

THE ATHEIST VOICE

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PUBLIC RELATIONS

General blasts “agnostics, atheists, bigots” during NAACP speech

AMERICAN ATHEISTS

In a shocking “about face,” the Chief of the National Guard Bureau praised American diversity and the role played by minorities in our nation’s military defense, but then suddenly chastised “Agnostics, atheists and bigots.”

Lt. Army Gen. H. Steven Blum made the remarks while speaking to the NAACP Annual Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Awards Dinner in Washington, DC on July 18. The story, including quotes from Blum’s talk, was reported in an American Forces Press Service dispatch. According to writer Rudi Williams:

“As for the military’s diversity, Blum said, the battlefield might be the greatest equalizer. ‘Agnostics, atheists and bigots suddenly lose all that when their life is on the line,’ Blum said. ‘Something that they lived with

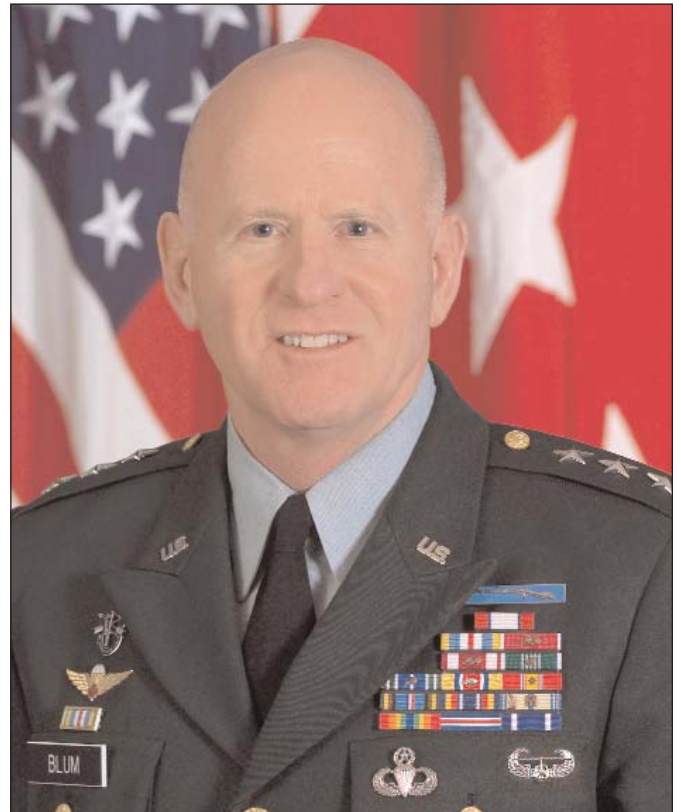
their whole life believing gets thrown out the door, and they grasp the comrade next them, and they don’t care what color their skin is, and they don’t care where they pray...’ “

American Atheists President Ellen Johnson said that much of Blum’s talk emphasizing themes such as tolerance and diversity was “stained by an animus directed at Agnostics and Atheists.”

“Why is he singling out the millions of Americans who simply have doubts about religion or do not believe in religious teachings, and then comparing this group to ‘bigots’?”

Johnson said that if religious groups and ethnic minorities deserve praise for their role in defending America, the patriotism and intellectual integrity of Atheists, Agnostics and other

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U.S. National Guard

Lt. Army Gen. H. Steven Blum

SOCAS

AA files suit in “Oklahoma Outrage” prayer bullying case

AMERICAN ATHEISTS

American Atheists filed suit in federal court in a case involving charges of “prayer bullying” and conspiracy to violate the civil rights of an Atheist family.

In November, 2004, Nicole Smalkowski – a student at Hardesty Oklahoma High School and member of the female basketball squad – was ordered by her coach to participate in a game-time recitation of the “Lord’s Prayer.” Ms. Smalkowski, an Atheist, refused and was then banished to the locker room. Days later, following a meeting of school officials, she was punished by being removed from the team.

The suit charges that Nicole and the rest of her family were then made the victims of false accusations and “subjected to public humiliation and distress.” Her father, Chester Smalkowski, tried to meet with the School Principal who “struck Plaintiff Chester Smalkowski repeatedly without warning or provocation.” Incredibly, a warrant was filed against Mr. Smalkowski who was arrested and scheduled for trial. Officials with the District Attorney’s Office in Texas County, Oklahoma then offered a deal where charges would be dropped if the Smalkowski family agreed to leave the jurisdiction.

He refused the buckle under to the intim-

idation.

Represented by attorneys Tom Gungoll and American Atheists National Legal Director Edwin Kagin, Smalkowski endured a five-day trial that included a grilling of the school district superintendent. Mr. Kagin patiently explained to the jurors what Atheism was. Many of the prospective jurors opined that they could not believe the word of an Atheist over that of a god-fearing Christian, and were struck for cause. Some, including the wives of two local ministers, admitted that they were incapable of being fair to an Atheist in such a situation.

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THE BACKSIDE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

The Voice of the Revolution

ED WALLACE

You do know the author of this political statement? “Some writers have confused society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them. Whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. For Society is produced by our wants and Government produced by our wickedness.”

Those words are as accurate today as they were when they were written, 228 years ago. Yet you don’t know the author’s name, even though he, more than anyone else, inspired this country to break away from England. In fact, his writings would in time have a real impact on our own revolution, ruin the power of the British Monarchy and help start the French Revolution.

OK, maybe you remember this, his most famous opening line: “These are the times that try men’s souls.” It is, of course, from Thomas Paine’s book, *The Crisis*.

You remember Thomas Paine, the man who crystallized the thoughts of liberty in the minds of most of today’s free world. And yet you know absolutely nothing about the man, in spite of what he’s done for us all. Worse, he’s been all but written out of our history - simply because, at the end of his life, he had far too many enemies.

Those enemies successfully kept his position of greatness from being honored by those his words helped free. Thomas Paine was born in 1737 in Thetford, England, outside of London. His father, who was a serious, devoted Quaker, was the town’s corset maker, so young Thomas learned that trade as a child. In his teens, Thomas became a world-class hellion, running away from home for a life at sea; but then he returned to England, married his childhood sweetheart and acted as if he was going to settle down. And, had his wife lived, we might never have heard of him. But she died when they were both in their early twenties, leaving Paine in a state of serious depression that his new addiction to alcohol only made worse.

He had borrowed the money to open his own corset shop, but he lost it in a drunken binge. So, in quick succession, he held a

series of jobs: a tax collector, fired; a teacher, too constraining; a preacher after he was born again, then back to tax collecting - where once more he was fired, only this time he took it personally.

Now he hated government bureaucracy and certainly King George. In fact, if you had hung out in the White Hart Tavern most any night, you would have been treated to an amazingly drunken Thomas Paine, holding court and propounding his theory that no man had any divine right to rule another.

He took to writing poetry. No one bought it, but it did bring him to the attention of a man running for Parliament, who paid Paine 3 guineas to write his campaign song for him.

The song was a huge success; the client was elected to Parliament. And suddenly, our drunken radical was much in demand as a writer of inflammatory campaign speeches.

And then, just as he was finding his place in the world, into London walked Benjamin Franklin, our colonial envoy to the court. It was Franklin who suggested to Paine that a man of his talents was needed in the colonies.

Late in 1774, Thomas Paine came to America to edit the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, where he discovered that already he faced a problem. You see, our wealthy ancestors really didn’t want to break with England; they simply wanted parity with the British upper class. To Paine’s way of thinking, that was no revolution at all, just a bunch of old conservatives complaining that they weren’t getting their fair share of excess wealth. So Paine decided to up the ante by adding the word “independence” to the argument, both in his magazine and in January of 1776, in his pamphlet “*Common Sense*.”

Because the thoughts expressed in the pamphlet were against the Crown and thus treasonous, it was signed “An Englishman.” Immediately, 500,000 copies sold at 2 shillings a piece, making Thomas Paine a very wealthy man.

When King George read “*Common Sense*” it enraged him, and His Majesty thought Ben Franklin had written it. British authorities here told the King that

the pamphlet was the work of John Adams; but it was Thomas Jefferson who spilled the beans. When he was accused of being the author, Jefferson responded, “Not I, but the only person who writes as well, Thomas Paine.”

It was the book that moved our nation; it still is the book that defines liberty for the individual all over the world, whether here or in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

Paine served for a time in the army. He gave money to the cause whenever he could, including \$500 for Washington’s army; and, at the end of the conflict, our grateful nation gave Thomas Paine his own farm, in New Rochelle, New York.

So he moved into a new career as a would-be engineer, and he designed a bridge without any piers. He believed his design would revolutionize all bridge work, but money was a bit short in the U.S. So he went home to England to raise the cash, and there once again ran into the bureaucracy of the British Crown.

It seemed to trigger something in him. He started inciting to riot to overthrow the King, while he was in England. He was immediately indicted for treason and was forced to flee to France. Good timing. The French had just about had as much fun as they could stand with Louis XVI, so guess who became the writer who inspired the French Revolution? That’s right, our own Thomas Paine.

France loved him so much that he was soon on the National Assembly in France; but there his life soon started taking a turn for the worse. The French were out for revenge on the King - and most had misunderstood Paine’s writings. He had never advocated violence against those who had ruled as tyrants; no, he simply said all mankind should be set free from those who had opposed them. Well, in France, they wanted blood.

In the Assembly, Thomas Paine stood up as the best that mankind is and should be, demanding the monarchy go, but not the revenge, saying, “I would rather record a thousand errors dictated by humanity, than one of severe justice.” He finished with the line, “Kill the king, but not the man.” For that position, Thomas Paine was sentenced to death and put in Luxembourg Prison for execution.

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

The only reason he lived is that the guard assigned to him marked the wrong side of his jail door, so the executioner would never come. Paine would stay in that prison for 11 months, until James Monroe, our French Ambassador, secured his release. A thankful Thomas Paine came home to his farm in New York.

One of his later works, *Age of Reason*, an attack on organized religion, made his enemies call him an atheist; but, like all of our Founding Fathers, Paine was a Deist, not an atheist. When he died at 73 years of age in 1809, he was refused burial in the local Quaker cemetery because of his beliefs; so he was interred on his farm.

When anyone talks about giving people their freedom and liberty, they are quoting the works of Thomas Paine. His writings are credited with effecting our breaking away from England and the British Reform Act of 1832, with reducing the power of the monarchy. His passion helped bring liberty to France; and, in gratitude, they gave us the Statue of Liberty, to honor Paine’s influence on the world. And one would think that Paine’s grave would be one of America’s cherished historical places today, but it’s not: Actually, we don’t have a clue where he is. William Cobbett, one of England’s most vicious right-wing conservatives, at first unremittingly savaged Paine’s works because of their idiotic concept of individual liberty. He wrote pamphlets and spoke of the dangers of Paine’s foolish and idealistic liberalism.

But then, when he saw the damage to the British poor at the start of their industrial revolution, Cobbett realized that in fact, Paine had been right. So his former worst enemy, William Cobbett, became the man who would carry on Thomas Paine’s work. He preached against the unrestrained power of the wealthy elite and the British Crown, and his writings got him jailed for two years. In 1817, he fled to America, where, like any good Pilgrim, he immediately went to the grave of his hero – and he was shocked. He wrote, “Paine lies in a little hole under the grass and weeds of an obscure farm in

America, there, however he should not lie, unnoticed, much longer. For he belongs to England. His fame is the property of England, and if no other people will show that they value that fame, the people of England will.”

Cobbett believed that America had badly mistreated the man who had roused it to demand independence. He meant to return Paine’s body to England; he would build a monument there to Paine, one to which the tired, hungry and desperately poor would come and realize that here lay their hero also.

So, Cobbett simply dug up the body of Thomas Paine. Well, not quite simply; he had a few problems. The least was that he had no money for a monument; so he decided to take the body of Thomas Paine on tour across England and use the ticket sales to build his final resting place.

But no one came to the grave robber’s spectacle. Lord Byron was one of those laughing at Cobbett’s folly, writing a poem about him.

*In digging up your bones, Tom Paine
 Will Cobbett has done well
 You visit him on earth, again
 He’ll visit you in hell.*

Desperate for money, Cobbett tried to sell locks of Thomas Paine’s hair, but little of it sold. And so the literary hero of our own American Revolution was put into a box and shoved under William Cobbett’s bed, where he stayed until Cobbett died in 1835. Cobbett’s son inherited the body, but was shortly thereafter sent to debtor’s prison. A British court ruled that Thomas Paine’s body was not an asset for sale and returned it in time to young Cobbett.

He in time lost the body of Thomas Paine, and it’s never been found since.

And so we know little of the life of Thomas Paine, the man who wrote the book on liberty, freedom for all and man’s independence from the past. Thanks to his most fervent admirer, who had good intentions but little brains or cash, today can we can’t celebrate Thomas Paine, the man who helped free us, England and France from the era of kings.

Nuts in the news

BRIDGEPORT, CT

A priest who resigned from a church mis-spent up to \$1.4 million in parishioner donations to lead a life of luxury with another man, according to a church-directed investigation. The Rev. Michael Jude Fay spent church money on limousines, stays at top hotels, jewelry, Italian clothing, and a condominium shared with the other man, auditors hired by the diocese found. About half the money he spent was kept in a secret bank account, according to their report.

Bridgeport Bishop William Lori, who ordered the investigation by Deloitte Financial Advisory Services, said he was shocked and angered by the findings. The report also was sent to federal authorities. "The amount of money that was misused is tremendous," Lori said. "I think this report and other things we found out shows a real betrayal of trust and abuse of power."

Libreville, Gabon

A priest has died after trying to demonstrate how Jesus walked on water. Evangelist preacher Franck Kabele, 35, told his congregation he could repeat the biblical miracle, but he drowned after walking out to sea from a beach.

One eyewitness said: "He told churchgoers he'd had a revelation that if he had enough faith, he could walk on water like Jesus. "He took his congregation to the beach saying he would walk across the Komo estuary, which takes 20 minutes by boat. "He walked into the water, which soon passed over his head and he never came back."

London, United Kingdom

A 'miraculous' image of Jesus Christ in the froth of an almost empty pint of beer is to be used as an advertisement to encourage more British to go to church this Christmas. The poster, which shows a glass with the words "Where will you find him?" will spearhead the Churches Advertising Network (CAN) campaign to boost attendance in the run-up to the Christian festive season.

CAN chairperson Francis Goodwin said he hoped the poster and accompanying radio adverts would spark a debate about religion. "The message is subtle but simple - where is God in all the boozing at Christmas?" said Goodwin, whose group is made up of Christians of all denominations working the British media and advertising.

"For many, Christmas is just drinking and partying and God is excluded, yet many young people are interested in finding deeper meaning and exploring faith." The poster is a nod to the occasional discoveries of holy images in everyday objects, from the face of Jesus in a frying pan, toast or fish finger, his mother Mary on a toasted cheese sandwich and even Mother Teresa in a sticky bun.

Lubbock, TX

Public officials are organizing a day to pray for rain. Mayor David Miller tells the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, "Nobody is going to tell God what to do and what not to do, but we are in a serious drought in West Texas and since he is the man who controls the rain clouds, we're asking him for his mercy and his help."

Officials have tried prayers before and say they were answered. In January 2004, after a year of drought, the city and county set aside a Sunday to pray for rain and got the second-wettest year since records have been kept.

Kiev, Ukraine

A man shouting that God would keep him safe was mauled to death by a lioness in Kiev zoo after he crept into the animal's enclosure, a zoo official said on Monday. "The man shouted 'God will save me, if he exists', lowered himself by a rope into the enclosure, took his shoes off and went up to the lions," the official said. "A lioness went straight for him, knocked him down and severed his carotid artery."

The incident, Sunday evening when the zoo was packed with visitors, was the first of its kind at the attraction. Lions and tigers are kept in an "animal island" protected by thick concrete blocks.

Haltom City, TX

Riverwalk Fellowship Church's senior pastor Steve Solomon has reported, among other things, an oil substance manifesting on the balcony, the baptismal and the pulpit of the sanctuary. Solomon said that as people began taking pictures of the oil, something else began to appear in the pictures. He said, "We'd started taking pictures at church and almost everyone would just take a picture and these orbs of light would show up."

Pastor Solomon pointed to the orbs of light depicted in very old paintings behind Jesus and the Saints and said, "how did they know to do that; where did that come from?" Solomon added, "I believe it's a sign from the Lord. There's nothing wrong with supernatural signs."

The feeling seemed to be echoed by Velma Alexander, the woman who discovered the oil in the church. She was still reeling from her experience. She said, "it was awesome. I haven't been the same since...I don't care what they say, I know God is real."



Are you searching for Atheists on the internet?

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

SOCAS

Orthodox instruction in Russian schools sparks controversy

Lauren Smith
AMERICANS UNITED

When Russian school children resume classes today, many will be greeted with a controversial addition to their schedules. The Moscow Times reports that mandatory courses on Orthodox Christianity will be added to the curriculum this year.

Despite the fact that obligatory courses on religious subjects run counter to the Education Ministry's position and the Russian constitutional mandates of church-state separation, there has been a growing push to get Orthodox Christianity into the classroom. In Belgorod and Bryansk, classes in Orthodoxy will be required; they will be optional in Mordovia and Chuvashia.

Supporters say students aren't taught religion, but rather are made aware of the predominant Orthodox culture.

Other regions have offered such courses as electives since the late 1990s. According to The Times, the Orthodox Church helps local schools develop the courses and even provides priests to do the teaching.

Geidar Jermal, director of the nongovernmental Islamic Committee, said the rise of Christian Orthodoxy in public schools is clearly meant to "drive a wedge between Russians and newcomers." Muslims plan to push for courses in Islam. Catholics, evangelical Protestants and those of other non-Orthodox

faiths are likely to take a similar view.

The struggle in Russia's public schools is not unlike what's happening in some public schools across our country.

Religious Right groups are promoting classes that would bring Bible instruction into public schools here. The Georgia legislature recently mandated the creation of two elective courses: "History and The Literature of the Old Testament" and "History and the Literature of the New Testament." The state education department can't legally turn to a church for help in creating a curriculum, but there are plenty of private organizations ready to come to the rescue.

Like the mandatory courses in Russia, supporters of Bible curricula in our public schools claim the courses are secular and necessary for children to be well-educated. However, the director of the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS), one major backer for the classes stateside, openly admits that her goal is to "expose kids to the biblical Christian worldview." NCBCPS texts, which have already been adopted for use in some North Carolina public schools, are rife with inaccurate "Christian nation" history, attacks on church-state separation and inappropriate proselytism.

For now, the classes in American public schools are voluntary. But if the Religious Right is allowed to get away with promoting fundamentalist Christianity in our public schools, could we soon face the same struggle as they are having in Russia?

Blum – From page 1

Freethinkers should be respected as well.

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists said that Lt. Gen. Blum's remarks suggest that the military still has a problem when it comes to religious belief.

"We've had the scandal at the Air Force Academy where officials were promoting Christian fundamentalism, and we have a problem with military chaplains insulting service men and women who happen to be Atheists," said Silverman. "Now the top official in the National Guard is singling out Atheists with these narrow and unfair remarks."

Silverman added that Atheists have always been present in the military, and noted that last year "Foxhole Atheists" from across the nation rallied in Washington, DC on Veterans Day.

"Religious belief, or the lack of it, shouldn't be a litmus for patriotism, on or off the battlefield," said Ellen Johnson. "Officials with the National Guard need to issue an apology for these ill-considered remarks made by Gen. Blum."



*Attention DFW
area
Atheists and
Agnostics!*

DFW Ethical Fellowship has scheduled services held every Sunday, from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Humanist Hall
414 N. Main Street
Grapevine, TX 76051

www.dfwfellowship.org



COLUMN

When prayer fails, try the Internet: A survey of Christian single women

William McEwen
METROPLEX ATHEISTS

I visited one of the Internet dating sites recently and I learned this: God continues to deny thousands of Metroplex Christian women a Christian mate. Despite the concept of leaving things in their god's hands, and apparently finding prayer ineffective, many local Christian women have turned to online dating services to find their mate.

Here's how the dating site works: Each person pays to have their profile on the site and for the ability to e-mail others with profiles. The online profiles contain a headline, a list of characteristics, an "in my own words" description of themselves, and a list of required characteristics for their mate.

It takes only a few minutes to set up a page. You simply go to a list, check off your characteristics and those of the person you seek. "Choices for Religion" lists most organized faiths, plus None/Agnostic, Spiritual But Not Religious, and Other.

Then there's "Attend Religious Services." Choices are More Than Once a Week, Weekly, Monthly, Only on Holidays, Rarely, and Never.

Quite a few women list their religion as Christian, but then they say they attend

services rarely or never. I once heard a comedian say "Sitting in a church doesn't make you a Christian any more than sitting in a chicken coop makes you a chicken." But I'm still surprised by the vast number of Christians who don't go to church.



Let's take a closer look at how some of the thousands of single 40-something Christian women of the Metroplex are describing themselves, and what they want from life and their mate. I've narrowed my search to within 50 miles of

where I live in Grand Prairie, and I've only searched females. Below are typical Christian women and some content from their pages. (For clarity, I've corrected their spelling, punctuation, and grammar. And I've included some of my own comments, in brackets if it's

within their descriptions.)

1. A 42-year-old Grand Prairie woman's headline is "Doing it god's way." She states, "I'd like to say that I am not perfect, but I do serve a perfect god. God bless all and keep praying for the Christian relationships in which god is the head."

An atheist friend points out, is "Doing it god's way" her way of saying she prefers missionary style?

2. Then there's the 48-year-old social butterfly who attends services once a week. Her entire profile is: "You have been on your knees seeking the will of god for your life. You give the first fruits of your day to god because you love him so much. Exactly what is it you have been praying for?"

This is kind of scary; I think even Christians would agree.

3. How about the non-smoker with a sensible love style. Her headline says she is "looking for the lord's choice." Here is her description:

"Enthusiastic, energetic, loving female seeking God's choice of mate. [Why does god need the Internet?] No games.

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

Complete honesty. Must believe in family. The lord has first place in my life, family is second. Please, only those who are serious about walking the Christian walk need respond. Another thing to mention, I have been called to hospice nursing by the lord. It requires being on call and working some long days. I will stay there until he has me move on."

I want to e-mail her and say, "God told me to tell you to move on and serve him by working at Home Depot."

4. I was confused by the voluptuous 5'7 North Richland Hills woman who titles herself "A little crazy but a lot of fun!" Her profile is disjointed. She said she is spiritual but not religious, yet she says she attends services weekly. She says, "I love the lord and really want to live as he would want me to."

5. The clever/quick witted Virgo from Lancaster was also confusing. She is a Christian, but we learn she is also into astrology. Or maybe not. She says: "I really would like to marry one day if god presented Mr. Right and would be willing to relocate if the opportunity presented itself, but I'm not desperate so I'm willing to wait until my Boaz appears until then. [Note: I don't know what that means.] No need for Virgos to apply, although I'm not into the sign thing, however, I have found that our personalities are too similar and this causes major clashing even with friendship. I'll work with a Virgo individual, if the latter were my choices (smiling, but for real.)"

[If similar personalities cause clashes, perhaps she should find an atheist. I'll invite her to come to our next meeting.]

6. And next, the blessed athletic woman from Arlington. "I am not looking for a man to complete me. God is already working on that. I am not perfect and always strive to better myself. My main focus right now is working on my relationship with my lord and savior. Jesus Christ! [I believe she is specifying who her lord and savior is, and is not cursing.] I am waiting for a strong man of god to find this Proverbs woman."

7. And then there's "Waiting for God's best," a hazel-eyed widow from Mansfield, who adds a little preaching at the end:

"My lord and savior Jesus Christ is number one in my life, then my girls. I enjoy spending time with them, going to church, camping, anything to do with water! I wake up with a smile, thankful to god for another day. I have been single with no dating for over six years. Just waiting on god to give me the OK. My man must put god first in his life. A strong man with a quiet sexy side. A man that can be an awesome dad, handyman around the house or car, and a wonderful lover when the lights go out. Are you waiting, too? Looking for god's best? Me, too. Let's talk and get to know each other. Don't always go by the age, you may really be missing out on a blessing that god has for you!"

9. A smoker and news Junkie from Balch Springs says Jesus is her best friend, but guess what she's looking for – a great friend!

"I have been married, divorced, separated, and widowed! Have learned a lot of things in my lifetime, always wanting to learn more. Not looking for affairs, one night stands, etc. Would just like a great friend. I feel friendship is very important. Not really clever with words, but make up for it in being a loyal friend. My best friend is Jesus Christ. I think we were all put on this earth for a reason. What's yours?"

10. And next, the friendly social drinker from Dallas: "Blessings to you and thank you for taking the time to stop by my page. I like to power walk and I'm independent, ambitious, good communicator, giving, caring, compassionate, sense of humor, young at heart, drama free, don't like to argue and most of all I have dedicated my life to the lord. I desire for my soul mate to find me and possess a relationship with Jesus Christ. Favorite scriptures: Proverbs 31:10, Psalms 37:4, Ephesians 5:1-21 and James 4:11-12 Philipians 4:6-7. Please remember that Christians aren't perfect or sinless but we can go to the lord in prayer and ask for forgiveness of our imperfections and work daily to improve ourselves. May the lord bless you with the understanding of his word and bring a blessing to your life."

This woman might be eliminating a

potential date by listing her favorite scriptures. Kind of early for that, don't you think? I always wait until the third date to expose that deeply personal side of me.

11. And finally, "Christian mate seeks Christian mate," a Dallas blue-eyed blonde. Her profile says she is "full of smiles and loving life. This Christian woman is enjoying a close walk with the lord and enjoys a very full life of god's many gifts. My perfect match will be a godly man with integrity and a lust for life."

Oh, yes, and by the way, her match criteria also indicates he must be at least six feet tall, and must make at least \$75,000 a year.

After reviewing the lonely (Christian) hearts, it is obvious that in the pursuit of finding a mate, being a Christian gives one no special advantage. It's all a matter of chance and opportunity, and divine intervention just doesn't seem to play a role.

And what of men looking for women? The Christian bible recommends men kidnap women for mates. In Judges 21:21-23, 600 men are all that's left of the town of Benjamin after a war with Israel. Town leaders tell the men:

Go to Shiloh and hide in the vineyards near the festival. Wait there for the young women of Shiloh to come out and perform their dances. Then rush out and grab one of the young women, then take her home as your wife.

If the fathers or brothers of these women complain about this, we'll say, "Be kind enough to let those men keep your daughter. After all, we couldn't get enough wives for all the men of Benjamin in the battle at Jabesh."

So that's just what they did:

The men of Benjamin went to Shiloh and hid in the vineyards. The young women soon started dancing, and each man grabbed one of them and carried her off. Then the men of Benjamin went back to their own land and rebuilt their towns and started living in them again.

Halleluiah, I guess. Kidnapping is a harsh and wicked act. But it's effective, especially compared to relying on the Internet.

SOCAS

Feds grab Mt. Soledad cross as “war memorial”

AMERICAN ATHEISTS

President Bush this past week signed a measure transferring ownership of the 29-foot high Mt. Soledad Christian Cross to the federal government in an effort to preserve the structure as a “war memorial” and de-rail litigation initiated by San Diego Atheist Phil Paulson.

The move came in response to a U.S. District Court order issued on May 3, 2006 ordering local officials to dismantle the historic structure, or face fines of up to \$5,000 per day. A battery of state and federal judges has repeatedly ruled that the cross represents an unconstitutional endorsement of one religion over other. In July, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy issued a stay of execution on the District Court ruling, giving the lower courts time to hear further arguments in the case.

On Capitol Hill, Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) introduced the protective legislation which cleared the House of Representatives by a vote of 349-74 back in July. The U.S. Senate promptly took up its version of the measure, passing it by unanimous consent on August 1. Democrats Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer spoke out in defense of the proposal, and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger extolled the effort to retain the alleged “war memorial.”

Supporters of the cross were quick to praise passage of the bill and the subsequent signing by Mr. Bush. Thomas Bock, National Commander of the American Legion – the veterans’ organization which has been fighting to keep the Mt. Soledad cross standing – called the development “a

victory for common sense.” He added, “We are a nation established on Judeo-Christian principles, and we are pleased to see the U.S. Congress and the President walking in the ‘footsteps of the founders’ in recognizing the sanctity of this veterans memorial.”

The American Legion has worked closely with representatives of the Roman Catholic Thomas More Law Center in trying to overturn a ruling by a state Superior Court judge who nullified a special election where 76% of San Diego voters approved the effort to transfer ownership of the cross to the federal government. The judge in that case also granted a request for Paulson’s attorneys to recover \$275,000 in legal fees. The Legion is also backing a so-called “Public Expression of Religion Act” which would stop legal advocacy groups from receiving compensatory legal costs in cases involving the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

When queried by reporters, Bock was belligerent over the prospect of more court challenges, promising “We expect more litigation and I assure you that the American Legion will be in the fight.” He added, “The religious symbols that mark the graves and honor the sacrifices of our fallen heroes – a cross, a Star of David, or other identification of faith in God – are sacred to Americans.”

Indeed, litigation over the unconstitutional religious monument is likely to continue. Mr. Paulson’s attorney, Jim McElroy, told reporters that he was filing papers in federal court in San Diego to void the transfer and have it declared unconstitutional.

“I don’t think anybody really thinks the


cross is going to remain on Mt. Soledad,” he told Associated Press. “It’s been 17 years and every court, every judge who’s ever looked at it has ruled it’s unconstitutional.” He added that the President’s signing of the bill to transfer ownership of the structure to the federal government “smacks of election-year politics.”

The legal battle over the Mt. Soledad Christian Cross is reverberating on Capitol Hill where efforts are underway to combat legal challenges to unconstitutional government practices involving the First Amendment.

Conservatives and religious right organization have been supporting a number of “court stripping” measures that would attempt to prevent courts from examining certain practices such as the inclusion of the words “Under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. Another measure, the Public Expression of Religion Act, would restrict compensatory legal fees even if plaintiffs succeed in removing religious references on public property, taking down Ten Commandments displays, barring Boy Scouts from receiving taxpayer perks (due to their policy of discriminating against gays and Atheists), and similar policies.

PERA is now in the U.S. Senate, and has been pretentiously re-dubbed the “Veterans’ Memorial, Boy Scouts, Public Seals, and Other Public Expressions of Religion Protection Act of 2006.”

The measure, S. 3696 was introduced by Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kansas). Presently in the Judiciary Committee, the bill is expected to see floor action when Congress returns from the August recess.



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No fire and
brimstone required*

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Outrage – From page 1

Attorney Tim Gungoll told the jury panel that he was a Roman Catholic, but that the facts of the case – not the religion of any of the parties – were of primary importance.

Chester Smalkowski was acquitted unan- imously.

The federal suit, filed Friday in US Dis- trict Court for the Western District of Okla- homa names a battery of defendants including school officials, the Texas County Sheriff’s Department, County offi- cers and the Town of Hardesty, Oklahoma. It charges that the family’s constitutional rights were violated under, but not limited to, the First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments. It also charges that school officials “unlawfully and unconstitutionally met in conspiracy to violate (the) Plaintiff’s constitutional rights.”

In addition, it is charged that members of the District Attorney’s staff “conspired ... to punish Plaintiff Chester Smalkowski for

his religious views by prosecuting a crimi- nal case against him” that they knew “to be grounded on false statements and perjury.”

The suit notes that a year after the first incident involving Ms. Smalkowski, she once again tried to participate in the girl’s basketball team. Again, Coach Ernest Cook “attempted to force Plaintiff N.S. to recite the “Lord’s Prayer.” Ms Smalkowski instead “chose to recite the Pledge of Alle- giance.” This time, the suit charges, Nicole Smalkowski was punished by school offi- cials who falsely accused her of “threaten- ing another student.” She was suspended “without a Due Process hearing or notice, as is required by Oklahoma Statutes.” Eventually, she was suspended and denied her statutory right to a hearing.

A school board member and her husband, a Texas County Deputy Sheriff are identi- fied and charged in the lawsuit as conspir- ators who “attempted to hire, coerce, or otherwise convince, for payment of money or other consideration on school property, one Jerry Kelly to inflict personal harm on

Plaintiff Chester Smalkowski in retaliation for his religious opinions and in further retaliation for Plaintiff Chester Smalkowski’s attempt to defend his daugh- ter and family against the false and mali- cious allegations...”

Another charge focuses on a Deputy Sheriff who ostensibly ordered the submis- sion of falsified policy reports and attempt- ing under false pretext to have Mr. Smalkowski re-arrested. Other allegations listed include:

- Attempts to coerce the bail bondsman to withhold bail without charges.
- Improper meetings and private confer- ences involving local officials.
- Efforts to coerce the filing of a “groundless restraining order” against Mr. Smalkowski.
- Efforts to obtain false statements from students “in order to create a false cause for arrest.”
- Harassment
- Efforts to coerce the giving of false testimony.



EDUCATION SERIES

The Development of Christianity

Kevin B. Metcalf
METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Christianity's evolution from a folk religion is apparent upon examining older versions of its scripture. Humans are by nature storytellers who weave daily life, traumatic events, thoughts, and dreams into narrative form they can pass on to others. Before written language, this was the method of transmission for tribal or clan history, stories, and mythologies as they passed from one generation to the next. Naturally, variations in stories accumulate over hundreds or thousands of years as tribes evolved into societies while simultaneously adapting manifold social values and identity throughout the generations. Eventually, written language made transmission of these stories and myths much easier and more efficient. All revealed religions have their sacred holy texts although each sub-sect tends to interpret this text depending upon their social or group needs.

Folk religions had no "written creeds, no theologians, [and] no hierarchy of officials" (Dennett, 2006, p. 140) but provided "rituals, stories about gods or supernatural ancestors, [and] prohibited and obligatory practices" (p. 140) necessary to provide the foundation for the emergence of the major organized religions. The movement from the oral traditions of folk religions to written language also aided the spreading of its ideology (Dennett, 2006). The Christian Bible evolved over centuries of adaptation and exists today in several different versions. Scholars suggest the various books of the Christian Bible were written "for the people of that time as history, social commentary, and political analysis" (Shermer,

2000, p. 207) although there are no known original texts to go by.

Because there exist over 33,000 versions of the Christian religion currently in the United States (Shermer, 2000), including around 1,500 denominations (Randi, 1987), there are necessarily multiple biblical translations. As society and culture evolve, religion must also change or face extinction as

interpreter's perception of targeted readers and cultural considerations. Departures from the most probable original meaning "often serve to maintain the illusion that the Bible remains relevant to and harmonious with our changing view of what comprise or constitute facts, norms, and values" (Avalos, 2006, p. 39); these deviations include addition, omission, or simply mistranslation.

The TNIV provides a good example of changing translation to fit with current sociocultural beliefs and values. Its translators wanted to create a bible that is gender-neutral and one that provides a better reflection of gender equality as our society recognizes it. It is currently under attack by evangelical and fundamentalist Christian groups for suggesting that women are equal to men, which goes against their traditional Christian dogma.



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most of the other hundreds of thousands of religions have done over the course of human civilization. Unlike Islam, the Christian religion has changed with society in order to adapt and survive; as a result, there are numerous biblical translations depending upon the social values of the sect. Avalos (2006) provides examples of various translations of the Christian Bible:

- King James Version (KJV, 1611)
- Revised Standard Version (RSV, 1952)
- New American Bible (NAB, 1970)
- Good News Bible (GNB, 1976)
- New International Version (NIV, 1978)
- New Jerusalem Bible (NJB, 1985)
- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1989)
- Revised English Bible (REB, 1989)
- Today's New International Version (TNIV; 2005)

Each version of the Bible has its own way of interpreting scripture based upon the

New Information on Pre-Israel Culture

Texts discovered starting in 1929 in a city called Ras Shamra in modern Syria illustrates more of pre-Israelite culture and beliefs than was available before. The translation of Deuteronomy 32:8-9 offers evidence of Christianity's folk religion background where there is reference to "the Most High" and "the Lord" (NAB). In light of these texts, the reference to "the Most High" in Genesis and in Deuteronomy 32:8-9 is most likely a reference to the god Elyon "who is represented as a god superior to, and separate from, Yahweh, the Jewish and Christian God; in fact, Yahweh appears to be Elyon's son" (Avalos, 2006, p. 39). Biblical translations naturally do not reveal that "the Most High" refers to the god Elyon and "the Lord" refers to the "principle deity of ancient Israel" (Avalos, 2006, p. 39) pro-

nounced Yahweh. There are many references to multiple gods in the Christian Bible; for example, a more literal translation of Genesis 1:1-3 follows:

When Elohim [refers to many gods, including Elyon and Yahweh] began to shape the heavens and the dry land-the dry land being then formless and empty, and darkness on the face of the waters, and the breath of Elohim blowing over the waters-Elohim said: "Let there be light" (Avalos, 2006, p. 40).

In addition, translators have mistranslated references to the earth such as Matthew 5:5 where Jesus refers to the meek inheriting the earth. The Greek term *ge* ("earth") is most likely a translation of the regular Hebrew term *'aretz*, which is often used to designate the land of Israel" (Avalos, 2006, p. 43). There are other misinterpreted verses where interpreters falsely translate "the land of Israel" as the "earth." Thus, through mistranslation, the pre-Israelite god Yahweh, son of Elyon, became the supreme God of Christianity, no longer constrained to the land of Israel or the Israelites and no longer inferior to Elyon. Regardless of its social origins, Christianity was more successful in marketing its social identity through religion and evolved into its current influential form.

Despite these significant problems with biblical interpretation, religionists of all sects continue to insist that they have the one true religion and refuse to examine their dogmatic philosophy. The problem is that unexamined assumptions and shared cognitions, along with standard operating rituals, reflects what a culture entails; for good or bad, "the beliefs group members share with each other can define the group's very essence" (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003, p. 183). The group perceives these shared beliefs as "basic truths" and hold them with great conviction. The beliefs come to "enjoy a presumption of truth and cease to be routinely evaluated by the group" (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003, p. 183). This seems to be the reason for religious apologists, someone has to find a way to spin ancient scripture into something valid.

Religious Evolution

Many researchers find that "the major religions of today are as different from their ancestral versions as today's music is different from the music of ancient Greece and Rome" (Dennett, 2006, p. 155). The changes are not random; they result from "the restless curiosity and changing needs of our encultured species" (Dennett, 2006, p. 155).

Many people do not want to know or do not care how great music, through the works of its design features, works its magic in stimulating emotions; they just want to enjoy the effect. The same goes for the performance of a magician; to explain the trick would diminish the wonder of the act. Religion is no different (Dennett, 2006).

Just as biblical translators do, religious ministers of every faith keep their traditions alive by adapting them to the current sociopolitical culture and gauging his or her audience in order to maintain their hearts and minds. The minister chooses the scriptures to read, along with relevant translations, in order to shape the minds and social behavior of the congregation. As a result, most congregants only know a small fraction of the holy text of their faith, depending upon the material most commonly presented since childhood, and have no idea about their religion's origins or developmental history. This method of conceptual transmission shapes the cultural and social identities of its followers. Modern America is the more religious than ever before in its history and the fundamentalist/evangelical leaders have successfully shaped their supplicants into the most effective sociopolitical force ever.

This history provides an interesting context of how the human species evolved within societies and it illustrates that caution must be exercised in using religious dogma in social interaction due to its artificial nature. Considering the history of religious development how does religion influence current social

behavior? Before discussing this subject, it is necessary to examine the role of faith in religious belief and social interaction.

Types of Faith

Paul Kurtz describes three types of faith. Type I is intransigent faith and will not be influenced by any counter-evidence, no matter how strong. Despite significant evidence to the contrary, those with Type I faith hold to their beliefs. For example, notice the number of people who attack evolution and who still hold to creationism as a means of explaining biological diversity despite over 150 years of research that supports evolution. Regarding this type of faith, Gerry Straub, Pat Robertson's television producer for over two years and author of *Salvation for Sale*, said:

I am convinced that if Pat Robertson or any other of television's faith-healers were proven to be pranksters and frauds, the vast majority of their staff and viewers would not drop their belief in the ministers' healing power or weaken their faith in God (Randi, 1987, p. 7).

Type II faith is willful in that there is little or no evidence to support a rational choice. The reason for type II faith may come from comfort, social needs, or just because it is psychologically easier. Type III faith depends upon evidence; however, if the evidence is minimal or of poor quality, it may result in false beliefs. Most victims of faith healers use type I or II faith and are unlikely to change their minds when confronted with significant evidence (Randi, 1987). Faith is an important aspect of modern, revealed religion and is important in its ability to influence social behavior.

Faith is a powerful force in shaping social behavior. Religious practitioners of faith do not require evidence and even disregard strong evidence to the contrary of their position. The next issue will build upon this brief overview of the origins of Christianity and its reliance on faith.

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COLUMN

The Founding Fathers Were Not Christians

Steven Morris, PhD.
ATHEIST ALLIANCE

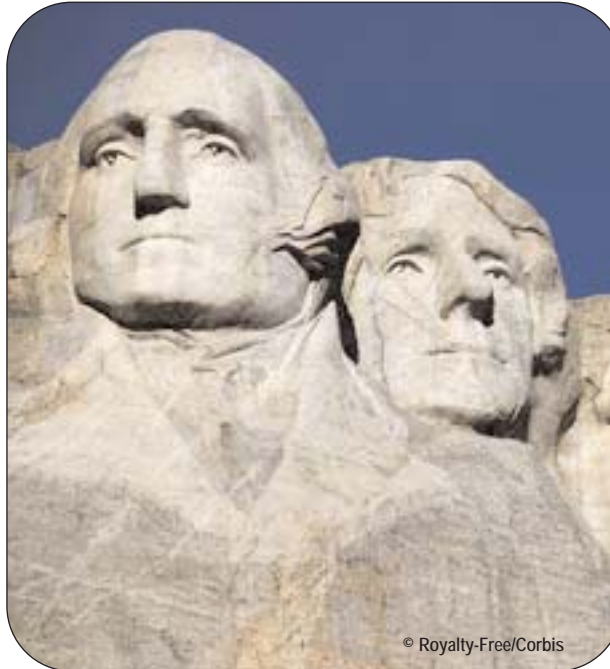
The Christian Right is trying to re-write the history of the United States, as part of their campaign to force their religion on others who ask merely to be left alone. According to this Orwellian revision, the Founding Fathers of this country were pious Christians who wanted the United States to be a Christian nation, with laws that favored Christians and Christianity.

Not true! The early presidents and patriots were generally deists or Unitarians, believing in some form of impersonal Providence but rejecting the divinity of Jesus and the absurdities of the Old and New Testaments.

Thomas Paine, pamphleteer whose manifestoes encouraged the faltering spirits of the country and aided materially in winning the War of Independence: "I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of... Each of those churches accuse the other of unbelief; and for my own part, I disbelieve them all." (1)

George Washington, first president: He seems to have had the characteristic unconcern of the 18th century deist for the forms and creeds of institutional religion. Although he often referred to Providence

as an impersonal force, remote and abstract, he never declared himself to be a Christian according to contemporary reports or in any of his voluminous correspondence. Washington championed the cause of freedom from religious intolerance and compulsion. When John Murray



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(a Universalist who denied the existence of Hell) was invited to become an army chaplain, the other chaplains petitioned for his dismissal. Instead, Washington gave him the appointment. On his deathbed, Washington uttered no words of a religious nature and did not call for a clergyman to be in attendance. (2)

John Adams, second president: Drawn to the study of law but facing pressure from his father to become a clergyman, he wrote that he found among the lawyers "a noble air and gallant achievements" but among the clergy, the "pretended sanctity of some absolute dunces." (3) Late in life, he wrote,

"Twenty times in the course of my late reading, have I been upon the point of breaking out, 'this would be the best of all possible Worlds, if there were no religion in it'!!!!" (4)

It was during Adams' presidency that the Senate ratified the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which states in Article XI that "the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion." This treaty with Tripoli was written and concluded by Joel Barlow during Washington's administration. (2)

Thomas Jefferson, third President and author of the Declaration of Independence: "I trust that there is not a young man how living in the United States who will not die an Unitarian." (5) He referred to the Revelation of St. John as "the ravings of a maniac" (6) and wrote, "The Christian priesthood, finding the doctrines of Christ levelled to every understanding and too plain to need explanation, saw, in the mysticisms of Plato, materials with which they might build up an artificial system which might, from its indistinctness, admit everlasting controversy, give employment for their order, and introduce

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it to profit, power and pre-eminence. The doctrines which flowed from the lips of Jesus himself are within the comprehension of a child; but thousands of volumes have not yet explained the Platonisms engrafted on them: and for this obvious reason that nonsense can never be explained.” (7)

James Madison, fourth president and Father of the Constitution: Madison was not religious in any conventional sense. “Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise.” (8) “During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and

servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.” (9)

Ethan Allen, whose capture of Fort Ticonderoga while commanding the Green Mountain boys helped inspire Congress and the country to pursue the War of Independence: “That Jesus Christ was not God is evident from his own words.” In the same book, Allen noted that he was generally “denominated a Deist, the reality of which I never disputed, being conscious I am no Christian.” (10) When Allen married Fanny Buchanan, he stopped his own wedding ceremony when the Judge asked him if he promised “to live with Fanny Buchanan agreeable to the laws of God.” Allen refused to answer until the Judge agreed that the God referred to was the

God of Nature, and the laws those “written in the great book of Nature.” (11)

Benjamin Franklin, delegate to the Continental Convention: “As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion... has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some doubts as to his Divinity; tho’ it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble.” (12) He died a month later, and historians consider him, like so many great Americans of his time, as a Deist, not a Christian.

SOCAS

House committee passes bill cutting off attorneys’ fees in church-state cases

AMERICANS UNITED

The House Judiciary Committee has approved a bill that would make it more difficult for Americans to challenge church-state violations in court.

The so-called “Public Expression of Religion Act” targets those who stand up to church-state infringements by government officials. The measure, H.R. 2679, denies legal fees and out-of-pocket expenses to plaintiffs who win lawsuits under the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause, which bans the government from promoting religion.

The committee passed the bill on a voice vote today, and it is now headed to the House floor.

“It’s remarkable to me that at a time when our country faces so many serious issues, the Judiciary Committee has nothing better

to do than pander to the Religious Right with this mean-spirited bill,” said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. “It’s another sad example of how this ‘do-nothing Congress’ earned its name.”

Lynn charged that the bill erodes individual rights. Under current law, Americans whose church-state rights have been violated by the government are free to file lawsuits. If the lawsuits are successful, the law allows for the recovery of reasonable attorneys’ fees and out-of-pocket expenses from the government. If H.R. 2679 were to become law, however, that will no longer be the case.

The measure is being touted by Religious Right groups as a way to discourage lawsuits challenging religious displays on public property. But, in fact, it is much broader than that and would deny reim-

bursement in conflicts ranging from government-sponsored religion in public schools to taxpayer funding for religious schools and other ministries.

Lynn said if the bill passes, it will set a precedent for Congress to deny attorneys’ fees in other types of litigation. Currently, attorneys’ fees are recoverable in a wide range of successful cases against the government involving constitutional and civil rights violations.

“This bill is nothing more than an attempt to scare people away from having their day in court,” Lynn said. “The House Judiciary Committee should be ashamed of itself for passing such a blatantly un-American scheme.”

Several national organizations that support civil rights and civil liberties have joined forces to oppose the measure.



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

Place: J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill (Meet 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

DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP BRUNCH:

What: Sunday brunch without the gospels

Date: Second and fourth Sunday

Time: 10:15 AM – 11:30 AM

Place: TBA

Place: Humanist Hall

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

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

HUMANIST HALL IS CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 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

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

DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP STUDY GROUP

What: Explores classical mythology

Date: Second and fourth Sunday

Time: 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

To have your events listed email:

The Atheist Voice Editor at

editor@metroplexatheists.org

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

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EVERY THIRD SUNDAY
11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

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September 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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October 2006

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November 2006

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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?