

THE ATHEIST VOICE

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SOCAS

San Diego Showdown: Battle over cross in California park continues

Jeremy Leaming
AMERICANS UNITED

A 17-year battle to keep a towering Christian cross atop a hillside overlooking San Diego, Calif., has become yet another front in our nation's so-called culture wars.

Philip Paulson, a Vietnam veteran and San Diego resident, sued the city seeking removal of the 43-foot religious symbol from Mount Soledad Natural Park. His lawsuit argued that the icon violates the separation of church and state. Religious symbols, the case contended, are properly displayed on private property, such as a church lawn, but not in a public, tax-supported park.

Since the filing of the lawsuit, city officials have transferred the land to private entities three times in blatant efforts to keep the cross in place. Those maneuvers were declared shams by the

courts and invalidated.

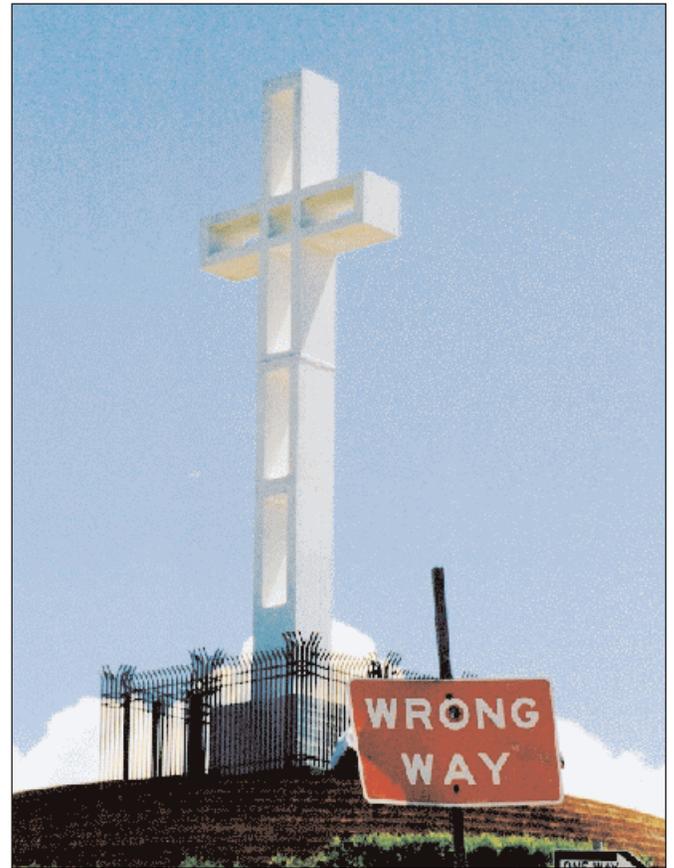
Various anti-separationist forces have joined the fray. Conservative pundits, such as the insistently shrill Michelle Malkin, have used the cross battle in their ongoing efforts to destroy church-state separation and establish a Christian nation.

U.S. Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.) has also thrown himself into the fight. In 2004, he slipped a provision into a massive spending bill designating Mount Soledad park a veterans' memorial, *The San Diego Union-Tribune* reported.

In a recent letter to President George W. Bush, Hunter seeks to have Mount Soledad declared a national park, thereby avoiding the recent state court order to remove the cross or face daily fines of \$5,000.

A lawyer for the city told the *Union-Tribune* that if the land

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godless.com

SOCAS

AA files suit against Detroit for subsidizing churches

AA News
AMERICAN ATHEISTS

Joining with a local plaintiff, American Atheist has filed suit against the City of Detroit, Michigan against the awarding of \$690,000 in public money given to churches for "fix-up" and facade improvement in anticipation of the recent Super Bowl.

The churches, including the Central United Methodist Church and the Second Baptist Church received seven grants under a local program run by the Detroit

Downtown Development Authority.

The suit charges, "Such direct subsidies of religious organizations from taxpayer-derived funds violate the plaintiff's rights to be free of taxation for the support of religious organizations."

Attorney Robert Bruno added that the use of taxpayer money for churches and other houses of worship violates the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and Article 1 of the Michigan Constitution which stipulates that "no money shall be drawn from the treasury for the benefit of religious societies."

Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists, said that her group filed the suit in response to a disturbing trend where religious and political leaders are trying to divert tax money to private, faith-based groups.

"This amounts to a 'religion tax' on all Americans including millions of Atheists, Freethinkers and other non-believers," said Johnson.

The suit asks for immediate injunction against such grants to religious organizations, and that the churches return the money.

THE BACKSIDE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

There's something about Mexico

ED WALLACE

Imagine, if you will, a time in American history when the only concern in developing our foreign policy and relations was not our highest political ideology but business. Imagine such policy being determined by a new administration in the White House, one with heavy Texas connections and a strong religious undertone. Could such a new president possibly be determined to force democracy on a foreign country where oil was king, and whose dictator he detested? And could that effort mean that prisoners would be held, without trial, in a United States military brig?

Absolutely. And no, these aren't recent events; they're history - events in our relationship with Mexico in the days before the First World War. It's a story of intrigue, double dealing, responding to false threats and missing real ones. And, being history, in the end it gives us clues - both about the events that would ultimately lead to World War II and about how the Middle East came to be in our cross hair today.

It started in 1911. A German spy, Horst von der Goltz, arrived in Paris to meet with Mexico's Finance Minister, Jose Limantour, the man that most people believed would succeed Porfirio Diaz as the president of his country. Both spy and minister were setting each other up for mischief, but the plan the German was about to unleash would involve the United States in Mexico's internal problems. If it succeeded, his plan would effectively tie up our military, potentially keeping us from joining any conflicts that might arise in Europe. Like most great political deceptions, it depended on secrecy, human gullibility and most of all fear in order to succeed - and it almost did.

According to von der Goltz's autobiography, he had purloined letters from the Mexican Finance Minister "proving" that Mexico was about to form an alliance with Japan, one that could lead both Mexico and Japan into war with the United States. Von der Goltz wrote that he then turned that information over to our Ambassador to Mexico, Henry Lane Wilson. Wilson always denied that, but history records that



General Pershing & Poncho Villa in better days

he left for Washington immediately. Then, just a month later, President William Howard Taft mobilized two-thirds of our standing army, deployed that force along our border with Mexico, and ordered our fleet into position in the Gulf of Mexico.

And so it was in March of 1911; fear and rumors of war were flying. The soldiers at Fort Sam Houston in Texas were saying that the Japanese fleet lay in the waters off Mexico's western coast. The citizens of San Antonio forecast that our army would be in Mexico City by Easter.

President Taft had to deny everything to the media. Of course, our President was telling the truth when he said he had mobilized our army because of internal insurrections in Mexico that had nothing to do with the Japanese. For, at the time, American business was firmly entrenched on Mexican soil; this was the era of dollar diplomacy. Foreign policy was set by the standard of what was good for American business and American business only. We were primarily interested in Mexico's internal politics because they could either protect or destroy our businesses there.

However, things had been changing in Mexico; Diaz had been replaced by General Victoriano Huerta. Then Wilson replaced Taft. Still the rumors of a possible Japanese invasion fleet stayed afloat, wor-

rying enough of the nation that California passed a law: From then on, no Japanese national would be allowed to own property in that state.

Huerta was a vicious piece of work; he ruled by brute power, killing 35 rivals in just his first 17 months in office.

But it should also be noted that, at that time, the world's super powers were switching their coal-powered navies to oil. And, although exploration for oil had started in the Middle East that same year, the British Navy was then purchasing oil almost exclusively from - you guessed it - Mexico. In fact, at the time, Mexico provided 25% of the world's oil. Much like Saddam Hussein's, Huerta's dictatorship ran on the fortune created by his country's oil.

That's why German agents were playing all sides against the middle. In case of problems in Europe, Germany planned to make us believe that Japan would invade U.S. soil through Mexico; and, should this deception work, it would also knock our ally, England, and her navy out of Mexican oil.

Well, Woodrow Wilson, who hadn't been in office long, wanted nothing to do with any of these potential problems. Besides, he couldn't stand President Huerta, believing him to be the personification of political sin. Wilson,

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William McEwen

Yeah, yeah, the Pentecost. Christians celebrate the dead Jesus showing up as a ghost. Some gift! I'd prefer a Hallmark card and a crisp \$20.

Cross – From page 1

becomes federal property, the debate will shift to whether the cross violates the First Amendment. The federal and state court rulings have said the cross violates the California Constitution's provision calling for church-state separation, which is stricter than the First Amendment.

The lawyer who argued for the removal of the cross told the newspaper he couldn't understand why "anyone would think a cross on city land would be any different than a cross on federal land."

The Religious Right forces fighting to keep the cross on public land, however, are blinded by zeal. If those folks

had their way, public parks and all public buildings across the nation would be festooned with symbols of Christianity.

And their argument that Mount Soledad is a war memorial is specious. In a 2002 hearing on the cross, 9th U.S. Circuit Judge William Fletcher questioned the city's argument that the cross is a memorial for veterans of war.

"If I'm a Jewish veteran, am I to feel that's for me or for Christian veterans?" asked Fletcher.

The Mount Soledad cross is a symbol of the Christian faith, and its proper place is on church property. San Diego and California officials should stop frittering away tax dollars promoting the merger of government and religion.

Mexico – From page 2

based on an inner religious certainty, believed that he alone should do something about this brutal Mexican usurper of power.

Wilson said, “The Mexican people must be given democracy, ready or not. My passion is for the submerged 85% who are struggling to be free.” Actually, the 85% were just struggling to keep out of the crossfire raging among all the men who wanted to rule Mexico: Huerta, Carranza, Obregon and Pancho Villa. As history often reminds its students, throwing out dictators and forcibly installing democracy is tricky. American businessmen in Mexico pretty much liked Huerta, who was a do-business kind of guy. Worse, European leaders were stunned at Wilson’s public demand that democracy be instituted in Mexico; for example, the Kaiser, when he heard of America’s position, said, “Morality is all right, but what about the dividends?”

Other nations also did business with Huerta’s Mexico, so a multinational standoff was in place. But then two factors came into play unexpectedly. One was our military, still dealing with that rumored Japanese invasion; they took it upon themselves to relocate our fleet from China to the Philippines, having concluded that before fully mobilizing for its Mexican invasion, Japan would first attack both Manila and Pearl Harbor. That’s right, our military moved to protect Manila and Pearl Harbor before the Japanese could attack - in 1914, 27 years before Japan forced us into the Second World War.

The other factor was that our agents were negotiating secretly with Pancho Villa. The administration briefly had come to believe that Villa would be our best bet, should Huerta be over-thrown. Of course, then came the Great War in Europe, and yet there was Wilson, still talking about forcing democracy on Mexico. This time he was quoted as saying, “I am going to teach the Latin American republics to elect good men!”

Now fighting a ground war in Europe, Germany made its moves. First it offered to supply Mexico with large amounts of arms and ammunition, but only if Mexico agreed to cut off the British navy’s supply of oil.

That move was what led to our naval intervention at Vera Cruz, in which we wouldn’t allow the German ships to unload those arms. Nineteen Americans and 127

Mexicans lost their lives on that day in April of 1914.

That resulted in another problem: Germany formally protested to our State Department, claiming that under international law our actions against its ships at Vera Cruz were illegal. Only then did the White House consult legal counsel, and to its dismay discovered that our actions in Vera Cruz had been illegal. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan had to go to the German Embassy to apologize; he blamed our commanders on the scene for having over stepped their orders - which wasn’t true. The German response was to take their ships farther down the coast and unload the military supplies there.

Up to this point, it was apparent that the Germans’ divisive plan was starting to work. Suddenly American travelers and businessmen throughout Mexico were returning home, reporting that hostility toward all Americans was becoming a serious problem. “Yanqui Go Home” graffiti started appearing across Latin America.

But, soon enough, Huerta’s reign of terror ended and he was exiled to Spain. Germany immediately plotted his return, knowing just how furious Huerta made Wilson. What with the Great War now in full swing, Germany hoped, Huerta’s return might just promote Mexico’s war with America and keep us out of Europe. Also during this period, we decided that Pancho Villa might not have been our best choice for replacing Huerta. Villa, a drunk and a pot-smoker who had once thought he was America’s golden boy, turned on us much like Osama Bin Laden; Villa attacked Columbus, New Mexico, shortly after we dropped him.

It just gets better. With the help of the Germans, Huerta did attempt to return to Mexico, by way of the United States. Yes, Huerta and his German handlers met in New York City to plot his return to power, and Huerta was given huge amounts of money to make it so. Flush with cash, Huerta attended a baseball game, told a New York City census taker that he was not retired from his former position as Mexico’s despot, bought tickets to the Policemen’s Ball - and then quietly hopped a train for the West Coast, on a very southern route.

With our President in New Hampshire, federal agents didn’t know what to do. So they took no chances: As Huerta tried to

leave the train in Newman, New Mexico, for a short car ride back to his country and power, we arrested him.

At first we placed the former Mexican leader in the El Paso County Jail. But that only scared the hell out of the citizens; El Paso feared that an armed posse, much like the one Villa had recently led in attacking Columbus, would storm out of Juarez to free Huerta. So the would-be dictator was interned in the Fort Bliss brig.

Well, then he got deathly ill. We feared that others would think we’d killed him while in custody, so we released Huerta to his family, which had come to El Paso. Then Huerta appeared to recover from his illness - so we rearrested him. Suffering a relapse, General Victoriano Huerta finally died of liver disease on January 13, 1916.

General Black Jack Pershing, ordered to get Pancho Villa, never caught him. Mexico was a mess for decades. And, while in time their people were finally able to vote, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, made sure that Mexico was not a functioning democracy. American business left; even today, Mexico’s Constitution forbids any American involvement in the country’s oil industry.

Japan finally attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor and Manila late in 1941, having learned those two harbors’ vulnerabilities during our too-early defense of them 27 years earlier. But, in spite of what the Germans had tried to make us believe, Japan had never had any plans to invade us through Mexico - in 1911 or ever. We entered the Great War; and, because Mexico backed out of being the world’s oil producer, England would develop the Middle East to keep the Empire running. It failed soon afterward anyway.

Today, in a virtual repeat of what happened 91 years ago, we have decided to bring democracy to the Middle East, end the turmoil there and teach those people to, as Woodrow Wilson once said, “elect good men.”

History always offers guideposts for those seeking the truth. Remembering them might have warned us that it’s almost impossible to force democracy on people, or that it’s wise to beware of the potential for blow back. Most assuredly, we might have learned to be careful how we reacted to rumors of invasion. They usually make people - and countries - do silly things.

SOCAS

Marriage Crisis: Ripping up the Constitution behind closed doors

Americans United

JEREMY LEAMING

In a closed-door session, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted along party lines to send a federal marriage amendment to the Senate floor for consideration.

By a 10-8 margin, the committee, headed by Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), approved S.J.Res.1, which mandates that marriage in America “shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman.”

Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) voted against the proposed constitutional amendment and lambasted his colleagues for deliberating in a private session.

The amendment, which is being pushed primarily by the nation's Religious Right, is a tawdry attempt to undercut church-state separation and write discrimination into the U.S. Constitution. The so-called “Marriage Protection Act” would enshrine the Religious Right's doctrine on marriage and limit the rights of a group of Americans.

Shredding the Constitution behind closed doors is a new low for the Senate's leadership, which is under great pressure during this election season to placate its Religious Right base.

Religious Right pundits and lobbyists have been clamoring for a constitutional amendment to outlaw same-sex marriage for several years now. In 2004, a measure was defeated in both chambers of Congress. During his campaign for re-election, President George W. Bush mentioned his support for the amendment.

Since his re-election, many Religious Right leaders believe the president has not done enough to push for passage. The Washington Times reported today that

Religious Right lobbyists Tony Perkins, head of the Family Research Council, and Gary Bauer, president of American Values, said Bush must do more.

“The only thing we're hearing now from the administration are either comments that are totally opposed to the amendment or those that appear to be opposed to the amendment,” Perkins told the newspaper. “The president needs to speak to the issue as passionately as he did in the campaign.”

Bauer told the reliably right-wing newspaper that his organization has received a slew of e-mails questioning Bush's commitment.

“I'd like to see him use the same aggressive approach as he did on the Medicare drug program - that is, he called individual members and politely but firmly twisted their arms to get it done,” Bauer said.

James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, has also grouched about the lack of attention top Republicans and the president have given the issue.

The New York Times reported Monday that Dobson has met privately with Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) and other congressional leaders, as well as the president's senior political adviser Karl Rove, to urge them to get serious on push-



ing the constitutional change.

At its heart, the marriage amendment is a political tactic. The Religious Right and its political allies are obsessed with the mid-term elections, fearing they may lose their grip on power in Washington. The proposed amendment is a ploy to propel so-called “values voters” to the polls, and they don't mind sacrificing the Constitution in the process.

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

EDUCATION SERIES

Evolution and Society

Kevin B. Metcalf
METROPLEX ATHEISTS

The evolution of the human species required that we evolve from individuals, inferior to better equipped predators and fluctuating resources, to hunter/gatherer clans, and finally to stable communities that provided better protection and allocation of resources. Regarding inferiority to environmentally specific predators, humans lack the strength, speed, and overall power of large predators and have no fangs, venom, toxins, or claws to put us on equal footing with many others regarding predation or competition. Communal living and the development of language allowed humans not only to overcome physical inferiority but to exceed those inferiorities through the application of reason, science, and technology (Adler, 1998; Dennett, 2006).

These adaptations and innovations brought about the need for humans to interact with each other in manifold ways such as through reciprocal altruism where members of a group learned that by helping each other, they could survive more effectively by ameliorating the effects of illness or environmental fluctuations. We no longer have to fear lurking predators and most Western societies have few fears of dwindling resources; instead, we have complex agendas, shifting relationships, and strategic posturing. Precocious species have young that can care for themselves after a short time and therefore rely extensively on genetically transmitted information. Humans are an altricial species that requires comparatively prolonged parental

care and training thus providing the opportunity for more in-depth training. This training bypasses genetic transference and is largely how social and cultural mores are passed; social learning transmits this information from generation to generation (Bandura, 1986; Dennett, 2006). Schemas of the self, environment, and the future form during childhood and serve useful purposes regarding expectations and potential courses of action (Beck, 1995). Cognitive distortions or dysfunctional biases can propagate as conflicting information is typically overlooked or reframed to agree with preconceptions (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). Through trauma, fear, and social need, religious belief became influential over the millennia of social schemas development, distortions and all.

Developing Organized Religions

Prehistoric shaman provided many roles for his or her group such as healer, spiritual leader, medium, or sorcerer. He or she was the group's link with the supernatural that influenced all aspects of their existence and survival. Shamanism is a vital aspect of social identity as it "is embedded within the whole social and religious fabric of a society" (Townsend, 1997, p. 431) and varies within cultures; this likely represents some influence on the manifold religions existing today. Researchers traced shamanism back to the Upper Paleolithic period around 25,000 years ago by means of examining French cave paintings and other evidence. There is other evidence to suggest that migrants brought shamanism to the New World in the late Pleistocene as

hunters and gathers began to develop social communities. Shamanism began as attempts to influence the human-animal relationship, important in hunter/gatherer success, and as a means of ameliorating the stress of a harsh existence through interaction with supernatural influences (Townsend, 1997). The shamans' interaction with the spirit world gradually evolved into folk religions by means of intricate rituals and belief systems.

Religious Beliefs and Random Reinforcement

B.F. Skinner (1948) put pigeons on a random reinforcement schedule after teaching them to click for a food pellet. The random schedule caused the pigeons to act out an elaborate superstition effect as they devised complex dances that would seem to make the food pellet appear; this effect is also apparent in gambling devices like slot machines that pay just enough to keep people gambling (Dennett, 2006; Shermer, 2000). Humans, despite education, experience, or religion, are not immune to this type of reinforcement schedule. Parents know the dangers of random reinforcement and the difficulty in breaking the pattern of children who learn that enough disruptive behavior will eventually get them what they want.

Many modern athletes have certain rituals they perform such as eating the same meal or wearing the same underwear before a game because doing this had obviously helped them win an important game. "We do not live in a Pleistocene environment, but our minds were built there and often function as if we do" (Shermer, 2000,

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p. 47). These factors are likely responsible for human belief in magic and the supernatural in general; we are more susceptible to magical thinking whenever uncertainty or tragedy arises.

Rain dances, religious rituals, and prayer are superstitious activities in people that are the result of centuries or millennia of random reinforcement. I reference prayer as a superstitious activity primarily in the context of intercessory prayer as it has been subjected to empirical study and lacks validity (CNN.com, 2006; Krucoff,

Crater, Gallup, Blankenship, Cuffe, Guarneri, et al., 2005; Stein, 2005).

Folk religions developed, through shamanism and ancestor worship, as ways to explain environmental phenomena as well as to suggest taboo behavior. For example, humans are a pattern-seeking species, which allowed the hunter/gatherers to locate sources of food and other vital resources. Therefore, groups would eventually notice the effects of incest or of allowing dead bodies to lie around and to attribute the outcome of these acts to the

consequences of angering a god or gods. An interesting aspect of folk religions as compared to modern organized religions is that folk religions had no use for the concept of "faith." A compelling possible benefit of shamanism and rituals that became an adaptive benefit of religion is its ability to provoke the placebo effect through expectation. However, this may have required a predisposition to supernatural belief and many of us probably would have been without shaman-era health insurance; luckily, we now have science.



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

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

WWII & Korea:

James Hardwick (Ret), Navy

Korea:

Chris Gregory, Air Force

Iraq:

Brian McIntosh (Ret), Marines

Shawn Ruzek, Marines

Deanne Dice

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Atheist bashing as a new national pastime?

Flashline

AMERICAN ATHEIST

What, "in God's name," is going on?

According to a recent study from the University of Minnesota, Atheists have become the ultimate social outcasts. Researchers working with the American Mosaic Project which monitors popular attitudes about minorities reported, "Americans rate atheists below Muslims, recent immigrants, gays and lesbians and other minority groups in 'sharing their vision of American society.' Atheists are also the minority group most Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry."

Then came a spike of public statements by celebrities defaming Atheists.

Outgoing "Today Show" host Katie Couric opened a recent program segment about military policy and religiosity by repeating the old canard, "There are no Atheists in foxholes."

Charlie Sheen, whose career has spanned everything from Hollywood awards to encounters with Hollywood Madame Heidi Fleiss was discussing his current divorce spat with estranged wife Denise Richards. Waxing emotionally about his two children, he told ET's Mark Steines:

"They represent the real gifts and treasures of this life. Anybody that doesn't believe in God hasn't looked into the eyes of their child."

There is also the latest Newsweek column by Rabbi Marc Gellman, "Trying to Understand Angry Atheists."

Gellman, who holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Northwestern University and was ordained by the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, is senior rabbi of Temple Beth Torah,

and past President of the New York Board of Rabbis. His writings have appeared in the New York Times, People Magazine and Time. Gellman has authored and co-authored a number of books including "Lost and Found: A Kid's Book of Living Through Loss," and "Religion For Dummies." He has also attracted a devoted throng of fans through a cable television program he co-hosts, "The God Squad."

His latest piece for the MSNBC/Newsweek web site asks, "Why do non-believer seem to be threatened by the idea of God?" Gellman is more gracious than other critics of non-belief, admitting "I don't think they need to be religious to be good, kind and charitable people..." He suggests, though, "Perhaps their atheism was the result of a tragic death of a loved one, or an angry degrading sermon, or an insensitive eulogy, or an unfeeling castigation of lifestyle choices or perhaps something worse."

Lurking behind Gellman's genteel, soothing, even conciliatory tone, though, is a mix of condescension and ignorance of what it is that angers many Atheists. He urges us, his "atheist brothers and sisters to see things as Spinoza urged, sub specie aeternitatis - 'under the perspective of eternity.' "Atheism, of course, emphasizes the "here the now," this life for that is, and as far as we know, all that is. We reject the promise of an eternal afterlife, or that we somehow fit in as bit players in some cosmic stage production put on by and for the benefit of an all-powerful deity.

What angers the Atheist, though, is the arrogance of those faithful who are determined to impose their religious dogmas onto what should be a free, open and secular society. We are "angry" when government tells us when and how to pray; when

politicians drape themselves in the mantle of religiosity as a credential for public office; when the state demands that we subsidize the faithful and their clerical-social institution as President Bush and others would have us under the faith-based initiative.

Rabbi Gellman simply does not understand either Atheism or Atheists.

Conservative belligerent Ann Coulter thinks she does, however, or at least those who might identify with the term "Godless."

"Godless: The Church of Liberalism" is the title of Coulter's latest bombastic tome which has already created major media buzz, and according to the Drudge Report generated "one of the largest advances paid to a conservative author for the manuscript."

One description of "Godless" says that Coulter "holds nothing back in detailing liberalism's war on religion and yes, God." Chapter titles reportedly include such witty gems as "On the Seventh Day God Rested and Liberals Schemed" and "The Holiest Sacrament: Abortion." It is, opines another pundit, a "completely original and thoroughly controversial work." Coulter has kept unusually mum about the message in "Godless," and even danced around pointed questions from Fox News talking head Neil Cavuto. She made much out of the fact that her new work is due for release on June 6, 2006 (6-6-6 or 666 - the "Sign of the Beast"), telling Cavuto this was her "little tribute to liberals, to have it come out on 6/6/06."

"It's probably not a coincidence," said the Fox correspondent.

Coulter has insisted, "Liberals love to boast that they are not 'religious,' which is what one would expect to hear from the

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groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWatheistTalk/

state-sanctioned religion. Of course liberalism is a religion. It has its own cosmology, its own miracles, its own beliefs in the supernatural, its own church, its own high priests, its own saints, its own total world view, and its own explanation of the existence of the universe. In other words, liberalism contains all the attributes of what is generally known as 'religion.'"

This may be news to some "liberals" and other secularists. But we should ask, "What is Ann Coulter up to, anyway?" If we are to reject what she defines as "liberalism" because it is an ersatz religion with all of the external trappings of faith, why embrace her brand of mainstream religion? It may well be that Ms. Coulter's latest screed to the right is less reasoned argument than another polemic salvo designed to stereotype "godlessness" and anything else which does not smack of orthodox religiosity. As for 666, what better way to demonize ideological adversaries than to brand them as modern-day Anti-Christ?

Finally, there is the description of "most Atheists" as "whack jobs" by freelance writer and blogger Melinda Barton. A self-described "bi-racial Jewish lesbian from the South's working class," Ms. Barton has generally enunciated a sharp but insightful progressive tone in her commentaries. Her recent column on the Raw Story website (via Pharyngula) was off the mark, however.

"First, what is a secular whack job? The term secular for the purposes of this article

will refer to those who disbelieve all religious and spiritual claims, not to those who merely support a separation of church and state. Although all secular (by this definition) extremists are atheists, not all atheists are secular extremists..."

Philosophical and linguistic errors abound in Ms. Barton's essay, but perhaps the most egregious offense is the use of "whack job" as an umbrella term for the godless. Austin Cline, moderator of the About.com Atheism website charges that Barton "seems to believe that atheists are a threat to liberalism and democratic liberty," and fabricates false, inaccurate definitions of terms like Atheism. He also points out, "Theism may be a matter of faith; atheism is not," a critical distinction both Barton and Ann Coulter overlook.

Atheism as a Target?

If the University of Minnesota study is correct, Atheists have now assumed the role of the ultimate "other" or social villain once played by more traditional social bogeymen - Jews, Communists, even Roman Catholics. We are, in the perceptions of many, "a symbolic moral boundary to membership in American society."

"The reaction to atheists has long been used as an index of political and social tolerance," note the U. of MN. researchers."

Ironically, this comes as rates of general levels of tolerance and acceptance are on the rise. Voters, for instance, seem more

willing to accept Catholic, Jewish and even gay political candidates as credible office-holders. Atheists remain at the bottom of that and other rosters, however. Americans are increasingly willing to tolerate diverse faiths; those of "no faith" or no religion, however, linger outside the parameters of respectable society.

"We've noted a spike in the animus directed at Atheists," says Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. "It's still permissible for major media and entertainment figures to engage in cheap-shot 'Atheist bashing,' and make statements they would never utter about any other group."

Johnson sees a silver lining, though, in this dark cloud. "There's improvement on two fronts," Johnson told AANEWS.

"Atheists are slowly gaining some degree of social acceptance, and over the long term more Americans are willing to consider Atheists for public office."

She also sees improvement when it comes to Atheists asserting their civil rights and looking for ways to influence the debate over public policy.

"We've got lobbyists in Washington, we've got a political action committee, and whenever media pundits, politicians or celebrities, or celebrities say something disparaging about Atheists, a lot of us are speaking out.

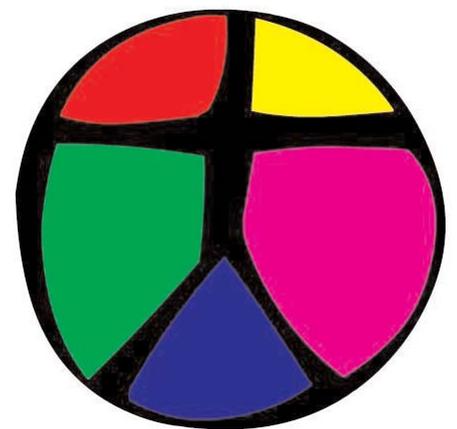
"We're the last sizeable minority to be included as authentic Americans," Johnson said. "It's just a matter of time."



Attention DFW area Atheists and Agnostics!

Scheduled services are held every first and third Sunday, from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM
Humanist Hall
414 N. Main Street
Grapevine, TX 76051

www.dfwfellowship.org



SOCAS

Christian Censorship

Steven Morris, Ph.D.

ATHEIST ALLIANCE

Americans too often take for granted the freedom that they have, to say what they please and read what they want. It is easy to forget that such freedom was forbidden throughout most of human history, and its presence in America today is one of the greatest gifts the Founding Fathers of this country gave to us. "Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press" according to the First Amendment to the Constitution, and this remains a basic foundation of our democracy.

This foundation is hated by those who wish to control the minds of others. Those who are convinced that they have the absolute truth in Jesus are working hard to forbid access to ideas they do not personally like.

Freedom of speech and freedom of thought are certainly foreign to the Bible. Close-mindedness is a virtue; "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy" (Col. 2:8). Christians are told to avoid "profane and vain babblings" (2 Timothy 2:16), but you cannot recognize "babblings" unless you first listen and think. The only way to prevent that from happening is to silence anyone who doesn't agree with you.

Book burning has been the most exciting form of censorship, and previous generations showed great enthusiasm for this form of muscular Christianity. In the year

391, the last great library of antiquity was destroyed by Christians in Alexandria. When 20,000 books were burned in a huge bonfire in Berlin on May 10, 1933, Joseph Goebbels congratulated the students on having "done well" in the middle of this night to throw into the flames these unspiritual relics of the past."

One of the most successful censors in recent years has been the Reverend Donald Wildmon, who runs the American Family Association. His specialty is organizing consumer boycotts against TV advertisers. According to Wildmon, "Censorship has existed since man learned to communicate. Society cannot function without practicing it."

If Pepsi advertises on MTV ("a cancer eating away at the moral fiber of our young"), he organizes a boycott. Wildmon's hit list includes just about everything: Roseanne, Murphy Brown, Coach, The Simpsons, Wings, and The Golden Girls. Once, Wildmon decided he'd seen Mighty Mouse sniffing cocaine on a Saturday morning TV series. The series' animator protested that the cartoon rodent was actually smelling a flower. Nevertheless, the innocent scene was removed to satisfy the paranoia of one man. A British documentary Damned In the USA about Wildmon's activities was scheduled

to be shown in the USA. Wildmon sued to prevent it.

Such dictators of thought claim that they are promoting a Bible-based ethic of

"Are we to have a censor whose imprimatur shall say what books may be sold and what we may buy? Is a priest to be our inquisitor, or shall a layman, simple as ourselves, set up his reason as the rule for what we are to read and what we must believe? It is an insult to our citizens to question whether they are rational beings or not... let us hear both sides if we choose."

Thomas Jefferson, 1814

"Morally, the Church can and does exercise what is called censorship."

Roman Catholic Bishops of U.S., 1957



© Royalty-Free/Corbis

decency. But Christians have yet to clearly define what 'Christian ethics' is. On every major social issue of the day, including abortion, the death penalty, sex education and homosexuality, Christians can be found on either side, insisting that their god speaks through them alone.

Pornography is the easiest and most popular target of censors, who often claim that pornography inspires such crimes as rape. The trouble with this line of argument is that individual women are raped by criminals, not by dirty movies. No respectable study or evidence has shown any causal link between pornography and actual violence. In countries where pornography is legalized, the crime rates for rape and sex offenses have actually decreased, according to a Danish report." Should selling Mein Kampf be illegal because some cretin might read it and kill a Jew? No! To ban such books is to let the very lowest among us determine what we may read and hear.

It is impossible to appease the censors; like blackmailers, each success emboldens them to ask for more. No rational limits

exist for them. Halloween activities have provoked challenges that schools are “teaching the occult” of advancing “Satanism”. Library books about the supernatural and the witches in Macbeth have come under fire, as has an elementary school book called Mrs. Piggie-Wiggie’s Magic. In Texas, textbook censors Mel and Norma Gabler issue this warning; “When a student reads in a math book that there are no absolutes, suddenly every value he’s been taught has been destroyed. And the next thing you know, the student turns to crime and drugs.” Such a statement would be taken as a sign of mental illness, were it not uttered in the name of religion.

If the book-burners were really serious about keeping disgraceful literature away from impressionable minds, here is a suggestion for them: Let them begin by banning a book that speaks approvingly of human sacrifice, multiple sex partners, slavery, genocide and torture. That book is the Bible. “Hath he not sent me to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?” (Is. 36: 12) is degraded filth that hypocritical Christians refuse to criticize and censor.

The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. If you think that Christians are too moral to cause real suffering, consider the fate of Hypatia due to Christian censorship in 415 CE:

“There was a woman at Alexandria named Huypatia, daughter of the philosopher Theon, who made such attainments in literature and science, as to far surpass all the philosophers of her own time... It was calumniously reported among the Christian populace, that it was she who prevented Orestes from being reconciled to the bishop. Some of them therefore, hurried away by a fierce and bigoted zeal, whose ringleader was a reader named Peter, waylaid her returning home, and dragging her from her carriage, they took her to the church called Caesareum, where they completely stripped her, and then murdered her with tiles. After tearing her body in pieces, they took the mangled limbs to a place called Cinaron, and there burnt them.”

So perished the last great philosopher of antiquity, murdered by Christians for the crime of speaking freely, as the Dark Ages descended on the world.

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

Cartoons spark riots, murder

Bobbie Kirkhart
ATHEIST ALLIANCE

The Atheist Alliance International has called on all governments that claim to value freedom of expression to stand up to the bullying tactics of Islamic militants, who are wreaking havoc around the world in response to the printing, in privately-run periodicals, of editorial cartoons depicting Mohammed.

Many Muslims believe Mohammed, indeed any human or animal, should not be portrayed, and the Atheist Alliance honors their right to that belief. If it ever were to happen that a government coerced members of any religion to display their icons in a manner which they find blasphemous, the Atheist Alliance would be on the side of the believers. In this case, where no one is forced to draw Mohammed or even to look at his likeness, we find it ironic that some Muslims are protesting the renditions of their prophet as an inspiration to violence by demonstrations of kidnapping and arson, while making threats of worse mayhem.

More dangerous than the uprising, the Alliance believes, is the fact that several governments, including three Western democracies, have given comfort to these terrorists by criticizing the private expression of a free press.

Ironically, Kurtis Cooper, spokesman for the US State Department, was talking not of the rioters but of the newspapers, when he said, “Inciting religious or ethnic

hatreds in this manner is not acceptable.” The government of Norway sent their foreign minister to Lebanon to deliver an official apology. It was a Danish paper that originally published the cartoons and Denmark at first stood by the right to uncensored speech, but has now issued letters of regret.

With embassies burned and citizens threatened, such responses might be understandable, but they are not acceptable. It is the job of government of a free people to protect the free expression of opinion, not to criticize it.

We commend British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who took issue with a European Union Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson’s warning that newspapers should “think twice” before printing the cartoons. Blair’s statement said the decision to print is “entirely a matter for the media organizations.”

There is no doubt in the minds of most atheists that blasphemy laws have contributed to the current crisis, as they give credence to the idea that government should protect religion, and that religious people—unlike the rest of the citizenry—have a right to be shielded from anything they find offensive to their beliefs. We would suggest that strongly held beliefs do not need to be shielded from opposition or nonconformity.

To those who hold freedom of religion dear but find freedom from religion unnecessary, we point out that this incident is a clear example that one does not exist without the other.

*Metroplex Atheists:
No fire and
brimstone required*

www.metroplexatheists.org

Nuts in the news

Hattiesburg, MS

In our September/October issue, we told you about Shawn Miller (formerly residing in Portales, NM) who was arrested and accused of disorderly conduct, and resisting arrest.

Mr. Miller contacted the the *Atheist Voice* to inquire "...why I am considered [sic] a nut?"

He offered the following details of the incident in an unsuccessful attempt to sway opinion:

My wife, our two children, and I had been going for three months to this same abandoned gas station without any incident. We were simply having a quiet Bible study on Sunday morning. The bank across the street is closed. There are two churches (Baptist & Methodist) on opposite corners from us. There is a minimal amount of car traffic and no pedestrian traffic. We are NOT there to be heard. We are simply there trying to let our light shine.

We are NOT yelling at anyone because there is no one around. Sure, cars pass and see us, but there is no way we are disturbing them since we are 15 feet away from the sidewalk.

This police officer decided to pick on us that day for some unknown reason. I went over to him and extended my hand and said, "What is the problem, officer?" He said, "You need to tone it down." I said, "I am preaching to my family and we are not bothering anyone. This is free speech and you can not stop me." He said, "We have been getting phone calls about you pointing and yelling at cars." I said, "I was not yelling at cars and was not pointing and I was not bothering anyone.

This is free speech and you can not stop me. If you have a problem with me being on this property, I will go to the sidewalk." He said, "I do not have a problem with you being here, you just need to tone it down." I said, "If you are going to arrest me, I am

going to go to the sidewalk because it is public property." So I went to the sidewalk.

I was standing on the sidewalk looking at the officers. They said, "Come back here." I did not want to get arrested for trespassing, so I stayed where I was. I said, "No, I am staying on the sidewalk because it is public property." He then came towards me. I have seen the TV show "COPS." I thought it best to get on my knees and put my hands in the air to show that I was not resisting arrest. At this time, a University police officer also

drove up. So, there were three police cars at this abandoned gas station, obviously causing much attention and causing people to rubberneck. Officer Smart came and handcuffed me and took me to his car.

I said, "There are drug dealers and bars in this town and people getting killed, but that's ok, I'll gladly be arrested for preaching the Gospel." When I got to his car, I asked, "Why am I being arrested?" He said, "For disorderly conduct and obstruction. You can not walk away from me if I am asking you questions."

Los Angeles, CA

The American Bible Society has refused to print New Testaments with covers that say "Jesus Loves Porn Stars."

Pastors Mike Foster and Craig Gross, whose anti-porn ministry is called XXXchurch.com, had ordered 10,000 of the customized Bibles to hand out at adult film conventions.

But the edgy cover led the publisher to cancel the paid order. The American Bible Society says that while it appreciates the pastors' mission, the words "Jesus Loves Porn Stars" are "misleading and inappropriate for a New Testament."

Toledo, OH

A Roman Catholic priest has been convicted of killing a nun 26 years ago while

she was preparing the Mercy Hospital chapel for Easter services. She was choked, then stabbed 31 times. The stab wounds on her chest were carved into an inverted cross.

The Reverend Gerald Robinson was so angry with Sister Margaret Ann Pahl that he also tried to anoint her with her own blood in a "bastardized" version of the last rites.

El Dorado, TX

Warren Jeffs is a self proclaimed prophet and leader of the nation's largest polygamist sect. He is believed to have 50 wives and is also on the FBI's most wanted list.

Jeffs is the leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, a group that practices polygamy. Among other charges, Jeffs is accused of conducting a plural marriage between a 16 year old girl and an older man.

Jeffs is on the run and hasn't been seen in public in more than two years. Some believe he could be hiding in a remote area of the Black Hills, in one of his six polygamist compounds.

The FBI is offering a \$100-thousand dollar reward for information leading to Jeffs' arrest. Utah authorities have just filed new charges against Jeffs for unlawful flight, giving authorities one more reason to hold him if he's ever caught.

Reading, PA

Regardless of how he had signed a stack of other documents, from bank records to income tax returns, a judge rejected a man's request to be allowed to legally sign his driver's license as "God."

Berks County Senior Judge Forrest G. Schaeffer ruled Thursday that the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation could require the man to sign his given name, Paul S. Sewell, and said documents he had signed in the past didn't prove differently.

"The so-called name you want to apply is rather a series of scribbled marks and don't establish any name at all," Schaeffer said. Sewell, 40, said he would appeal.

Sewell said he is a self-employed bond enforcement agent and began using the signature because fugitives always prefaced their comments with, "Oh, God," when he captured them.



NUTS

Robertson launches attack on Americans United

AMERICANS UNITED

TV preacher Pat Robertson's bizarre attack on Americans United for Separation of Church and State is part of a troubling pattern of extremism, the Washington-based church-state watchdog group says.

On his Christian Broadcasting Network today, Robertson launched into a tirade against Americans United and its executive director, the Rev. Barry W. Lynn. After a "700 Club" segment on AU's opposition to federal funding for prison ministries, the TV preacher said the American Civil Liberties Union and the Communist Internationale "pulled a secret takeover" of Americans United.

Added Robertson, "Barry Lynn is so extreme, he has said that if a church is burning down, the city shouldn't bring the fire department and trucks to spray water on the church because that violates separation of church and state."

AU's Lynn said Robertson is not just factually wrong, but increasingly shrill and paranoid. Americans United, he said,

has not been taken over by the ACLU, the Communist Internationale or any other organization, and AU remains committed to broad-based religious liberty for everyone.

"Americans United does not want to remove religion from the public square," said Lynn, who is a United Church of Christ minister. "All we want is for the government to stay out of religion and let Americans make their own decisions about matters of faith. We defend the religious liberty rights of all people, including Robertson."

"Robertson has to conjure up imaginary villains in order to keep his followers and donors worked into a frenzy of fear and anger," Lynn continued. "That may be good for Robertson's bank account, but

it's bad for American democracy. For a Christian leader to behave this way is pathetic.

"All we want is for the government to stay out of religion and let Americans make their own decisions about matters of faith. We defend the religious liberty rights of all people, including Robertson."

Rev. Barry W. Lynn
AMERICANS UNITED
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"And don't worry, Pat, if your studio catches on fire, I'll expect the Virginia Beach fire department to come and put it out," Lynn concluded. "If they don't, give me a call and we'll sue them."

The Robertson attack on Americans United is just the latest in an escalating string of shrill episodes. In recent months, Robertson has called for the assassination of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, suggested that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's stroke was

punishment from God for giving land to the Palestinians and threatened the town of Dover, Pa., with divine wrath for voting out a pro-creationism school board.



TEMPTED?
www.metroplexatheists.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Business Meeting

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING:

What: Meeting to decide general business of the group and to discuss current events
Date: Third Sunday of the month
Time: 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Place: Humanist Hall
 414 N. Main St.
 Grapevine, TX

on the grill side)
 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: 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Place: Humanist Hall
 414 N. Main St.
 Grapevine, TX

414 N. Main St.
 Grapevine, TX

DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP STITCH 'N BITCH

What: Knit, vent and dish. All levels of knitters (and other crafters) welcome
Date: Second and fourth Tuesday
Time: 6:30 p.m.
Place: Humanist Hall
 414 N. Main St.
 Grapevine, 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

DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP OBJECTIVIST LECTURE

What: For those interested in a better understanding of Ayn Rand's philosophy of objectivism
Date: Thursday, January 19
Time: 6:30 p.m.
Place: Humanist Hall
 414 N. Main St.,
 Grapevine, 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

DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP STUDY GROUP

What: Explores classical mythology
Date: Second and fourth Sunday
Time: 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Place: Humanist Hall

To have your events listed email:

The Atheist Voice Editor at
editor@metroplexatheists.org

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

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 JOIN

US

EVERY THIRD SUNDAY
 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

www.metroplexatheists.org

May 2006

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

June 2006

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

July 2006

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

***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
414 N. Main St., #13
Grapevine, TX 76051

Deliver to:

WHY DO WE FIGHT?

'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