah and then declared "God has another match!"

The Chronicle reported an attendee as saying McKissic "said the most horrible things. He was the most difficult to listen to."

Perry also spoke at the event, reciting his pledge to so-called family values and his opposition to gay marriage. According to The Chronicle, following the governor's speech, an attendee asked how to help him and Perry responded by saying, "Pray for me."

The governor's wooing of the state's Religious Right is seen by Texas political science professor Bruce Buchanan as an attempt to replicate President George W. Bush's 2004 strategy of

actively courting ultra-conservative voters.

Like the president, Perry seems indifferent to the tax-exempt status of churches. Houses of worship like other nonprofit secular groups enjoy tax breaks. But they can jeopardize those benefits if they engage in electioneering. The federal tax code bars nonprofits from endorsing candidates for public office.

In early June, Perry surrounded by some of the same Religious Right behemoths, signed two state bills in a gymnasium of a Pentecostal church school. Both were sure-fire crowd-pleasers: one required girls under 18 to attain parental consent before getting an abortion and another certifying the anti-gay marriage ballot initiative.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State warned that the event had the appearance of a campaign rally. The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United, told the Los Angeles Times that the rally amounted to a "grotesque misuse of religion for clear partisan political advantage."



TEMPTED?
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Roberts – From page 1

religion and religious discrimination and seeks to deny court access to religious minorities.

Roberts, as Principal Deputy Solicitor General, coauthored a brief in a 1992 school prayer case asking the high court to overturn a decades-old legal test the justices have used to decide church-state cases.

The Lemon Test, which has served as a bulwark for religious minorities, should be scrapped, Roberts argued. In its place, Roberts pressed for an extremely narrow standard that recognizes the nation’s “religious heritage” and bars only government coercion in religious matters. (The high court rejected the Roberts approach.)

Roberts approved a speech to the Knights of Columbus by then-Education Secretary Bill Bennett that excoriated the Supreme Court’s church-state rulings, taking the view that “our values as a free people and the central values of the Judeo-Christian tradition are flesh of the flesh, blood of the blood.” In his memo, Roberts gave his approval of the screed, saying “I have no quarrel with it.”

Roberts, during his service in the Reagan administration, supported a constitutional amendment that would have allowed government-sanctioned prayer in public school classrooms.

Roberts, as a Justice Department staff member in the 1980s, advocated the right of Congress to deny federal courts the

authority to hear cases involving school prayer, abortion, desegregation and other controversial issues. If this radical legislative approach were adopted, citizens fighting for their civil and religious rights would find the courthouse door slammed in their faces.

The report concludes, “Roberts’ elevation to the Supreme Court would herald a sea change in Establishment Clause jurisprudence, resulting in further erosion of the wall that separates church and state. The Supreme Court to the extent it retained jurisdiction would cease to be receptive to the complaints of religious minorities, and the longstanding protections against government-sanctioned majoritarian overreaching would be weakened, if not eliminated altogether.”

WWII & Korea:
James Hardwick (Ret), Navy

Korea:
Chris Gregory, Air Force

Iraq:
Brian McIntosh (Ret), Marines
Shawn Ruzek, Marines

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ATHEISTS IN FOXHOLES

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FLASHLINE

Harry, Katrina and the tragedy on the gulf coast

AMERICAN ATHEIST

First, the good news.

One of the many fortunate survivors of the calamity that was Hurricane Katrina was Harry Greenberger, President of the New Orleans Secular Humanists.

Some may remember him as a speaker at the Godless Americans March on Washington. I got to know Harry, and many of the other gracious NOSH members last year when Ellen Johnson spoke in New Orleans. He typified so much of the ethos of the "Big Easy" (residents there apparently do not use that term to describe their city, but I claim the right of a tourist) - charming, erudite, a disarmingly pleasant and friendly Atheist with a sense of humor as big as the town he loves so much.

As Katrina turned north, still a day's jaunt from the coastline, I called Harry to see if he was still there and had plans to evacuate. There were those flickering images on the television of Interstate 10 and the other major routes out of New Orleans reduced to parking lots, traffic grid-locked. Harry said he had considered driving out, but the highways were ... you get the picture. He then made plane reservations, but for reasons still not clear, the airlines had canceled all flights out of town even though the weather was just fine. Besides, he said, it was impossible to even get the airport.

Harry joined the tens of thousands of natives and tourists who, for their own reasons, would "ride this one out" just like they had so many other storms, squalls and full-blown hurricanes.

"They're predicting enormous storm surges that could flood New Orleans," I said.

"We've got plenty of levees," Harry replied, "and we can just pump the water

out."

He added that, yes, he had plenty of food and water, he filled up a sink, he had candles and flashlights and extra batteries. And if the worst happened (as it did), his neighbors across the street owned a sturdy two-story house that offered more safety than his rancher, and he could always go over there... if the worst happened. "I'm sitting here with my martini, and I'm set," Harry said.

A thorough-going, "the glass-is-half-full kind of Atheist," I thought.

"Take care, Harry, stay in touch."

His fate over the next 24-36 hours was like that of thousands - tens of thousands, really - of people who managed to survive Katrina. A lot weren't so fortunate, and now there are bodies floating in the lake which was once New Orleans, cooking in the hot sun, decomposing and contributing to the nasty chemical brew of an epidemic. The rain came, so did the wind, at least two levees broke, and water poured into the city and Harry's neighborhood.

Katrina was barely exiting the Big Easy when I sent Harry an e-mail, followed by a couple of phone calls. "All circuits are busy now," reported an anonymous voice. What had happened? Was he even alive?

As it turned out, Harry was fortunate enough to make it first to Houston, then a local hotel, and (hopefully) the safe confines of a relative's house. Others have not been so lucky.

Along with causing colossal damage to property and loss of life, Hurricane Katrina also had the effect of resurrecting the perennial "blame game" and the deeper

questions of divine intervention (or, in this case, apparent non-intervention.)

Popular media continue to exploit this dramatic theme, complete with evocative footage of survivors praying, often huddled together on the site of a demolished church. As with previous natural disasters, the living are "thankful to God" for being alive. The dead "have joined Jesus" in the hereafter, although this type of glorious event is often met with tears and sorrowful emotion.

There is the on-going debate over why "God" or some other supernatural entity did not intervene, an Ultimate Question that frequently stirs memories of evangelist Pat Robertson. It was Robertson, after all,

who in 1998 warned that a potential natural disaster was possible after city officials in Orlando, Fla. and the Walt Disney Company decided to sponsor a "Gay Days" weekend complete with banners, parades and other festivities. All of this, warned Robertson, invited God's wrath in the form of hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, terrorist bombs and "possibly a meteor."

Earlier, Robertson made headlines when he "prayed" that a major hurricane forecasted to strike Virginia Beach - home of his Christian Broadcasting Network and other business enterprises - instead be diverted through supernatural intervention. The hurricane did change course, proceeding up the Eastern Coast of the United States leaving behind a swath of death and destruction. Robertson followed this gaffe with a similar mis-step, when he joined fel-

"We've got plenty of levees, and we can just pump the water out."

Harry Greenberger,
NEW ORLEANS SECULAR
HUMANISTS PRESIDENT

Continued on page 10

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

Nuts in the news

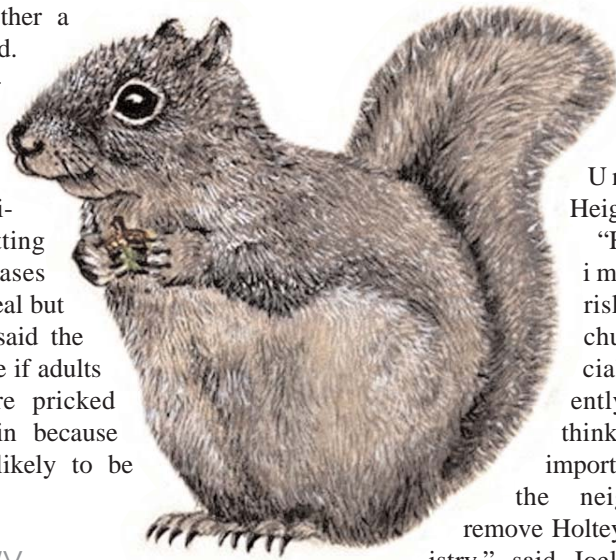
Austin, TX

The Catholic Diocese of Austin is investigating complaints after a priest called about 15 children to come forward during evening Mass so he could prick them with an pin to demonstrate the pain Jesus suffered during crucifixion.

“What I was trying to teach them is that suffering is a part of life,” said the Rev. Arthur Michalka, 78, on Friday.

Officials will then determine whether the children might be at risk for exposure to diseases such as HIV or hepatitis and whether a blood test is needed.

Dr. Ed Sherwood, health authority for the Williamson district, said the likelihood of transmitting blood-borne diseases by a pinprick is “real but quite small.” He said the risk would increase if adults and children were pricked with the same pin because adults are more likely to be sexually active.



Charleston, WV

A man born Peter Robert Phillips, Jr. has a social security card, passport, and driver’s license bearing the name Jesus Christ. He is unable to get a West Virginia driver’s license in the name of Jesus because his birth certificate has his original name, and he has been unable to get an official name change.

Chicago, IL

A man was arrested on the suspicion of defacing a salt stain on an expressway overpass believed by some to be an image of the virgin mary. He is accused of scrawling “Big Lie” over the stain. Authorities pained over the stain to cover the graffiti. People still flocked to the stain and prayed to the stain and expressed sorrow for its loss.

San Diego, CA

A support group for clergy abuse victims

sent a letter today to Bishop Robert Brom, demanding that a priest who pleaded guilty to possessing child pornography be removed from a San Diego neighborhood.

Officials with the Catholic Diocese of San Diego did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment on the allegations raised by the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.

SNAP contends that the diocese failed to notify neighbors that the Rev. Gary Holtey, 59, was living unsupervised across

the street from St. John’s Catholic parish in University Heights.

“He poses an immediate risk, but church officials apparently don’t think that it is important to warn the neighbors or remove Holtey from ministry,” said Joelle Casteix, SNAP’s southwest regional director.

Portales, NM

Shawn Miller, a street preacher, was arrested accused of disorderly conduct, and resisting arrest.

Police officer Charles Smart was dispatched in reference to a subject yelling at passing vehicles. Miller repeatedly told Smart he didn’t have to listen to him because he was preaching the word of God and wasn’t doing anything wrong, according to the police incident report. Miller walked away from the police officer and continued yelling out at vehicles when he was arrested for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. Authorities have said Miller’s preaching was creating a disturbance to passing motorists, and he was arrested because he did not give a responding officer any opportunity to remedy the situation.

“The whole experience concerned me,” Miller said. “God revealed himself to me while I was in jail and encouraged me. God has blessed me and my family.”

Waco, TX

A grand jury indicted a former pastor accused of leading police on a high-speed chase that ended in a traffic accident. Ron Keener was indicted on a state jail felony charge of evading arrest/detention with a vehicle. When officers from the town of Hewitt went to Keener’s residence Aug. 19 to arrest him on outstanding theft-by-check warrants, he gave a fake name, then jumped in a rental car and drove up to 100 mph through several towns. Although officers called off the pursuit for safety reasons, Keener’s car and another vehicle collided at an intersection. Keener and the other driver were injured.

Bismarck, ND

A priest has resigned after allegedly trying to raise money through what turned out to be an internet scam. No parish funds were lost, and the Rev. Cyprian Meier is still a priest in good standing with the diocese, Bishop Paul Zipfel said. Individual parishioners at the Spirit of Life Catholic Church in Mandan lost money when they gave it to Meier for fund-raising attempts. Meier was ordered to resign when he refused to stop the scam. Zipfel said he does not believe Meier was seeking personal gain but was trying to raise money for the parish.

Tucson, AZ

A former bookkeeper for the Baptist Foundation of Arizona pleaded guilty to one count of attempting to assist a crime syndicate and agreed to testify against three remaining defendants in the case.

Harold DeWayne Friend was originally indicted on three counts of fraud, 27 counts of theft and one count of illegally conducting an enterprise and was facing more than 33 years in prison, according to federal prosecutors.

The foundation, which was created as a nonprofit religious entity to raise money

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Katrina – From page 8

low evangelist Jerry Falwell in blaming the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 not on religious fanatics but a sinister cabal of gays, women seeking abortions and secularists.

No sooner was Hurricane Katrina heading for the Gulf, though, than Robertson shifted gears to his own form of disaster control, putting the spin on his public call for the assassination of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Chavez has been a thorn in the side of U.S. policy makers, and Rev. Robertson's shocking outburst only served to provide the combative Latin American leader with more rhetorical ammunition. The Bush White House failed to publicly distance itself from the combative evangelist, however, perhaps in recognition of the ability of Robertson, his Christian Coalition and the rest of the American Religious Right to deliver whole congregations to the polls when election day rolls around. It makes what happened next even more surreal.

Hurricane Katrina battered New Orleans and much of the Gulf Coast leaving record destruction and loss of life (there are 25,000 body bags ready for use according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency). Robertson did not go on television to shoo Katrina away, but the philanthropic arm of his religious empire, Operation Blessing, somehow found its way to near the top of the FEMA list of charitable organizations accepting donations for hurricane relief. Max Blumenthal of The Nation notes that "dozens of media outlets" from the New

York Times to CNN reprinted the roster, "unwittingly acting as agents soliciting cash for Robertson." One group that was outraged was Operation USA, which has carried out massive disaster relief programs on five continents for more than a quarter-century.

"How in the heck did that happen?" groused OpUSA's president, Richard Warden. "That gives Pat Robertson millions of extra dollars."

Indeed, there has been a sense that with President Bush promising to unleash his "army of compassion" - DC belt-way-ese for faith-based religious charities that include proselytizing as part of their social outreach - secular groups are still not receiving the full measure of publicity and support they should from federal agencies. Blumenthal noted, "While relief efforts falter in the face of colossal bureaucratic incompetence, the Bush Administration's promotion of Operation Blessing has ensured that the floodwaters swallowing New Orleans will be a rising tide lifting Robertson's boat."

There are many aspects about the Hurricane Katrina aftermath that have a distinctive social and religious sub-text. The victims are largely poor, black, elderly, the social strata that could not hop in an SUV for the 400-mile trip to safety. There are heart-breaking tales of people who literally could not find that extra \$25 dollars to get out of town; payday was still two or three days away, an eternity for those living check to check.

If anyone was praying that Hurricane Katrina would, through supernatural agency, be diverted elsewhere and not

claim thousands of lives, those petitions were evidently not answered. Some have already proclaimed that the devastation was punishment for the moral laxity, ethical tolerance, sensuality and Bacchanalian ethos that characterizes New Orleans. By this account, the victims "deserved" their fate, punishment from the same Jehovah whose other mass executions are colorfully documented in the pages of the Good Book. It does not explain the suffering, though, of children, animals and others who seemed caught up in this orgy of life-taking. Perhaps God can sort them all out...

And back to Harry ... and heroes.

Those who deserve our thanks and support are not gods, angels, deities or their self-appointed clergy. Despite the bureaucratic morass, within days helicopter rescue teams were on dangerous missions literally picking people like Harry off the roofs of houses and other buildings.

Hour after hour it went on, and now the rescue effort continues with boats reaching victims stranded by the flood waters. These "first responders" are the real heroes of this saga known as Hurricane Katrina. They have risked life and limb to intervene, to do something tangible and good for their fellow human beings. More good works, the delivery of material aid and medical care, will follow. New Orleans is perhaps a caution about life in general on this delicate planet we call Earth; nature, to be controlled and commanded, must also be obeyed. And in times of calamity, we can forget the gods. All we have is each other.

*Metroplex Atheists:
No fire and
brimstone needed.*

www.metroplexatheists.org

NEWS
Church exposes teens to graphic scenes

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

According to Trinity Church officials, Hell House was viewed by 11,000 people last year. There were no restrictions on age, and the majority of viewers were teenagers and pre-teens.

Hell House's content, performed by underage volunteers, is gratuitous violence, which includes youngsters being held hostage and then shot in their school classroom by an out-of-control teen, and a teen girl bleeding from the crotch because of a "botched" abortion.

Television monitors also display video footage of aborted fetuses. Last year,

KDFW (Channel 4) ran a news segment about Hell House, and said the abortion footage was unsuitable for broadcast.

"This is a capitalist country, and we believe Trinity Church of Cedar Hill is entitled to hold any kind of fund-raiser it wishes," said John Hattan, secretary of Metroplex Atheists. "But the violent content of the scenarios and the video footage of aborted fetuses is not appropriate for underage people."

Specifically, Metroplex Atheists is requesting:

1. Admission to Hell House be limited to those 18 years of age and older
2. A valid ID be required for admittance

3. Employees or volunteers working at Hell House must be 18 years of age or older

4. A copy of a valid ID for everyone working at Hell House be on file at the church office

"If Trinity Church officials are truly concerned about young people, they will stop using underage actors in violent entertainment, and they will stop providing this violent entertainment to underage patrons," Hattan said.

Trinity Church of Cedar Hill is located at 1231 E. Pleasant Run Rd., Cedar Hill, Texas 75104. Telephone is 972-291-2501.

EVANGELISTS

Robertson calls for assassination

AMERICANS UNITED

During his "700 Club" broadcast Aug. 22, Robertson lit into President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela as an American enemy that needed to be done away with.

"You know, I don't know about this doctrine of assassination, but if he [Chavez] thinks we're trying to assassinate him, I think that we really ought to go ahead and do it," Robertson told his audience. "It's a whole lot cheaper than starting a war. We have the ability to take him out, and I think the time has come that we exercise that ability."

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United, said Robertson's call for violence should be condemned by American officials.

"It is deplorable for a Christian preacher to go before his vast audience and urge the American government to murder a foreign leader,"

Lynn said. "His bloodthirsty commentary is over the top, even by Pat's rather elastic standard.

"This is just the kind of religious fanaticism that the world does not need more of," Lynn continued. "President Bush should immediately disavow Robertson and his extremist rhetoric."

Lynn noted that Robertson has a long history of outrageous commentary, including shrill attacks on Islam. Most recently, Pat has been urging his "700 Club" audience to pray for more vacancies on the U.S. Supreme Court so that current justices can be replaced by President Bush with "righteous" judges.

During the same Aug. 22 broadcast where Robertson called for the assassination of Chavez, the TV preacher prayed that God "take control of the court, that you would take control of the confirmation process for Judge Roberts, that you bring about other vacancies on the court."

Nuts – From page 9

for Southern Baptist causes, collapsed in the largest nonprofit bankruptcy filing in U.S. history. About 11,000 mostly elderly investors lost almost \$600 million as a result of the collapse.

Warsaw, IN

Mark Allen Johnson, a pastor was arrested on warrants for child molesting and sexual misconduct. Johnson is the pastor at the Pentecostal Church of Refuge. Police officers went to the church to serve a warrant for Johnson's arrest, but Johnson fled the church. He later turned himself in to authorities.

Johnson is accused of fondling boys and performing deviate sexual acts with them over several years.

According to the affidavit, while Johnson was babysitting a 9-year-old boy, Johnson reportedly removed his clothes while the two were sitting under a blanket together at the boy's residence. Johnson then allegedly exposed himself and placed the boy's hand on his penis. Johnson and the boy reportedly went to an abandoned house where Johnson took off his pants and underwear and exposed himself. The boy allegedly performed oral sex on him at that time.

The following year, Johnson allegedly took him to a barn where he reportedly removed his pants and had the boy perform oral sex.

Are you searching for Atheists on the internet?

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

SOCAS

Intelligent Design: Bad science, bad theology

Michael McGough

E SKEPTIC

Put aside the question of whether “intelligent design,” the latest alternative to Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, is good science. The more interesting question is whether it is good theology.

ID argues, supposedly on purely scientific grounds, that the complexity of life, especially at the cellular level, points to an Intelligent Designer. Its adherents won’t call that designer God, but the conventional wisdom is that Christians can only be pleased if ID gains traction. But that’s not necessarily so, though ID certainly has its Christian cheerleaders, and they aren’t all fundamentalists.

Last month, for example, Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Vienna, published an Op-Ed article in the *New York Times* assailing “neo-Darwinism” and sounding a lot like a supporter of ID.

“The Catholic Church,” he wrote, “while leaving to science many details about the history of life on Earth, proclaims that by the light of reason the human intellect can readily and clearly discern purpose and design in the natural world.”

Schoenborn conceded that Pope John Paul II said in 1996 that evolution was “more than just a hypothesis” (a statement science writer Michael Shermer once paraphrased as “evolution happened - deal with it”). But the cardinal also argued that this “rather vague and unimportant” papal pronouncement must be read in light of John Paul’s comment 11 years earlier that “the evolution of living beings... presents an internal finality which arouses admiration [and which] obliges one to suppose a Mind which is its inventor, its creator.”

But is acceptance of ID (and rejection of Darwinism) really required by the basic belief contained in the Apostles’ Creed?: “I believe in God ... creator of Heaven and Earth”? It all depends, as Bill Clinton might say if he were a theologian, on what the definition of “creator” is.

Long before Darwin, Christian thinkers struggled with the paradox that portraying



eSkeptic

Dinosaur bones on display in Iwaki, Japan, support scientists’ assertions that the earth is much older than 6,000 years old.

God as “maker of heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible” (in the words of another creed, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan) could give the Deity less than his due. The problem, Protestant theologian Langdon Gilkey explained in his 1965 book “*Maker of Heaven and Earth*,” is that a “maker” could be a mere craftsman, shaping raw material, rather than a truly omnipotent God. The solution, was to emphasize that God created *ex nihilo*, “from nothing.”

“In the Christian doctrine of creation,” Gilkey wrote, “God is the source of all and creates out of nothing. Thus the Christian idea, far from merely representing a primitive anthropomorphic projection of human art upon the cosmos, systematically repudiates all direct analogy from human art.” God instead is the “transcendent source of all existence.” Moreover, Gilkey wrote, human beings discover God the creator “not from a careful scientific or metaphysical analysis of the general experience of nature and of finite existence, but rather from the illumination that comes from special encounters with God in revelatory experiences.”

And that points to a different problem with a naive embrace by the church of intelligent design. Christian faith cannot be produced by a reflection on scientific knowledge or supposed gaps in that knowledge.

The Catholic theologian Luke Timothy

Johnson makes a similar point. “The Christian confession of God as creator,” he writes in “*The Creed*,”

is not theory about how things came to be, but a perception of how everything is still and is always coming into being. God’s self-disclosure in creation, therefore, is not like the traces of the watchmaker in his watch. God is revealed in the world first of all not through the ‘whatness’ of things but through the ‘isness’ of things. That anything exists at all is the primordial mystery that points us to God.

Johnson sees this vision of creation as being “entirely compatible with theories of evolution.” He adds: “The theories of the natural and biological sciences address, and can only address, the interconnecting causes of beings that have been or are now already in existence. They cannot account for existence itself.”

And although Johnson doesn’t refer specifically to intelligent design, he calls its close relative, creationism, a “failed enterprise lacking... intellectual integrity.”

For atheists, the distinction between these accounts of the doctrine of creation and intelligent design might seem a distinction without a difference. After all, they both see a God of some sort behind or under (pick your metaphor) physical reality. Yet for many Christians, it is not only possible but necessary to reject the idea of God as the watchmaker, the mere Intelligent Designer, who walks away from his work.

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: TBA; For the scheduled location, visit www.metroplexatheists.org

400 E. Abram Street
 Arlington, TX

DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP:

What: All the things you want in a church, without the gods
Date: First and third Sunday of the month. For information visit: www.dfwfellowship.com
Time: 11:00 PM – 12:00 PM
Place: Humanist Hall
 414 N. Main St.,
 Grapevine, TX

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/
Date: Third Sunday of the month
Time: After the regular meeting
Place: Heritage Park
 217 Main St. at Second
 Irving, TX

Social Meetings

DALLAS / PLANO ATHEIST MEETUP DAY:

What: Meet with other local Atheists to talk about your beliefs
Date: Every Tuesday
Time: 7:00 PM
Place: TBA; For locations near you visit: atheists.meetup.com

DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP BRUNCH:

What: Sunday brunch without the gospels
Date: Second and fourth Sunday of the month.
Time: 10:15 AM – 11:30 AM
Place: TBA

INFIDELS BASH:

What: Celebration of the Winter Solstice with a sacrilegious slant
Date: December (TBA)
Time: TBA
Place: TBA

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)

DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP HALLOWEEN PARTY:

What: Potluck dinner
Date: October 30th
www.dfwfellowship.com
Time: 11:00 AM
Place: TBA

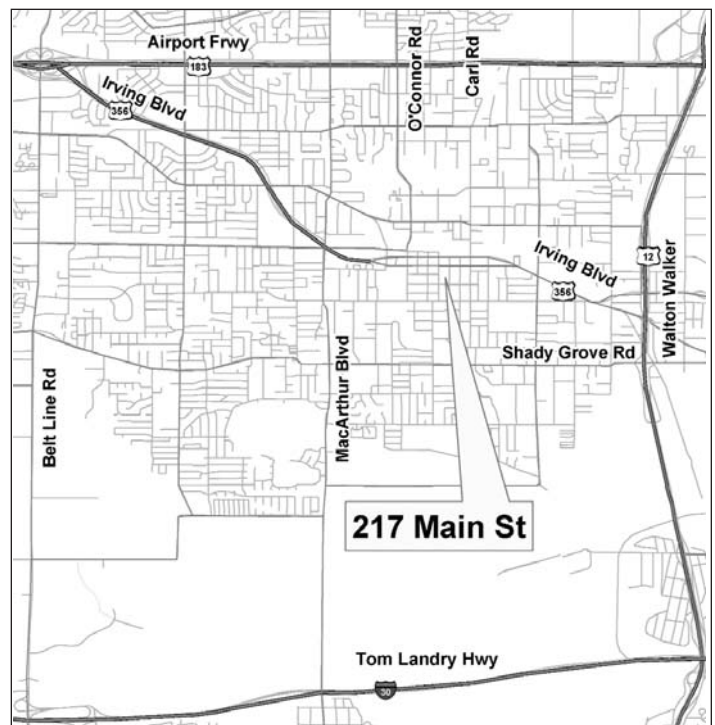
To have your events listed email:

The Atheist Voice Editor at
editor@metroplexatheists.org

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

COME
 JOIN
 US

EVERY THIRD SUNDAY
 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM



September 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4 DFW EF	5 <i>Labor Day</i>	6 D/P AMD	7 J. Gilligan's	8	9	10
11 EF Brunch	12	13 D/P AMD	14 J. Gilligan's	15	16	17
18 RM & MARG DFW EF	19	20 Atheist Meetup	21 J. Gilligan's	22	23	24
25 EF Brunch	26	27 D/P AMD	28 J. Gilligan's	29	30	1

October 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2 DFW EF	3	4 D/P AMD	5 J. Gilligan's	6	7	8
9 EF Brunch	10 <i>Columbus Day</i>	11 D/P AMD	12 J. Gilligan's	13	14	15 Humanist
16 RM & MARG DFW EF	17	18 Atheist Meetup	19 J. Gilligan's	20	21	22
23 EF Brunch	24	25 D/P AMD	26 J. Gilligan's	27	28	29
30 Halloween	31	1 D/P AMD	2 J. Gilligan's	3	4	5

November 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 D/P AMD	2 J. Gilligan's	3	4	5
6 DFW EF	7	8 D/P AMD	9 J. Gilligan's	10	11 <i>Veteran's Day</i>	12
13 EF Brunch	14	15 Atheist Meetup	16 J. Gilligan's	17	18	19
20 RM & MARG DFW EF	21	22 D/P AMD	23	24 <i>Thanksgiving Day</i>	25	26
27 EF Brunch	28	29 D/P AMD	30 J. Gilligan's			

***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
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?