

THE ATHEIST VOICE

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Supreme Court sets stage for pledge showdown

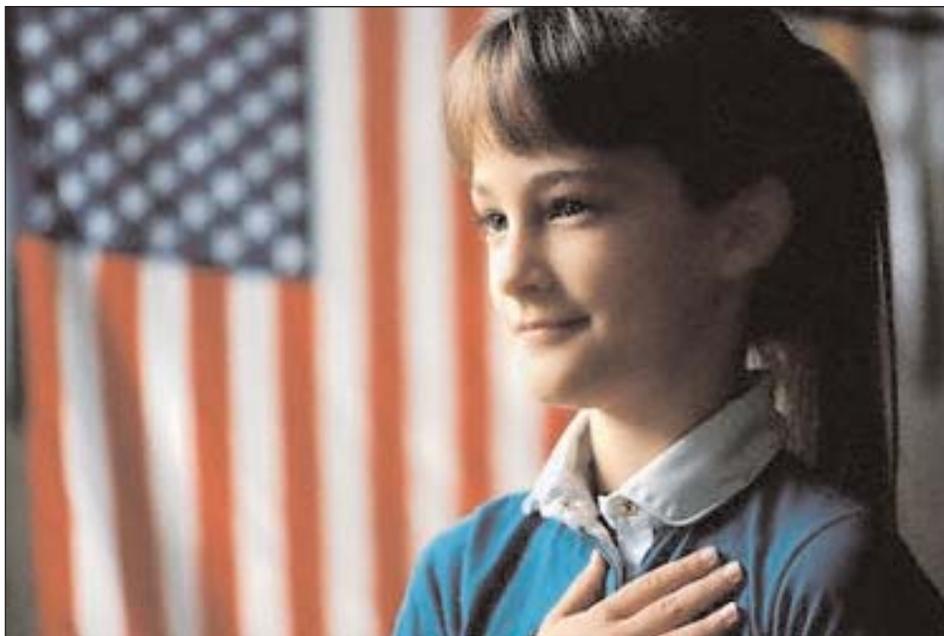
AMERICANS UNITED

The Supreme Court's decision to review a controversial ruling striking down recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools sets the stage for an emotional clash over government endorsement of religion, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The high court announced that it will hear *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow*. The case challenges the right of public schools to sponsor recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, asserting that its religious content violates separation of church and state.

In June of 2002, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that public schools may not sponsor daily recitation of the Pledge, which includes the phrase "under God." The controversial ruling was appealed to the full 9th Circuit, which refused to hear it, and then to the Supreme Court.

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In 1954, during the now infamous McCarthy era, the United States Congress passed a bill that inserted the phrase "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance. The bill was signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, effectively assuring that the citizens of the United States acknowledged God.

Ten Commandment's appeal denied, but issues linger

Flashline

AMERICAN ATHEIST

The U.S. Supreme Court today announced that it would not consider an appeal filed on behalf of suspended Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore over a controversial monument of the Ten Commandments.

By doing so, justices ducked the thorny question of precisely when display of such religious presentations in government venues survives constitutional muster. The court instead simply announced that it would not arguments in the case.

Moore has become the central figure in a nationwide legal and cultural battle over

the status of religion in public life. He argued that the Judeo-Christian deity was "the source of the community morality so essential to a self-governing society," and that states could "acknowledge God" by promoting religious values and display of sacred symbols. While a judge in Etowah County Alabama, Moore attracted national attention by mounting a hard-carved Commandments plaque above his dais, and commencing judicial proceeding with a religious invocation.

Moore later successfully ran for the elected post of state Chief Justice, and pledged to take his campaign on behalf of government-sponsored religious displays to the

capitol in Montgomery. He promptly ordered the stealth placement of a two-ton granite monument conspicuously portraying a version of the Commandments in the foyer of the Alabama Judicial Building. Lawsuits followed, and Federal Myron Thompson ordered the display removed, saying that it violated the First Amendment separation of church and state.

Moore remained defiant and supporters of the combative justice organized rallies, prayer vigils and even a "Save the Commandments" caravan that traveled through the South ending in Washington, DC. Sev-

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The difference between science and religion

Jon Nelson

ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL

One of the key tenets of modern religious apologetics is that science and religion are mutually compatible, and that the findings of science are "proving" the veracity of the various claims of religion. It is certainly not surprising that those who argue in this way invariably seek to prove that science is proving not just any religion, but their own particular religion.

Those who argue in this way will insist that they are committed to science and to the scientific method. Yet this is rarely the case. Their hypocrisy can be exposed by asking the following simple question: What scientific (or rational) evidence would you accept as invalidating your religion?

Egyptologist Gerald Massey once said: "They must find it difficult, those who have accepted authority as truth, rather than the truth as authority." This is particularly true regarding religion, for the religionist and the scientist operate from very different perspectives. The scientist relies on what is known as the scientific method. This method is the only legitimate method of acquiring knowledge, for the simple reason that it has a built-in method of self-correction. In other words, any given scientific theory is only as good as the evidence that supports it. Scientists do not operate from pre-conceived ideas.

In the scientific method, scientists observe a certain phenomenon and asks what is the underlying truth of that phenomenon; what is it that we are looking at and what makes it act the way it does. After considering a number of possible ideas, they come up with a hypothesis, which they feel to be the best explanation of the phenomenon in question. The hypothesis, in order to be considered valid, must pass certain experimental testing. The testing must be repeatable. If the testing does indeed validate the hypothesis, the hypothesis becomes known as a theory. A theory is not, as many

creationists and other anti-scientists maintain, a mere blind guess; it is the end result of rigorous scrutiny and examination. If the theory cannot be invalidated, it is accepted, but it is never hardened into absolute dogma; all scientific theories are subject to revision, alteration, and rejection as new evidence and experimentation demands.

This method is the exact opposite of the methods of religion. Religious beliefs are

fusing to consider ideas that invalidate it (which unfortunately is the method of most religionists trying to rationalize their faith) illustrates a hostility towards not only science, but to the reasoning process in general. For those who accept the absolutist claims of their religion, truth is defined not in terms of what corresponds to reality, but in terms of what corresponds to their faith. It has often been pointed out by atheists that in science, when the facts disprove the theory, the theory is discarded, while in religion, if the facts disprove the theory, the facts are discarded. This point illustrates that, for all too many religious people, they are committed to their religion, and not to the truth.

Since no religion is founded on objectively verifiable facts, there are naturally no objective proofs to validate them. While many modern religious apologists insist that all religions point to the same "truths", this is not borne out by the facts. Indeed, if this were so, the history of religion would not be as bloody as it has been.

There are psychological factors to consider too. Since religions cannot be objectively proved, the only way for believers of two different faiths to resolve their differences is by violence. Hatred of reason is of paramount importance here. Any examination of the historical writings of various religious leaders conclusively illustrates this point. Since

time immemorial, these men (for it was usually men who were the leaders of these religions) displayed at best a grudging tolerance toward human reason, and (more often) at worst abject hatred for it. Martin Luther was only voicing the views of a long line of religious leaders when he stated that, in order to be a true believer, one must "tear they eyes out of" his reason. However, we are reasoning animals. It is in our nature to think, to examine, and to question. Therefore, in order to ensure the survival of an idea that is not based on reason, the quest for knowledge, at least in the

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completely subjective in nature; believers "prove" the existence of god or of their faith not by critical examination and the scientific method, but rather by faith. Faith, despite the praised heaped upon it by the religious, is nothing more than the acceptance of an idea without objective evidence or proof; in effect, believers convince themselves that what they want to believe is true. Convinced of this, they seek to place their belief on an intellectual foundation by seeking out certain "proofs" that justify their pre-conceived conclusion.

This is the exact opposite of the scientific method. Making a leap of faith and then re-

Ask–An–Atheist: “What was the pivotal event in your life that ultimately led to your rejection of religion and God?”

I have to say my accidental run in with the story of the bloodlines of Christ published on Nexis Magazine led me to further investigation into the foundations of Christianity. This occurred about ten years ago and I am still studying. After consuming about 30 books I went from Agnostic to total Atheism.

–SUSAN B.

I gradually lost my religious faith as I began to study philosophy in college. I realized the The Truth is a lot harder to come by than opening up the bible.

–DAVID P.

As I am sure many other atheists have experienced, I frequently am asked if some trauma or bad experience made me decide there is no god. The truth is there was absolutely no trauma at all. I liked church. My family is Southern Baptist. My grand-

father, who died before I was born, was a country Baptist preacher, ordained by a "laying on of hands." His brother, my great uncle, was a well-known traveling preacher in Erath and Commanche counties in Texas. My parents were not strict, religious people. We did not pray at dinner unless we had guests who prayed at dinner. We went to church about two to three Sundays a month, on average, but I often went without my parents because I liked the socializing. I sang in the youth choir and traveled with them.

At age 18, like many adolescents, my understanding of the world broadened and I began to ponder "philosophical" issues. I often did this while sitting in church on Sunday, since I really wasn't captivated by our preacher's messages. I began to have doubts about blind acceptance of all the religious stuff.

One Sunday, as one of my buddies whom

I had been drinking with the night before "rededicated" himself to Christ and claimed that god had talked to him, I came to the conclusion that anybody can claim god is talking to them and who could dispute it? I knew god wasn't saying diddly to my friend and I was beyond buying "god speaks in mysterious ways" (said with appropriate condescension). All my life, up to that point, I had looked at religion as truth and looked for evidence to support that truth.

When I switched to the viewpoint that religion was not true and looked for evidence to support that, well, you know where that goes. Making myself willing and ready to accept that my beliefs were not the same as evidence, I rather quickly concluded there is not any verifiable evidence to substantiate the claims made by these people who are trying to tell me how to live my life. I

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METROPLEX ATHEISTS

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AUSTIN COMMANDMENTS



Atheist Community of Austin

The Texas 5th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled the "Ten Commandments" monument may remain on capitol grounds. Thomas Van Orden, a homeless man, sued the state claiming the marker was a government endorsement of Christian values.

EDITORIAL

Why follow the commandments?

It is intellectually dishonest to say that our country was founded on the Mosaic laws of the Ten Commandments, and here is why.

The first three Commandments are in direct opposition to the First Amendment, restricting the way people may worship and what they might say. Our forefathers did not want the government telling its citizens how to pray and worship. Which denomination would they choose?

The fourth and tenth Commandments are both at odds with the capitalist nature of the country, and might be considered "unamerican". Most Americans strive to have better things. Sometimes, in order to keep up with the Jones', we must work every day of the week.

When a family members are most likely to abuse children, why should that child necessarily follow the Fifth Commandment?

Generally, sex between consenting adults behind closed doors should not be an issue with the government.

The Sixth, Eighth, and Nine Commandments are rules of that allow society to operate effectively. If people were allowed to kill, steal, or lie indiscriminately, society would fall into total anarchy. We didn't need religion to figure that out.

Judeo/Christian groups in this country follow one of three lists of the Ten Commandment. The commandments list above correspond to the JKV and are listed below with some of the prescribed punishments.

- 1 *Thou shalt have no other gods before me. [Ex. 22:20 Destroyed]*
- 2 *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.*
- 3 *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. [Lev. 24:16 Death]*
- 4 *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. [Ex. 31:15 Death]*
- 5 *Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. [Ex. 21:17 Death]*
- 6 *Thou shalt not kill.*
- 7 *Thou shalt not commit adultery. [Lev. 20:10 Death]*
- 8 *Thou shalt not steal.*
- 9 *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*
- 10 *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.*

Science – Continued from page 2

area of religious belief, must be replaced by a quest to support and justify one's faith.

To those of this mindset, science is useful only insofar as it seems to prove their faith. Creationism is a particularly interesting phenomenon. Since the time of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, many religionists have spared no expense in attacking his theory. This is despite the fact that evolutionary theory is the cornerstone of modern biology and that nothing makes sense except in view of it.

Creationists often insist that their views

are scientific. Yet their absolutist religious views are manifested in similar absolutist views about creationism and evolution. Never will they consider the possibility that evolution might be true. Never will they try to refute the rationalizations they come up with as defenses against evolution. This illustrates once again the psychological makeup that motivates people of this mindset.

Many believers argue that, because the findings of science are always subject to revision, religion is a superior method of

knowing, since it provides one with "absolute" truth. This is easily refuted. If any one religion is true, it logically follows that all the others are false, since they make different claims about reality. Therefore, no one can claim to possess "absolute" truth.

Moreover, an error made by faulty reasoning can be corrected, but an error made blind faith not only cannot be corrected, it cannot even be admitted.

In summary, religious faith destroys our ability to distinguish truth from falsehood and, as a consequence, good from evil. It should therefore come as no surprise that so many evils have come from religion.

IN REVIEW: *GOD.COM – A DEITY FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM*

John Hattan

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

When I first got the request from the author to review a book for him, I was skeptical. I'd gotten two such requests before. The first book was a 200-page photocopied rant with no direction whatsoever, and the second was an adventure story that ended up being a plea for some weird form of new-agey deism. Hence, I was not overly fond of receiving another vanity-published book to review.

My first impressions, however, were positive. First off, the book's only about 90 pages long. As a person who has proofread other peoples' books, I know how easy it is to fall in love with your own words and "run off at the keyboard" until you've got a 600 page monstrosity with the point so deeply buried that it's difficult to find.

Thankfully, Dr. Henderson has done some serious editing of his own work and managed to prune it down to its essentials. Despite its short length, the book has a lot to say.

The core of the book is, as the title suggests, *GOD.COM*. The author, a staunch atheist, suggests dumping old deity-based religions and replacing them with a new reason-based *GOD.COM* religion. This point, unfortunately, is where I grew cross-eyed. To be frank, lots of folks have tried to explain to me the concept of "free-thought as religion" or "atheism as religion" or the like, but I still don't get it.

To have a religion without belief in the supernatural makes as much sense to me as stamp-collecting without the stamps. I suppose some people can gain some enjoyment from the outer accouterments of religion without believing in a god just like someone might enjoy organizing empty stamp-binders, but it didn't (and still does-

n't) hold any shine for me.

After thinking about the concept a bit further, though, I realized that I'm pretty far from the target audience for this book. While I'd given up the need for religion quite a while back and never felt any kind of nostalgic "pull" to return, there are lots of wishy-washy believers out there who

kicking his habit.

GOD.COM is a god based on reason. She's female because female gods are significantly kinder and gentler than their male counterparts. She rejects the need for faith and myth. She values self-reliance, science, and personal freedom. She requires no prayer and promises no afterlife, good or bad.

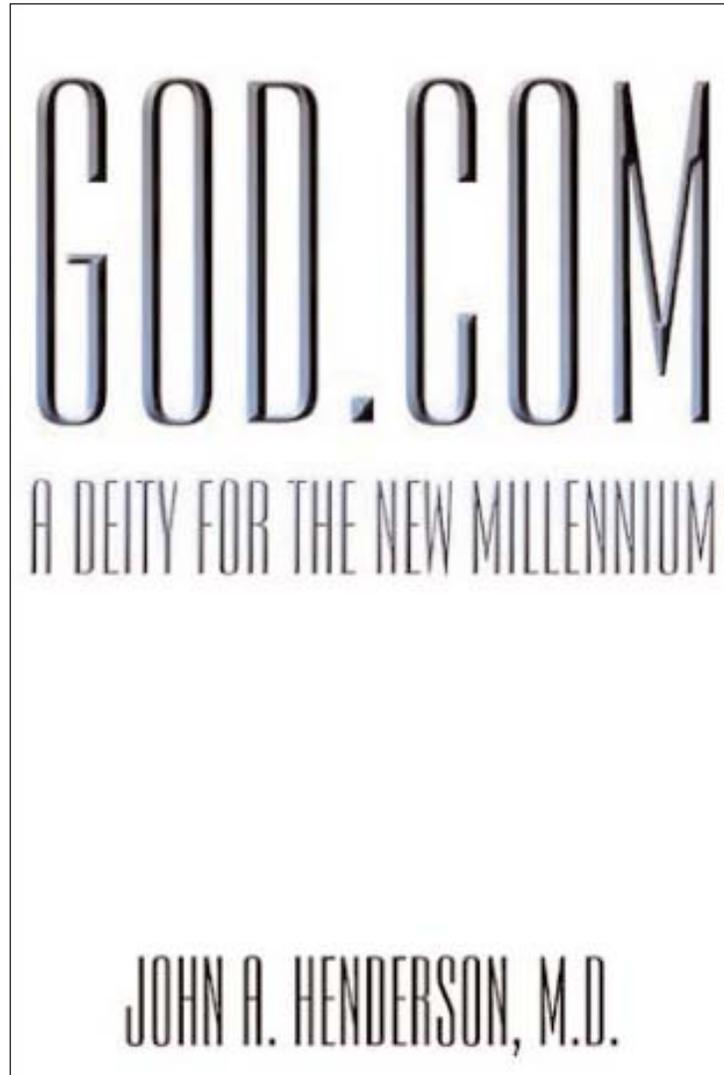
In short, *GOD.COM* is atheism wearing a goddess costume.

The book's divided into very short (1 to 4 page) chapters, each covering a different facet of *GOD.COM*, ranging from her views on myth and superstition to suicide and abortion. Again, there's little that a well-read atheist hasn't already seen, but this book isn't written for well-read atheists (like you and I) but atheists-to-be or atheists-that-don't-realize-they're-atheists-yet.

My only complaint about the content itself is that it's sometimes repetitive. Rather than taking on religion, finding it lacking, and dispensing with it, it continues nipping at religion like an angry Chihuahua for the length of the book. While I've got no problems with religions being torn to shreds by tiny nervous dogs, this could be off-putting to someone looking into a new religion and finding that it consists mainly of reaction to existing religion.

In other words, keep it positive. You don't need to constantly attack the competition if you can successfully establish why your product is superior.

In conclusion, this would be a good gift-book for that wishy-washy Christian, new-age-candle-gazer, or person who's too paralyzed by Pascal's Wager to dump superstition. It proposes a religion based on reason that's an easier step for the baby atheist who's not quite ready to dump something he's held closely for quite some time.



don't really believe anymore but aren't at the point in their lives where they can dump their god-beliefs and religion. Not for the comfortable atheist, this book is intended to be a "stepping stone" for the person unwilling to commit. It proposes a god and a religion for the person who's tired of superstition but is still afraid of the dreaded "A-word".

In short, this book is literary methadone for the religion-addict who needs help

In age of high-tech surveillance, is big brother watching you?

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC NEWS

WASHINGTON – As we begin the 21st century, everything from red-light runners to potential terrorists, from online conversations to bank records can be tracked electronically. Each of us can be profiled - by medical history, by consumer tastes, by travel habits. Does this mean better security, or the end of privacy? asks the article "Watching You" in the November 2003 issue of National Geographic.

Cameras can film you wherever you go, your cell phone can signal exactly where you are, and your identity can be revealed with just a computer and a glimpse of the iris of your eye. Increasingly, ours is a world of ID checks, surveillance cameras, body scans, fingerprint databases, e-mail sifters and cell phone interceptors. Add to that more mundane domestic gadgets like nanny-cams, wireless heart monitors and the EZPass tag that electronically deducts highway tolls from your prepaid account, and you begin to get the feeling that you are under regular electronic surveillance.

National Geographic reports that a surveillance tool may one day reside in every pocket. A number of countries in Europe and Asia are introducing a citizen smart card that would serve as an official national ID. It could hold personal medical history and social security information, and serve as a passport, train pass, toll card, credit and debit card, long-

distance phone card and library card. It could tap into systems that talk to each other, merging the worlds of consumer convenience and citizen surveillance. Imagine the benefits of integrated e-mail, cell phones, online pharmacies and per-



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sonal UPS accounts - and the opportunities for hackers or government observation.

The United States is using electronic

watchdogs such as motion sensors, remote-controlled cameras, night-vision devices and surveillance satellites to police its 6,000-mile border with Mexico. Infrared cameras mounted on elevated platforms, which can spot people two miles away in the dead of night, have proven particularly effective. It used to take hours to scan trucks for illegal cargo such as drugs, weapons or people, by manual inspection. Now backscatter X-ray machines can look through thin surfaces like truck walls to produce detailed images of what lies behind them.

In Great Britain, municipalities began installing closed-circuit television cameras on streets and in parks, transit stations, stadiums and shopping areas in the 1970s and '80s. The number of cameras increased with the rise of attacks by the Irish Republican Army in the 1990s, and today there are estimated to be more than 4 million cameras nationwide, or around one for every 15 people. The average visitor to London is now likely to be captured on video 300 times in a single day - a strange turn of events for the native land of George Orwell, who prophesized just this kind of Big Brother role for the government in his novel "1984." While Orwell saw the danger in totalitarian regimes that don't recognize citizens' rights to privacy, he didn't foresee just how pervasive surveillance would be in free societies, introduced in the name of liberty, safety and security.

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Commandments – Continued from page 1

eral federal officials, including Reps. Tom DeLay and Robert Aderholt have introduced legislation that would nullify the power of federal courts to review cases where governments permit the display of religious slogans and symbols on public property. DeLay says that federal judges who rule against such practices are examples of out-of-control “judicial activism.” Opponents note that the proposals are blatantly unconstitutional, though, and would seriously damage the balance of power between the judiciary and the legislative branches of government.

But is Justice Moore's battle on behalf of “acknowledging God” in the public square really over?

Lower court have splintered over cases which involve depictions of the Ten Commandments. Proponents of displaying the Commandments have argued that it is a right under the First Amendment which guarantees freedom of speech and religious belief. But critics draw a distinction between private monuments to the commandments or other faith-based symbols, and having the government

“acknowledge God.” The latter practice, they say, often conveys a clear government endorsement of a particular religion, and religion in general.

Even so, insisting that there is no clear divide between God and the state, some courts have upheld religious displays in-

volving everything from nativity churches to religious slogans on money or in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the display of the Commandments. Chief Justice William Rhenquist, along with Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence

Thomas, have both opined that plaques or other representations of the Mosaic code “simply reflect(s) the Ten Commandment's role in the development of our legal system.”

Justice Rhenquist, in a case examining a Commandments monument in the town square of Elkhart, Indiana said that “a carving of Moses holding the Ten Com-

mandments, surrounded by representations of other historical legal figures, adorns the frieze on the south wall of our courtroom.”

But Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in the same decision that the first commandment inscribed on the Elkhart monument was “rather hard to square with the proposition that the monument expresses no particular religious preference.”

In the 1980 *STONE v. GRAHAM* case, the high court ruled that a Kentucky statute ordering the display of Ten Commandments posters in public school classrooms clearly ran afoul of the First Amendment, and that the Decalogue was a “pre-eminent” statement of religious belief.

Along with exhausting his legal appeals over the Ten Commandments monument, Moore now faces other obstacles including a hearing slated

for November 12 in front of the Alabama Court of the Judiciary. Moore is charged with violations of judicial ethics for his stubborn refusal to obey the federal order and remove the Ten Commandments monument. Meanwhile, the washing machine-size granite rock remains in a locked storage room in the Judicial Building, its ultimate fate is uncertain.

The Mosaic code “simply reflects the Ten Commandment's role in the development of our legal system.”

William Rhenquist
SUPREME COURT
CHIEF JUSTICE

The first commandment was “rather hard to square with the proposition that the monument expresses no particular religious preference.”

John Paul Stevens
SUPREME COURT JUSTICE



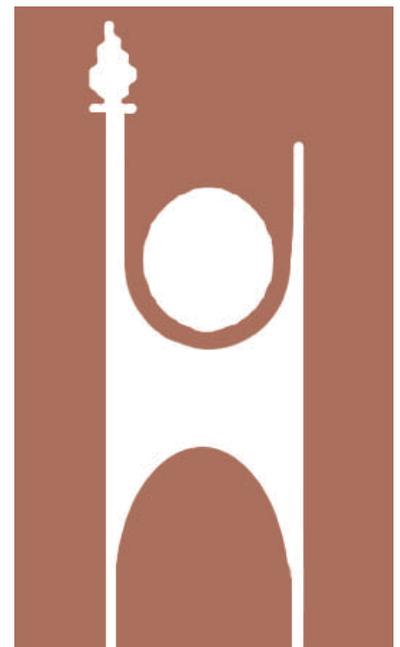
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Atheist Virtues: Charity, Humility & Compassion

Dale McGowan

ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL

Who can resist the impulse to feel all gushy and reflective at this time of year? Fall always gets the ball rolling for me and my family, since we live in Minnesota, a place where planetary realities find full expression. Tilt our part of the planet like so in the summer and we fry through long days in the 90s, then gradually tip us back away from the sun and we can watch the days shrink and the temperatures plummet. I wouldn't be too surprised if Jamaicans were still flat-earthers: you could conceivably disbelieve the spherical earth in the low latitudes. But up here in the north, it's a whirling ball we're on for sure, and in late December it gets to feeling like the atmosphere itself has been pared away, leaving nothing at all between our chapped, upturned faces and the brilliant stars. Awesome, that. Downright humbling.

It makes sense that the Easter resurrection myth found its home in springtime, what with the rising and renewal of life that characterizes that time of year. Nor would I say it's a coincidence that holy days emphasizing family and charity and peace and goodwill are sprinkled through the shortest and latest and coldest days of the year, when all we have is each other and, by golly, we'd better have each other to turn to to make it through. Charity would naturally be born in such a season.

These are also the times it's easiest to see that religion has no monopoly on virtue. Just about everyone succumbs gladly to the best of human impulses at this time of year. The thin veneer of religion is easily stripped away to reveal natural, honest, human virtues of which religion is just one articulation. That's why the "holy days" have so naturally and easily secularized to "holidays" – and that's right where they be-

longed in the first place, these celebrations of human hope and goodness in the midst of sometimes painful realities, in the hands of humans, not in the grip of a single mythic vision. The Christ concept was a cultural afterthought, after all, a single framing of that hope and goodness, not the source.

One of my personal discontents about our movement is its relative inattention to issues of the Good. Open up any atheist or humanist periodical and you'll see one arti-

from the true. But too often we fail to make it clear that the good is also a high value for us. We assume it's obvious.

Turn the coin over and you'll see that most Christians also assume their love of truth is obvious. We know otherwise. So it wouldn't hurt, especially at this time of year, to make our own commitment to the good just as visible to our kids as our commitment to the true. And just like Christians, we must make evident the connection of that value with our beliefs.

As atheist parents, we certainly attend to the good, but we often do a poor job of helping our children see that goodness as a direct expression of our atheist values. I'll take it a step further: not only CAN atheists do and be just as good as Christians, we really ought to do and be far BETTER than Christians. I'll illustrate just two of the traditional pillars of human virtue, charity and humility.

A fairly mainstream reading of the Christian world view could easily endorse an entirely hands-off approach to charity. God is all-just, after all. He will provide for the needy – and if not in this world, in the next. Yet Christians –not all, of course, but many – are out there doing for others as a direct and visible expression of their values. So much so, in fact, that the word "Christian" has found life as a synonym for

"good," as in "He's such a Christian young man," or "Are you being Christian in your dealings with others?" Now you must admit – achieving that kind of lexical coup is a major success for the Christian world view. They've got the whole Western world thinking they invented goodness! The problem, of course, is that a subtext exists, one that kids don't fail to learn: part of being a good Christian is renouncing an interest in mere truth, especially when it seems to run counter to the received mythology.

Is the reverse true for atheists? Do we renounce an interest in the good? Not exact-



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cle after another about the True: disputations of Bible claims, defense of scientific theories, logical dissections of theological arguments. We are naturally obsessed with the True, since that's the principle battleground between theology and atheology. And we fault theists for being so enamored of the alleged goodness of their conclusions that they fail to look closely enough to see whether they are in fact true. Ourselves, well, we typically reverse that: it simply must be better to acknowledge any given truth than to substitute any given fantasy, and we expect the good to follow

ly – we simply frame truth as a non-negotiable highest value.

Again, I'll suggest atheists should be better at living out certain values than Christians. We should be up to our elbows in charitable work, for example, since no one knows better than we do that WE ARE ALL WE HAVE. There is no safety net, no universal justice, no Great Caretaker, no afterlife reward. We have the full responsibility to create a just world and care for the less fortunate because there's no one else to do so. The answer to the question of how on Earth an atheist parent might instill values in his or her children is plain: the human moral mandate is, if anything, clearer in the atheist world view than in the Christian. So why are Christians doing most of the charity?

They're not.

Frankly I was shocked to learn that myself. When I first sat down to write this essay, it was going to be a stern exhortation to the atheist community to engage in sober self-examination leading to greater volunteerism and social service. An hour's research, however, showed that the idea of Christians doing most of the charitable work in our communities is a myth. They get credit for it, though, because they do a better job of tying it to their creed. But as it turns out, 82% of volunteerism by

churchgoers falls under the rubric of "church maintenance" activities – volunteerism entirely within, and for the benefit of, the church building and community. As a result of this "siphoning" of volunteer energy for the care and feeding of churches themselves, most of the volunteering that happens out in the community – from AIDS hospices to food shelves to international aid workers to those feeding the hungry and housing the homeless and caring for the elderly – most of that comes from the category of "nonreligious" volunteers – not all strictly atheists, of course, but the church monopoly on community service is clearly debunked.*

Our shortcoming, then, is not in doing good, but in making it clear that charity is not a stretch by any means – it's a logical outgrowth of our atheist world view.

A similar argument can be made for humility. No one should be more humble than an atheist, and no one should be more arrogant than a Christian. They are, after all, the center of God's creation, made in His image, repositories of the divine spark, beneficiaries of the sacrifice of His Son, and recipients of His confident Scriptural certainties. (Anybody getting itchy from the Capitals??) Atheists, on the other hand, should know better than anyone that we are little more than "trousered apes." Oh

sure, we've done some remarkable things with the three advantages we have (language, bipedalism, and an expanded neocortex that made the first two possible), but we should be kept continually humble by an awareness of our origins, of our incomprehensible punyness in space and time, and of the even greater vastness of our ignorance. Humility is the natural inheritance of atheism. Christians have also named humility as a virtue in their canon. Sure, many of them fail to achieve it, but given their arrogant theology, it's amazing they even try. And though I know many gentle and humble atheists, I also know several who are among the most spectacularly arrogant beasts I've ever encountered. I know that stems partially from enduring the ignorant, self-satisfied smiles of theism, but arrogance should really be near impossible for a truly reflective atheist.

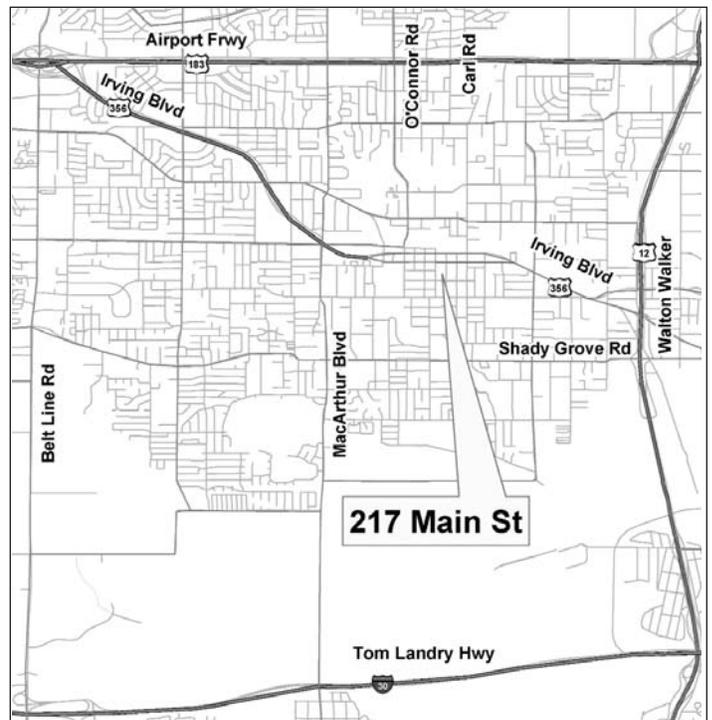
As atheist parents, then, most of us are already instilling these values in our children, teaching them to do good and to be good. But too many of us say we do this in spite of our atheism. Far better to tell the truth: the values flow directly from our atheism. It is our atheism that provides the deepest and most profound reasons for charity, humility, compassion, benevolence, and every other human virtue.

Happy holidays.

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

COME
JOIN
US

EVERY THIRD SUNDAY
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM



An Atheist's Christmas

Kim L. Cole

GUEST COLUMNIST

Okay, stop. Right now. This goes for everybody, theists and non. Read no further until you stop laughing, raging, staring incredulously, or whatever reaction is it you're having to the idea of atheists celebrating Christmas. Just quit. When you're ready to approach the subject with an open mind, please continue on.

In the beginning (to copy a well-coined phrase), there were people of many religious bents. Some were what we call pagans, some were Druids. Others followed the Egyptian pantheon of gods, or the Roman, or the Greek (with what small differences there were between those two). There were many ancient gods and religions. And most, if not all, had some sort of winter celebration.

Then came the Christians (we'll not worry about how at this particular time). At first they were few and persecuted. Then they began to grow, and eventually rulers of nations converted. Sooner or later, it followed that they were in power.

Actually, let me stop and clarify something very quickly. This is an extremely simplistic version of history only for the purposes of this discussion. So please, you purists, don't send me letters full of corrections. I know that I've probably got my time line off, and that I'm skipping a lot. It just doesn't matter

much right now. Okay, we can go on.

The Christians wanted to convert people, and they thought one of the easiest ways to help do that was to make their holiday celebrations on the same days and/or times as the more popular ancient religions. So they



Christmas (and Hanukah, Kwanza, Ramadan, Solstice, and any other religious winter observances I'm forgetting), we have Frosty the Snowman, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Hanky the Christmas Poo (for you South Park fans), Ebenezer Scrooge, and the famous Santa Claus. Okay, I know Santa started out as St. Nick (among many others from various countries), which is obviously a religious thing. But is anybody going to argue that the fat guy wearing a red suit, using flying reindeer, and hanging around with elves still has religious significance?

The point to all of this (and yes, there is a point) is that the celebration of Christmas has grown far beyond its original roots, varied as they are. It now has as many secular aspects as it has religious. It has become a part of American culture and is represented as much by the Garfield and Flintstone's Christmas specials shown yearly as it is by the nativity. It's a Wonderful Life may have religious themes (certainly, with the angel), but is A Christmas Story any less enjoyable because of its lack of them?

Some people choose to embrace only the spiritual aspects of Christmas, eschewing the materialism and secu-

larism that American culture has dealt with the holiday. Why, then, would it be any stranger for some of us to do the opposite? I eschew the spiritual aspect of the holiday, but embrace the secular aspects which are

larism that American culture has dealt with the holiday. Why, then, would it be any stranger for some of us to do the opposite? I eschew the spiritual aspect of the holiday, but embrace the secular aspects which are

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

all around us.

My home features a Christmas tree, decked with colored lights, sparkling balls, and topped with a bow and bells. The Christmas tree was a "borrowed" pagan winter tradition, and many cultures and people over time have believed the evergreen tree was a symbol of life and/or rebirth. Christians adopted the use. Now it is viewed as a fairly innocuous symbol of winter celebration which should not bother even the most adamant church-and-state separatists.

I give gifts to my friends and loved ones on Christmas. This tradition can be traced back at least as far as the worship of the Roman gods and was a winter tradition for them. It is quite probable that even earlier cultures celebrated in a similar manner. Christians adopted it as well, many citing the biblical references of gifts given to the Christ-child by the three magi. Now, however, it can just as easily be seen as merely a way to show your love or fondness for someone close to you. A way to say, "I've been thinking about you, and how you brighten my life."

I greatly enjoy Christmas music, al-

though I prefer an instrumental version to sung. Not only does that preclude any religious wording, but it allows me to appreciate the pure beauty of the music, and to see what thoughts and feelings it wakes in me. The Carol of the Bells, for instance, is an amazing song no matter what your beliefs.

I know that some of you are going to object to my use of the word "Christmas." The basis of these objections will be the fact that the first six letters of the word spell Christ. Okay, I'll agree with that. They do. I have two points to make, though.

First, Christ is not a name. It's a title. The name is Jesus, and Christ was meant to identify him as the messiah. Please note that I am not commenting on the truth of the Jesus story at this time. Neither am I commenting on whether he filled the Jewish idea of a messiah.

My second point is: who cares? Do we really have so little to think about that we care what people call the winter holiday they celebrate? Would it really make that big a difference to anyone if I behaved exactly the same, but called it Winter Solstice? Or if I called it, "Kimmy's Atheists

in Winter Day"? Besides, have you ever tried to find "Happy Solstice" wrapping paper? All I'm saying is that we need a little perspective here. A name is just a name, after all.

Winter celebrations are as old as mankind itself. Call it what you will, many traditions were built on older traditions, back to the first man who celebrated the changing season. I am not belittling the religious observances which take place this time of year. People of real faith should celebrate their religious holidays in whatever manner they see fit, and I respect that.

But do not try to take from me the right to do the same. Let me celebrate the days and emotions I choose to celebrate. Do not tell me that I cannot use the same name, the same day, the same traditions, or the same spirit of happiness and goodwill. Let every man, woman, and child enjoy the hope and love that abound this type of year in any way they wish. Including me with my atheist's Christmas.

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Order your Atheist Textbook Covers for School

Atheism may be defined as the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a lifestyle and ethical outlook verifiable by experience and the scientific method, independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority and creeds.

Madelyn Murray O'Hair

The study of theology, as it stands in the Christian churches, is the study of nothing, it is founded on nothing, it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authority; it can discover nothing, and it admits of no conclusion.

Thomas Paine, American Patriot

In those parts of the world where it aims and so far have prevailed, miracles have ceased, but in the paths of it are still barbarous and ignorant, savages are still in vogue.

Ethan Allen, American Patriot

American Atheists, Inc.
www.atheists.org

An honest god is the noblest work of man.

Revised by atheist, 1986 Century Order

Heaven do not believe otherwise than that He, the infinite Father, expects or requires no worship or praise from us, but that He is reverently above it.

Benjamin Franklin, Founding Father

I believe in an America where religious intolerance will thus end... where every man has the same rights as all others before the church of his choice.

John F. Kennedy, U.S. President, 1961-1963

The Bible is not my Book and Christianity is not my religion. I could never give assent to the long complicated statements of Christian dogma.

Abraham Lincoln, U.S. President, 1861-1865

We cannot permit any inquisition either within or without the law to apply any religious test to the holding of office. The mind of America must be forever free.

Calvin Coolidge, U.S. President, 1923-1933

The United States have administered upon a great and noble experiment, which is believed to be hazardous in the absence of all previous precedent that of total separation of church and state... religious establishments by law with a single will. The consequence is that those who are not permitted to worship his own god, are not... Such is the great experiment which is tried, our system of free government would be in perfect without.

John Tyler, U.S. President, 1841-1845

Shake off all the fears of servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat and call on her tribunal for every fact, every opinion. O with boldness even the existence of a God, because, if he be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear.

Thomas Jefferson, U.S. President, 1801-1809

As I understand the Christian religion, it was, and is, a rebellion. Such has happened in the case of the Jews, and in the case of the Christians, that the most bloody religion that ever existed?

John Adams, U.S. President, 1797-1801

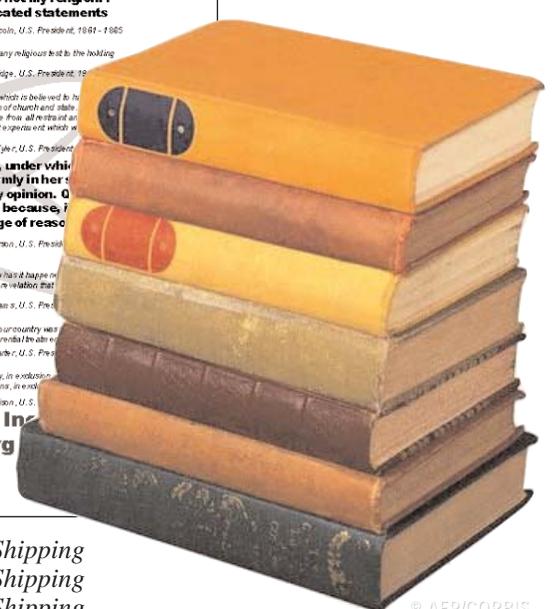
He is not in favor of the government making a preference in so far as our country was... that two particular religions both would have an equal share in the establishment.

James Madison, U.S. President, 1801-1809

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

James Madison, U.S. President, 1801-1809

American Atheists, Inc.
www.atheists.org



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IN REVIEW: *VICTORY CHURCH HELL HOUSE*

Tanner Boshane

CONTRIBUTOR TO THE ATHEIST VOICE

We just got back from our first Hell House, set up by Victory Church in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

We entered, and were sat in a small theater where “the devil” on a big screen told us how happy he was at his work on the 9/11 attacks, and how he caused the Colorado school shootings. I found this really repulsive. Demons led us into a living room, where a demon played the piano. He explained that in the bedroom beside us, little Ashley's stepfather was making her a woman. A slight giggle in the audience (obviously a Christian way of saying sex). The dad emerges, says crude things about telling her to “wipe up”, all the while she is crying in the room to the side. The mother comes into the living room, questions if he raped her, and a fight ensues. The mother picks up the phone, is pushed over, and hits her head...weak slow motion acting. The demon tells the man to stab her. The man sits on the piano bench, questioning what to do next. After the demon convinces him to kill Ashley, he stands up, and is shot. Ashley emerges with the gun, then runs into her bedroom. The demon leads us to follow her.

The second room was a rather well decorated school gymnasium. A school dance

has strobe lights, a DJ, people doing ecstasy (which doesn't really go on at school dances as far as I know, but we'll let them have their fun). A guy does drugs, and shoots everyone in the gym, including the girl at the concession stand. All the while demons dance around him to the music. Really quite funny.

The next room is a gay guy being bullied and pushed around, being called a faggot. We laugh at some of the lame jokes made about him, and the rather pushy and rude demons say “Think this is funny? It's time to go to class.” We are pushed into a classroom to the side, where the teacher calls up the gay guy. He breaks down as the students continue to call him gay. Like every other scene (getting tiresome), he shoots everyone, then himself. The demon is excited.

We are then brought to a small bedroom, where a girl is online (internet hell..bah) chatting with a guy. She verbally tells him to come over...because apparently we all like to say what we type. The guy comes over, and we see him on the other side of the door. He is probably about 60. She tells him he sounds a little old, but he says “I'm not a freak... I'm normal... I'm not a freak... I'm normal...” Really bad acting. He begins the “little pig little pig let me in” spiel, and breaks down the door. Inside, he kills the girl, THEN rapes her. A little variation.

Next we are brought to the hospital. Girl is having an abortion, but won't stop bleeding. Really quite nasty, TONS of blood...TONS! I mean it honestly looked like they turned a hose on full blast in her. Plus it was skin! We saw...alot. All of the bed, the girl screams in pain...then dies.

We are then brought to HELL! Whoop! Shoved into coffins for two, I was put with my girlfriend. We were then shook around (which I had never heard of), and words were shouted at us like: abortion, murder, death, hell, slaughter, rape, all that good stuff. We were brought out, to heaven, and explained that we have a choice. We could go upstairs to the “cold steel door with the red exit sign leading to the man's world.”, or go past the curtain and pray. We went for the gusto and went into the prayer room, which was no more then what looked like a funeral chapel, with sheets to sign up for the church itself, Victory.

We stepped out, back into hell, obviously upsetting the somewhat girl man-demon who was running the tour we interrupted. We then went back to working for “the man”...destined to go to hell. The whole thing ANGERED me more then anything. HOW can they do this? What if my wife was killed in the trade center buildings? What if my brother was the victim of a school shooting. It baffles me that they can get away with this.

Eye on our Legislator and religion

TEXAS CONGRESS

- HR 105** Expressing support for Chief Justice Roy Moore of Alabama relating to his display of religious principles on government property.
- HB 789** Exemption of tax-exempt property of religious organizations from municipal platting requirements
- HB 793** The observance of one minute of silence during the school day and to pledges of allegiance to the United States and Texas flags in public schools

UNITED STATES CONGRESS

- HCR 150** Expressing the sense of Congress regarding the protection of religious sites and the freedom of access and worship.

- HJR 39** Proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States relative to references to God in the Pledge of Allegiance and on United States coins and currency.
- HJR 46** Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States restoring religious freedom.
- HR 99** To designate *God Bless America* as the national hymn of the United States.
- HR 1547** “Religious Freedom Restoration Act”
- HR 2045** “Ten Commandments Defense Act of 2003”
- HR 3190** “Safeguarding Our Religious Liberties Act”
- SJR 7** Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States relative to the reference to God in the Pledge of Allegiance and on United States currency.
- SR 71** Expressing support for the Pledge of Allegiance.

God and the 'Tooth Fairy'

Shelly Hattan

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

I am an atheist. I have been an atheist since I was about 5 years old. That was around the time that I lost my first tooth and received a visit from the tooth fairy, which really freaked me out. A little flying thing would come into my room at night and take my tooth and leave money. The questions started: How does it get into my room, Mom? Why does it want MY tooth? Will I feel it take the tooth? Does it glow? Mom realized that I wasn't buying the whole tooth fairy thing and told me it was just pretend. Somehow that made me feel a lot better to know that mom was taking my tooth and giving me money.

Being somewhat inquisitive, the next day I asked her, with tears streaming down my face, if other things were pretend, like the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus, or God. My mother said that the Bunny and Santa were pretend, but that God was real. That was probably the time when I first started doubting.

Now that I am older, I have done a lot of searching. For a long time I was afraid to not believe, even though deep down I didn't. Recently though, I have finally really

looked at my own values and some of the values that the Bible puts forth and have found them incompatible, particularly for women.

I feel that self-esteem is very important for young women. I have noticed that women tend to lose their self-esteem when they become teen-agers. This carries on into adulthood and is very destructive. I think part of the root cause in America is Christianity. The Bible treats women as secondary. We are to obey our husbands.

*The head of every women is the man
(1 Cor. 11:3)*

What is really scary about this is that this verse is being used even to this day. The Southern Baptist Convention met in Salt Lake City, Utah this year and this verse was so important, the members of the convention used it to uphold the notion that women must obey their husbands.

I don't know about you, but I certainly feel that I have a good head on my shoulders. I am smart and can do things on my

own. Why do I need to have a husband tell me every thing to do?

I am married. I have been for seven years. We have a relationship built upon mutual acceptance. There are things that he does better than I do. Likewise, there are things that I am better at. We encourage each other to do things that we wouldn't accomplish otherwise. I do not allow a Bible or any other set of written-down rules to dictate how I should live my married life.

Which brings me to the question I hear the most when people find out that I am an atheist - "what is your moral base?" Well, I must ask the same question back - "what is YOUR moral base?" If you state the Bible, then you really need to follow ALL of it and not just the parts with which you agree. I know right from wrong because my parents taught me to use my head. Christians do not need to consult the bible every time they need to make a moral decision. They do it through deliberate thought, just like me.

I am happier now that god has gone the way of the tooth fairy.



*we don't need
gods
anymore*

Humanist military veterans get final recognition

AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

The U.S. military will now allow Humanist military veterans to display the Humanist emblem on their tombstones after persistent lobbying by the American Humanist Association and several of its military veteran members. "Although it's unfortunate that it took the military establishment so long to respect the wishes of its own veterans, it's nonetheless very gratifying to see this happen," said AHA executive director Tony Hileman.

Humanist military veterans enlisted the aid of the AHA to push the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to recognize the Humanist logo as a "legitimate emblem of belief" on military headstones. After more than

two years of lobbying, the federal agency responded affirmatively and formalized that response in an official letter received.

According to David Schettler, Director of Memorial Programs Service at Veterans Affairs, "the emblem will be added to NCA's official list of authorized emblems of belief." And "the emblem will be included in the next revision of the 40-1330 application for a government headstone or marker."

"The agency's decision should be a reminder that there are indeed atheists, Humanists, and others in foxholes," continued Hileman. "There are clearly many veterans who want to be remembered in death as the proud Humanists they were in life."

Pledge – Continued from page 1

"This case gives the Supreme Court an opportunity to remind all Americans of the importance of freedom of conscience," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "This is the most controversial religion-in-schools case since the school prayer decisions of the early 1960s.

"No one should feel coerced to take part in a religious exercise to express patriotism," continued Lynn. "A country founded on religious freedom should not be afraid to recognize that love of God and love of country are not the same for some people. Requiring a daily religious loyalty test for school children is simply wrong."

Lynn noted that the Pledge of Allegiance was originally secular. Written in 1892 by a Baptist minister, the Pledge was recited for several decades without any religious references. Congress added the phrase "under God" to the Pledge in 1954 in response to fears of Communism.

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

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

Humanist Church of N. TX:

What: All the things you want in a church, without the gods.

Date: Third Saturday of the month

Time: 11:30 a.m.

Place: Denton Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Hall

In fidel's Bash:

What: Winter Solstice Party

Date: December 21st

Time: TBA

Place: Dick Hogan's Party Barn
Weatherford, TX

J. Gilligan's:

What: "My dinner with Atheists," social time with a bunch of heathens.

Date: Every Wednesday

Time: 6:30 PM - 9:00 PM

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

MARG:

What: The Metroplex Atheists Reading

Group discusses selected books.

For the latest book, visit:

www.metroplexatheists.org/read/

Date: Third Sunday of the month

Time: After the regular meeting

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

UPCOMING EVENT

American Atheists:

What: 30th annual convention

Date: April 9th - 11th

Time: TBA

Place: San Diego, CA; For more information visit:
www.atheists.org/convention/

Do you have a special event?

Submit it to:

editor@metroplexatheists.org

Ask – Continued from page 3

didn't decide I was unsure, I decided there was no god. That was my last trip to church except for weddings and funerals. Obviously, the key was discovering critical thinking, what creationists call "scientific" thinking.

–CLARK V.

During my first week in law school I met my second atheist, my first bi-sexual, my first lesbian, and my first Shiite Muslim. It was a lot to take in. I, the recently born-again Christian didn't know how to take it. I liked these people and I REALLY hated that they were all going to Hell. They were my roommates, my classmates, my study buddies. I needed to learn how to live with them.

I looked where I had learned was the best place to look for how to do that. I read my Bible every night before I went to bed and arranged things so that I could read it all day on Sundays.

About a year later, my roommates had changed, but the others had become my friends and I'd learned that my Shiite friend believed just as firmly in Allah as I did in

God. She had shared religious experiences with me and my atheist friend had shared her natural experiences with me. I began to feel in my heart that maybe everyone was right. That God by any other name was still a god. So, I tried praying to Allah, but He didn't answer. I decided I couldn't hear him because I had nothing invested in him. I tried praying to Buddha. He didn't answer either. I decided to go outside of the box, to something that might mean something to me and prayed to Goddess. I thought I heard an answer when I felt empowered. I prayed to Goddess for several months before I realized that the "answers" I was hearing came from me and my own desire to feel like a powerful woman.

In that moment, I realized that no one was there. No one ever had been, and I felt empty and more alone than I have ever been in my entire life. But I did not go back. I couldn't once I knew the truth. Life is different now, harder, with no fairy tale to count on. But I wouldn't go back even if I could, because I would rather live with a sad truth than with a happy lie.

–DANA S.

I was about ten years old, lying in bed. I was worried if I was going to be punished if I didn't really believe and if I should just believe out of fear. Then I realized that any god would know that I was faking it, so if there really was a god I was doomed either way. And any god that would doom a ten year-old kid for questioning wasn't worth worship.

I didn't consider myself an atheist until several years later, but I do remember that being a turning point in my theology.

–JOHN H.

As a child my mother made me go weekly to Sunday school and I often wondered about the truth in the stories we were told in the weekly lessons about various miracles and so forth.

As a result of my perfect attendance I received a bible as a reward. I began to read it and thus began asking questions my mother could not answer. Among other things, why in the commandments, god says he will punish people three or four generations down the line for the sins of their grandparents and great grandparents. Not very rational, even to an eight year old.

–BILL H.

November 2003

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

December 2003

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30	1	2	3 J. Gilligan's	4	5	6
7	8	9	10 J. Gilligan's	11	12	13
14	15	16 Atheist Meetup	17 J. Gilligan's	18	19	20 Humanist
21 Infidel's Bash	22 <i>Winter Solstice</i>	23	24 J. Gilligan's	25 <i>Christmas</i>	26	27
28	29	30	31 <i>New Year's Eve</i>			

January 2004

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

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

For more information, please visit our website: www.metroplexatheists.org

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

The Atheist Voice Editor: editor@metroplexatheists.org

THE ATHEIST VOICE
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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?