

# THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS  
JULY 2003, VOLUME 1, NUMBER 3

## National Constitution Center honors Madalyn Murray O'Hair

### AMERICAN ATHEISTS

The National Constitution Center has introduced an exhibit honoring 100 people noted for their contributions and exercise of the U.S. Bill of Rights. Among them was Madalyn Murray O'Hair, a plaintiff in the historic 1963 U.S. Supreme Court suit (MURRAY v. CURLETT, combined with ABINGTON TOWNSHIP v. SCHEMPP) that helped to end mandatory prayer reading and Bible verse recitation in our nation's public schools.

Representing the late Mrs. O'Hair at the opening dedication ceremonies of the National Constitution Center was Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. "We are honored to accept this invitation from the Constitution Center, and participate in the long overdue recognition of Madalyn Murray O'Hair for her contributions in defense of the First Amendment, and raising awareness of Atheists and their struggle for equal rights," said Johnson.

"It is a major step forward for us, and for all Americans, when a prestigious institution like the National Constitution Center includes Ms. O'Hair as one of the 100 leading people fighting for freedom under the Bill of Rights."

The 40th anniversary of the historic school prayer decision took place on June 17.

"Many people of many religious creeds, philosophies -- and no religious creed -- have helped to make and America the free country that it is," said Johnson. "It is appropriate that Madalyn Murray O'Hair be recognized for her efforts in helping to keep our public schools secular and free from religious coercion."



American Atheists

Madalyn Murray O'Hair holds a copy of the Bible in her office.

## Court commands commandment's removal

### AMERICAN ATHEISTS

The 11th Circuit Court of Alabama panel unanimously upheld a ruling by a federal judge who said that Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore acted inappropriately in using the power of his office to install a 5,200-pound granite monument bearing a rendition of the Ten Commandments. The court ordered that the monument must be removed from the Alabama Judicial Building.

American Atheists President Ellen John-

son said that the Ten Commandments display should be removed immediately.

"The courts stayed earlier enforcement of a decision which found the placement of a sectarian religious monument in a public building to be unconstitutional," said Johnson. "It's time for the Ten Commandments to be removed, and send a clear, unambiguous signal that government buildings should not be exploited by elected officials to promote their particular

*Continued on page 5*

## Faceless identification cards not permitted in Florida

### AMERICAN ATHEISTS

Sultaana Freeman, who changed her name after converting to Islam, argued that her free exercise of religion would be "burdened" if she were required to show her face. The case is considered a test of the grow-

*Continued on page 5*

# Philosophical Tour of Atheism: Part III - Positive and Negative Atheism

A useful starting point in understanding atheism is to make a distinction between positive and negative atheism (sometimes called "weak" and "strong" atheism, respectively). Don't get caught up in thinking negative is bad, or strong is good. The terms are mostly just handles. I don't mean to exclude other definitions of atheism, but the positive/negative distinction serves to map out who has to do what in an atheist discussion. Does the atheist have to prove there is no god, or does the believer have to prove that there is a god? This is called the problem of the "burden of proof."

The negative atheist says: "I don't believe in god."

The positive atheist says: "I believe god does not exist."

So while the negative atheist simply does not believe, the positive atheist makes the assertion "there is no god." While this may appear to be an unnecessarily subtle distinction, it is actually very important in dis-



**David Penn**  
METROPLEX ATHEISTS

cussions. The negative position is the easier to maintain in a discussion, since the negative atheist position does not make a statement of belief. Taking this position is the best way to learn about defending your belief, especially if you are just beginning to sprout your atheist wings. You don't have to prove god doesn't exist; you just undermine the reasons for believing. Once you hear all the rebuttals to the god-arguments, a reason to believe in god seems pretty weak. At this point, believers are revealed to be an alliance of benefit or convenience instead of reason.

Antony Flew, a good 20th century atheist philosopher, wrote a famous essay, "The Presumption of Atheism," where he argued convincingly that the religious believers have the burden of proving that there is a god, and that atheism is the sort-of default belief system. He said that the matter of the burden of proof cannot be settled by purely rational means, but that the matter was akin to choosing between two policies like

"innocent until proven guilty" or a "guilty until proven innocent." If you take the latter, the jails will fill up. Do you adopt a policy of believing all gods until proven wrong, or vice versa? I think you know where I stand; just look at the full churches. The essay is worth looking up.

On the other hand, the positive atheist has to explain why there is not a god as well as specify what does not exist. If you affirm that the statement "God does not exist" is true, it seems you have to prove a whole lot. Not really. The words of the believer, or their holy books, or their historical saints provide a virtual sewer overflow of proposed god definitions. Take your pick, the positive atheist will prove them all untrue, or maybe even frauds! There are a lot of arguments against the belief in the theistic god, which is currently the most popular god on the planet. Theism is committed to certain propositions about the nature of god, and those propositions can be proven wrong. The problem is that they keep changing what they believe. The positive atheist realizes that no matter you try to spice or dress it up, spam is just spam, and the same goes for god.



*Attention DFW  
area  
atheists and agnostics!*

HUMANIST CHURCH  
of NORTH TEXAS

Scheduled first service:  
Saturday July 19th, 11:30 a.m.  
1111 Cordell  
Denton, TX

[www.humanistchurch.org/](http://www.humanistchurch.org/)

## Correction

In the May issue of The Atheist Voice, Lary Darby was misidentified as this year's "Atheist of the Year." He relieved that title in 2002, this year the title was awarded jointly to Ed Gauci and Larry Munding.

# ANOTHER KIND OF CLOSET

**Kim L. Cole**  
GUEST COLUMNIST

Coming out of the closet is a common phrase -- when you are speaking of homosexuality. What you may not know is that it has also been applied to atheism. After all, are not both groups often condemned to hell by fundamentalists? Do not both groups have to face an ordeal when informing friends and family members of their true inclinations? The main question faced by both groups is: How do I tell them?

A fortunate few are raised in open-minded, free-thinking homes. These atheists are able to simply say, "I'm an atheist," without fear of recrimination from their loved ones. These atheists can face their friends with a lifetime's knowledge of who they are and what they think. These atheists are amazingly lucky, and they are able to skip one of atheism's greatest hurdles.

For the rest of us, there comes the time when we must decide how to look our parents (and friends, and co-workers, and extended families) in the eyes and tell them that we have rejected a lifetime of teaching. We must explain to them that not only is this not a failing on their part, it is not a failing at all. We are forced to find a way to explain to those who love us best that we have found what we consider to be a better way.

I find that it is very important to remember how much these individuals do care for us. Our parents raised us, our grandparents spoiled us, our friends chose us, and our co-workers respect us. It is from these feelings that they are acting, regardless of how they react to discovering atheism in someone they love. Even if they scream, shout, cry, condemn to hell, or even separate you from their lives, it is because of the depth of feeling they hold for you. We are not excited by the fate of those we do not care about. While they may not be showing the best judgement, or the most maturity, in their reactions, it is important to remember that it is because they care. It is only by remembering this small fact that we are able to cope with the ugly reactions this statement may incur.

There are as many theories on how to "come out" as there are

atheists who are going to need to choose between them. I have a few words to say on what I believe (and have seen to be) the best method for this. But first, a few words on some methods you may want to steer clear of.

First, do not reveal your atheism in the heated and passionate moments of an argument with someone you love. Do not tell them out of spite, or out of a desire to hurt them. Not only is this unnecessarily cruel, but it belittles the importance of what you are saying, and of what you feel. I made this mistake with my mother. My only excuse is that I was young.

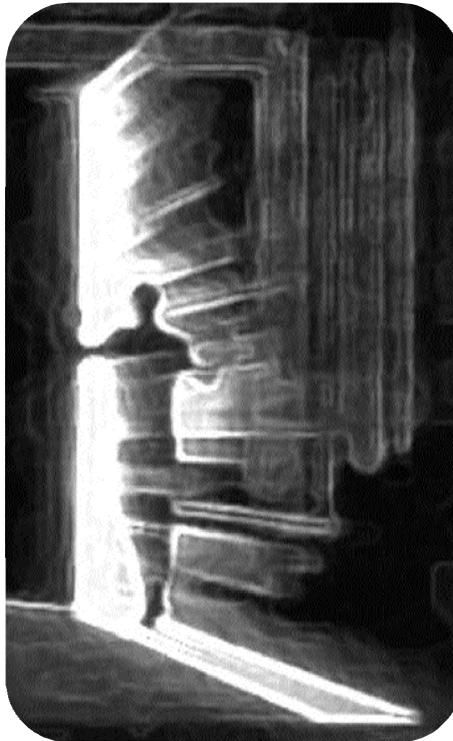
Secondly, do not wait until you are in a moment of extremis before you choose to reveal your decisions. I made the mistake of waiting until I was on a hospital bed awaiting a life-saving surgery before I informed my father of my atheism. I will always regret not sitting him down and telling him in a more reasoned manner.

Last, but definitely not least, do not let them read about it in the paper! This may sound odd, but it happened to me, with my extended family, and it resulted in a lot of hurt feelings. At the request of my mother, I kept my atheism quiet around my family. So when a newspaper article appeared detailing atheism in Oklahoma, they were quite surprised. I wish now I'd told them myself, whatever my mother's desires.

Okay, now that I've covered all the ways I've made mistakes in this matter, I would like to say that there are some times I've gotten it right. I told my brother in a quiet, reasonable discussion. The same with my friends, and with my co-workers.

So what should be said in these quiet, reasonable discussions? I think that it is best to begin small. Remind the person of your history with them, and of what you've meant to each other. Remind them that nothing could change that, and nothing can make you into anyone other than the person that they have known and cared about. This will serve to help them keep your relationship in mind as you discuss religion. It will allow them to remember why they

*Continued on page 9*



## 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

# Confederate Christians blame Atheists

**Ed Sebesta**  
GUEST WRITER

The modern Confederate Christian advocates a Christian Orthodox, biblical nation of the southern states. They believe the Civil War is basically a theological war between a heretical "North" and an Orthodox Christian South. They have a historical narrative for America in which Unitarians, Transcendentalists, free thinkers, and atheists are given specific roles as villains in American history. Authentic modern Southerners are supposed to be Orthodox Christians. The Confederate battle flag is held to be a Christian symbol, since the "X" is the St. Andrew's cross, and representative of an Orthodox Christian Confederacy. The Confederate army is held to have been a Christian army. They are publishing new works defending slavery as a defense of biblical orthodoxy and republishing old pro-slavery works,

many theological, from the 19th century. Abolitionism is held to be heretical and against the word of God. Society is held to have gone wrong with the ending of medieval ages, which they never call the Dark Ages. The 18th century Enlightenment is held to be anti-Southern.

The theological interpretation of the Civil War starts with 19th Southern Presbyterian

leaders during the Civil War and afterwards in the South. R.J. Rushdoony, Christian Reconstructionists, and C. Gregg Singer, conservative Presbyterian leader revive this interpretation in the 1960s. In Chalcedon Report, Rushdoony, praises and promotes the revival of 19th century Southern Presbyterian books with the theological war view point and his publication identifies Robert E. Lee and other Confederate leaders as Christian Reconstructionists. Singer publishes "A Theological Interpretation of American History." This is picked up by the developing Neo-Confederate movement in the late 1970s and popularized amongst so-called Southern Heritage groups and Neo-Confederate groups and publications, such as the League of the South, Southern Partisan magazine. Christian Reconstructionists groups devote pages in their publication to this Confederate Christian interpretation of history. The Sons of Confederate Veterans is now promoting Confederate Christian nationalism.

Before continuing, it would be helpful to explain who Neo-Confederates are and as importantly what they are not. Neo-Confederates are not screamers wearing funny clothing and saying things such as "white power now." They are

not belligerent, marginal members of society. They are per-

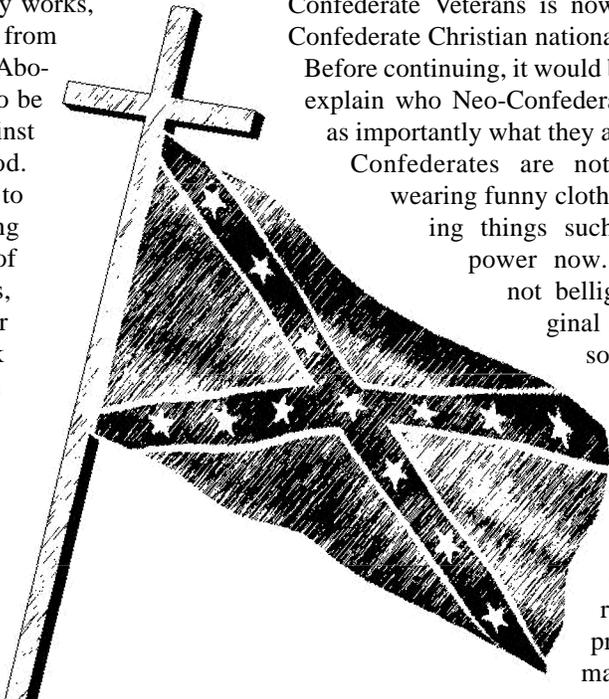
sons with education, good middle class decorum, who are professors in major univer-

sities, leaders in conservative organizations, journalists for major conservative publications, business people, and professionals. University presses often publish their books.

M. E. Bradford was a professor of English at the University of Dallas, in Irving. The same university had an M. E. Bradford memorial debate, with Confederate flags flying, on whether Lincoln was a villain. In the 1980s, three professors there were major contributors to the Southern Partisan magazine. William Murchison, columnist for the Dallas Morning News, is a regular columnist for the Southern Partisan, contributor to the Neo-Confederate Chronicles magazine, board member for the Texas League of the South, and a professor in the Baylor University journalism department. Phil Gramm, Dick Armey, Jesse Helms, John Ashcroft, and other U.S. Senators and Representatives have interviewed in the Southern Partisan.

Several concerns about the Confederate Christian nationalist movement deserve consideration. It is a Christian Reconstructionist (theonomy) movement, which powers its agenda by harnessing Southern sectionalism and popular support for Confederate symbols. It scapegoats atheists for the defeat of the Confederacy, making them specific villains in history. It casts being atheists, as well as many religious views, as being unsouthern and alien to the South.

The religious right, despite its public efforts to reach African American Christians, hasn't rejected the Confederacy. Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and other religious right leaders interviewed in the Southern Partisan over the years. The Southern states where the religious right is strong, is the same states where Confederate symbols enjoy strong white support.



## Information about the Confederate Christian Nationalists

Euan Hague and Ed Sebesta's article in the Canadian Review of American Studies:  
<http://www.templeofdemocracy.com/theologyCRAS2Final.htm>

The Southern Poverty Law Center on the Confederate Christian movement:  
<http://www.splcenter.org/intelligenceproject/ip-4q5.html>

Confederate Christian Reconstructionists - Chalcedon Report:  
<http://www.chalcedon.edu/report/2000dec/index.shtml>

*Ed Sebesta is an engineer and researches the Neo-Confederate movement. His work has been published academically and he has been featured in alternative newspapers such as the Dallas Observer. He is also an information resource for numerous journalists, authors, and organizations.*

## Faceless identification – Continued from page 1

ing use of federal and state "special rights" laws (including the Religious Freedom Restoration Acts) which provide legal carve-outs and other exemptions for behavior when religious groups and individuals are concerned.

"There should be no 'special rights' for any religious groups or individuals," said Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists, a First Amendment watchdog group. "Government must remain neutral in respect to religious practices; and religious belief or affiliation should not exempt someone from the generally applicable laws and regulations that everyone else has to obey."

Johnson dismissed arguments by Freeman's attorneys that concerns about "modesty" as bogus.

"Freeman, or any other Islamic woman,

who wants a driver's license can be photographed with only women present if that's what it requires to allay these kinds of concerns."

"There should be no 'special rights' for any religious groups or individuals"

**Ellen Johnson**  
PRESIDENT OF  
AMERICAN ATHEISTS

Ron Barrier, Communications Director for American Atheists, said the broad statutes creating "special rights" for religious groups often vitiate equal enforcement and protections of civil law.

"According to news reports and testimony, child welfare workers revealed that Ms. Freeman and her husband often used their religious beliefs and concerns over 'modesty' to prevent investigators looking into abuse charges in connections with their daughters," said Barrier.

"Religion should not be an obstacle to the equal and neutral enforcement of any law protecting us, especially when children are involved," added Barrier.

## Court – Continued from page 1

kind of religion."

"Allowing the monument to remain pending even further appeal would simply encourage defiance of the constitution," added Ms. Johnson.

Judges on the Circuit Court were clear in their ruling that Moore acted inappropriately when he ordered the Commandments monument installed in the rotunda of the Judicial Building two years ago.

"If we adopted his position, the chief justice would be free to adorn the walls of the Alabama Supreme Court's courtroom with sectarian murals and have decidedly religious quotations painted above the bench... Every government building could be topped with a cross, or a menorah, or a statue of Buddha, depending upon the views of the officials with authority over the premises."

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# INFIDELS' BASH



Photos by Randy Gorman

Dick Hogan (Top left) hosts the semiannual Infidels' Bash at his "party barn" in Weatherford. Heathens come from around the metroplex to celebrate the summer and winter solstice with drinks and good food.

# FFRF wins suit against city's park monument

## FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

(MADISON, WI) Federal District Judge Barbara B. Crabb issued a strong 41-page opinion in favor of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and its 22 local plaintiffs challenging a Ten Commandments monument in a city park in La Crosse, Wis.

The lawsuit revisited a case first filed by the Foundation in 1985 on behalf of two of its La Crosse members, which Judge Crabb had dismissed for lack of standing in 1987.

Her decision yesterday acknowledged the standing of the impressive list of plaintiffs, including Foundation members who are atheists and agnostics, a Catholic man, a Jewish woman, and members of the Unitarian-Universalists. Most of them attested that, despite the inconvenience to them, they avoided Cameron Park and shopping in the area because the presence of the bible edicts on city property caused them distress.

When the Foundation sent a letter threatening to sue the City if it did not remove the monument, the council passed a resolution to keep the marker "in its present location by any and all means available to the City."

After the lawsuit was filed last July, the City of La Crosse responded by selling a parcel of the small park to the Fraternal Order of Eagles, who had donated the marker in 1965. Crabb's decision noted that the board refused to consider an offer by the Foundation to buy the plot of land for fair market value.

"The law of this circuit compels a conclusion that defendant violated the establishment clause when it displayed a monument of the Ten Commandments on public property without a secular purpose for doing so. Furthermore, defendant's sale of a minuscule portion of the park to the Eagles in order to preserve the presence of the monument proves rather than extinguishes defendant's endorsement of the monument's religious message," wrote Crabb.

Crabb ruled the presence of the Ten Commandments in the city park before the sale was unconstitutional:

"The context of the monument in this case compels the conclusion that advancement of religion was both the purpose and effect of the monument as it existed before the sale."

She cited the *Books v. City of Elkhart*

case, decided by the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in 2000, ruling a similar Eagles Ten Commandments monument unconstitutional when displayed in front of an Indiana municipal building.

In a pivotal part of her ruling, Crabb called the sale of part of the park unconstitutional: "there was no reason to sell the land other than to maintain the location of the monument."

She rejected the precedent of an earlier case brought by the Foundation, in which the City of Marshfield, Wis., was permitted to sell and fence off a huge display of Jesus at a public roadside park. Marshfield sold a central bite of the park in response to a lawsuit by the Foundation, which contested the sale as a sham and a "sweetheart deal" since the City took no bids and sold to a group organizing to "save the Jesus statue." Although the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in 2000 upheld the sale as a constitutional remedy, it agreed with the Foundation that the lack of large fences and disclaimers made it appear that the lot was still city-owned, ordering that barriers and large disclaimers be posted.

"The facts discussed in City of Marshfield are not to be checked off like a laundry list so that following them creates an irrefutable presumption that a public body has acted with a secular purpose," wrote Crabb.

"A court must look at the entire context of the sale to determine whether the sale demonstrates a preference for religion."

"It is important to note that this is not a case in which defendant decided to sell an unoccupied portion of the park because it was no longer needed for park purposes and then the new owner made its own choice to erect a religious monument. Rather, a defendant sold a very small parcel of land in the middle of a park to a predetermined buyer for the purpose of preserving one religious message in the park."

The fact that the City refused offers by a church and even the Eagles Club to buy the monument and move it to private property shows the City was "intent on furthering the monument's message," Crabb wrote.

The judge noted: "Neutrality means more than just changing the name on a deed. Under defendant's view of the law, Chief Justice Moore would be permitted to dis-

play the Ten Commandments in his courtroom so long as he could convince the state to sell a tiny portion of the courthouse to a private party and erect a disclaiming sign."

"It is respect for religion, not hostility toward it, that is the animating principle behind the establishment clause. By prohibiting the government from favoring those who believe over those who do not, the establishment clause helps protect the rights of Christians, Jews, Buddhists, agnostics, Muslims and atheists."

Last year a magistrate refused the Foundation's request to protect the confidentiality of the lawsuit's initial two plaintiffs, a married couple. When her husband died unexpectedly, remaining plaintiff Sue Mercier agreed to be named publicly as a plaintiff, but asked that the Foundation find additional plaintiffs so she would not be alone in the community. In the lawsuit's most dramatic moment, an outpouring of sympathetic offers came into the Foundation office. Foundation member Hank Zumach, who signed up as a plaintiff, spearheaded a campaign to find more supporters.

Among the many area plaintiffs is attorney Maureen Freedland, a Foundation member whose parents survived the Holocaust. Freedland attested that she missed attending a peace rally in Cameron Park because of the monument, has received flak for being part of the lawsuit, and alters her routes to avoid the area. Plaintiff Myrna Peacock, who began speaking out against the monument in the 1980s, has been called a "pinky" and a "commie" for supporting the separation of church and state.

"We thank our 22 La Crosse plaintiffs for standing up to support the First Amendment," said Foundation president Anne Gaylor.

Gaylor noted that the Foundation's principal plaintiff in its original 1985 lawsuit, Phyllis Grams, who took a great deal of harassment and is now deceased, would have been delighted with Crabb's decision:

"It's been a long legal battle, but persistence has paid off. The courts seem to be shifting. We now have recent decisions out of four federal appellate circuits opposing such Ten Commandments entanglements, with only one appeals court recently going in the opposite direction."

# Teaching Kids to Yawn at Counterfeit Wonder

**Dale McGowan**

**ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL**

We don't experience wonder, you know, we secular types. Ask a Christian in case you thought we did. Our lives are coldly mathematical, devoid of wonder, sterile, lifeless, yada yada. Wonder requires religious faith. Funny, though, how often I've experienced something that seemed peculiarly similar to the dictionary definition of wonder. I wonder what it could have been?

Whatever it was, I'm assured, it couldn't have been actual wonder. Real wonder is derived only from contemplation of God and a knowledge that he created all that is. He is, after all, wonderful...no, REALLY wonderful, really especially great and powerful, super special and eternal and large and clean and...

Oh, I'm sorry, was I boring you? Me too. And therein lies my point. I have always found the platitudinous wonder of the Bible flat, hollow, close to meaningless. It has never moved me even as metaphor, rendered pale by its vague and colorless hyperbole.

Now try these on for size:

- If you condense the history of the universe to a single year, humans would appear on December 31st at 10:30 pm.
- Look at the ring on your finger. As the core collapses in a dying star, the inrushing gravitational wave slams into the outrushing sound wave from the collapse. In that moment only, as a star dies, gold is formed.
- We are starstuff that knows it exists.
- All life on Earth is directly related by descent. You are a cousin not just of apes, but of the sequoia and the amoeba, of mosses and butterflies and blue whales.

Now THAT'S wonder.

I was first introduced to jaw-dropping, mind-buzzing wonder by Carl Sagan. Author of the Cosmic Calendar concept above, Sagan was a master of making conceivable the otherwise inconceivable realities of the universe, usually by brilliant analogy, taking me step by step into a true appreciation of honest-to-goodness wonder.

Merely knowing that the universe is really really really big is one thing. But that only rated a two on the wow-meter for me as

a child, as it did for my son, as it will for my daughters. A few more specifics, though, can snap it into focus, and up the meter goes. Knowing that a car goes about 60 mph gave me an appreciation of how incredibly fast light travels – 186,000 miles per SECOND – which turned me to imagining myself riding a beam of light to the moon in two seconds or to the sun in eight minutes. Then I was wrapping my mind around a light-YEAR, the incredible distance light travels in 31,536,000 of those seconds. One light year equals nearly six trillion miles. I'd take my



bearings, remembering that six trillion is six million millions. Then on to the realization that the very nearest star to our sun is 4.3 of those light years away. Then to the fact that there are 200 billion such stars in the Milky Way galaxy alone – and that there are roughly as many galaxies in the universe as there are stars in OUR galaxy, arrayed through 13 billion of those light years in every direction, a universe made of a curved fabric woven of space and time in which hydrogen, given the proper conditions, eventually evolves into Yo Yo Ma.

And we, remember – we the inhabitants of the third planet from an average star in one of those 200 billion galaxies – we are the Main Attraction, the central concern of the Creator of it all.

Many Christians will smile that Smile, you know the one, and say "Yes, that's just how

wonderful it all is! All this vast universe is there only for us to gaze at and wonder about." But anyone whose grey matter was engaged for the whole process above will still be blank-eyed and buzzing at the contemplation of all we have learned about ourselves and our context in the past 150 years. (If not, read Voltaire's short story "Micromegas" to drive the final nail into the coffin of the age-old contention that our centrality is anything but the naturally infantile perspective of a prescientific culture.)

Christian wonder – the wonder we're supposedly missing out on by being rationalists – is counterfeit wonder, and not an especially imaginative counterfeit at that. As each complex and awe-inspiring explanation of reality takes the place of "God did it," the flush of real awe quickly overwhelms the memory of whatever it was we considered so wondrous in Christian mythology.

There is no surer way to strip religion of its ability to entice our children into fantasy than to show them the way, step by step, into the far more intoxicating wonders of the real world. And the key to those wonders is precisely the skill that is so often miscast as the death of wonder: skepticism.

Nothing will wrinkle the noses of the faithful faster than a skeptical attitude – "why do you have to be so negative, why do you have to tear down everything?" – yet there is nothing as essential to experiencing true wonder in its greatest depth. It is the filter that screens out the fool's gold, leaving nothing behind but precious nuggets of the real thing. Tell me something amazing and I'll doubt it until it's proven, why? Because fantasies, while charming, are a dime a dozen. I can tell you my dreams of purple unicorns all day, spinning wilder and wilder variations for your amusement. You'll enjoy it, but you won't believe – until I show you one, take you for a ride on its back, prove it's more than just a product of my imagination. Your skepticism up to that point will have served you well; it fended off counterfeit wonder so you could feel the depth of the real thing.

I doubt and doubt and doubt not to "tear down everything" but to pull cheap facades away to see and delight in those things that are legitimately wonderful. How do I rec-

*Continued on page 10*

**Continued from page 3**

need to keep an open mind, and why they need to listen to what you have to say.

It is hard to know where you should go after this. If your loved one is a rational, logical person, you may be able to follow with a discussion of your reasons for selecting atheism as opposed to religion. Even if they do not agree, perhaps they will understand your thinking, and accept it. Show them the philosophical, metaphysical, and scientific basis for atheism.

If your loved one is more of an emotional type, the kind to appeal to love and light in defense of their religion, I would suggest a different approach. You can tell them about the mental and emotional freedom that comes with atheism. You can explain to them the exhilaration of using your mental and emotional facilities to determine your own path for yourself, without recourse to the laws of a religion. Explain to them the way your self-esteem is bolstered by your ability to rely on yourself for your present and future.

But also explain, to either type, the web of friends and family that are necessary in times of trouble. Explain to them how much you will continue to need their

friendship and love. Explain that this in no way diminishes any relationship between the two (or three, etc.) of you, and that the affection you all feel for each other cannot be changed.

In the end, there is nothing you can do to force a person to understand your decision, if they choose not to. Remind yourself of their feelings for you, and yours for them. Remind yourself that you have chosen your path, and you cannot allow them to create unhappiness for you because of it. You are the person that you have grown to be. You accept them as they are, and you ask nothing more than that they do the same for you. If they can manage this, then you can maintain healthy relationships with those around you.

If they cannot manage this, there are still ways to get along, short of hiding your atheism from them. Some choose to simply not discuss it. There are houses in which religion and politics are never mentioned for these very reasons. You can simply agree to disagree, and let it be done. But even these methods require some acceptance on both parts.

What if no acceptance can be found? You have two choices in this circumstance. One is that you can deny what you have already

chosen to be the best philosophy for yourself and accept the philosophy that has been chosen for you. The second choice is to separate yourself from those who would deny you as you are. You may choose not to associate with them until they are able to take you for yourself, and to appreciate you as such.

Neither of these choices is easy, or desirable. We all wish to be loved and accepted for who and what we are, regardless. We wish that those we have spent our lives loving will continue to try to understand us, regardless. And, with luck, we can get our wish.

I, myself, will wish everyone luck in this circumstance. I hope that those you love will listen to you, and try to understand. I hope that your friends will remain friendly, and that you can be honest in your beliefs at work without fear. I hope that someday everyone will enjoy these freedoms, regardless of what their beliefs actually are. And, last of all, I hope that the advice found here will be of some help to you when it comes time for you to leave your closet.

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1:00 PM – 3:00 PM



# Continued from page 8

ognize them? Easily. They're the ones left standing after the hail of critical thinking has flattened everything else. Magnificent, those standing stones.

We are often accused, mindlessly, of having "faith" in scientific ideas such as evolution and therefore practicing a sort of religion. The less you know, the more reasonable that assertion is. Evolution by natural selection was positively barraged with skepticism throughout the end of the 19th century and well into the 20th. Darwin and Huxley spent the remainder of their lives answering doubts about the theory with airtight proofs and countless examples of any claimed lacuna. And, when the dust cleared, the theory remained, intact, beautiful in its inevitability, awe-inspiring not because it drew no fire but because it drew the fire and survived spectacularly. That is what is known as the truth, or our best approximation of that elusive concept. It is so precious to get a glimpse of real knowledge, so breathtaking, that no lesser standard than trial by skepticism will do. It leaves behind only those things wonderful enough to

make us weep at the pure beauty of their reality and at the equally awesome idea that we could find our way to them at all.

A theologian friend of mine once suggested to me that the metaphors of religion are beautiful "responses to mystery." If, each time a mystery is dispelled by real understanding, the metaphor stepped aside, ceding the ground of wonder to its successor, I'd have no problem with such metaphors. The problem of course – as illustrated by the creation/evolution "controversy" – is that people fall so deeply in love with their metaphors that they are unable and unwilling to let go when the time comes and mystery is replaced with knowledge. And it is this, more than anything, that represents a challenge for parents wishing to raise independent thinkers: the magnetic power of the lovely metaphor, standing in the doorway, impeding progress toward real answers.

The most compelling cases for preferring reality to metaphor are the most practical. All the prayer and animal sacrifice and chanting in the world couldn't cure polio; the Salk vaccine did. And how did we find it? Through rigorous, skeptical, critical thinking

and testing and doubting of every proposed solution to the problem of polio until only one solution was left standing. Let others find uncritical acceptance of pretty notions a wondrous thing. I'm more awestruck by the idea of not having polio because someone cared enough to find more wonder in testable reality than in wishful fantasy.

It's easy to get a child addicted to real wonders if you start early enough. Simply point them out – they are all around us – and include a few references to what was once thought to be true. Take thunder. Explain that lightning removes the air from a long column, sky to ground. For just a second that space is empty. The crack of thunder is the sound of trillions of air molecules smashing into each other as they fill that emptiness.

Forgive me if I find that completely wonderful.

Then explain that people once thought it was a sound made by an angry god in the sky, and enjoy your child's face as she registers how much less interesting that counterfeit is.

Repeat steps one and two ad infinitum until college.

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# UPCOMING EVENTS

**BUSINESS MEETING**

**Regular Monthly Meeting:**

**What:** Meeting to decide general business of the group and to discuss current events.

**Date:** Third Sunday of the month

**Time:** 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

**Place:** Heritage Park  
217 Main St. at Second St.  
Irving, TX 75060

**SOCIAL MEETINGS**

**J. Gilligan's:**

**What:** "My dinner with Atheists," social

time with a bunch of heathens.

**Date:** Every Wednesday

**Time:** 6:30 PM - 9:00 PM

**Place:** J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill  
(Meet on the grill side)  
400 E. Abram Street  
Arlington, TX 76010

**Atheists Meetup Day:**

**What:** Meet with other local Atheists to talk about your beliefs.

**Date:** Third Tuesday of the month

**Time:** 7:00 PM

**Place:** TBA; For locations near you visit: [atheist.meetup.com](http://atheist.meetup.com)

**MARG:**

**What:** The Metroplex Atheists Reading Group discusses selected books. For the latest book, visit:

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

**Date:** Third Sunday of the month

**Time:** After the regular meeting

**Place:** Heritage Park  
217 Main St. at Second St.  
Irving, TX 75060

**Do you have a special event?**

Submit it to:  
[editor@metroplexatheists.org](mailto:editor@metroplexatheists.org)

## July 2003

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

## August 2003

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

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

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

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*THE ATHEIST VOICE*  
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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?*