

THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS
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AA files amicus brief in pledge of allegiance case

AMERICAN ATHEIST

The nation's oldest active Atheist civil rights group today filed an Amicus ("Friend of the Court") Brief in the historic Newdow case currently under review by the U.S. Supreme Court. The original suit, filed by California Atheist Michael Newdow, challenges the constitutionality of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

That religious terminology was not part of the original Pledge, but was inserted by an Act of Congress in 1954. Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists said that in doing so, Congress discriminated against millions of patriotic American citizens who did not and do not believe in any deity, and cannot swear such a religious oath.

"This divisive legislation split our nation along religious lines, and put the

Continued on page 3



Christian pilot scares passengers with religious message

AMERICAN ATHEIST

An Atheist civil rights group said that it is urging the management of American Airlines to implement and enforce guidelines concerning religious harassment following reports that one of its pilots urged Christian passengers to preach their faith while on an L.A. to New York flight Friday afternoon.

The alleged incident took place on Flight 34 when the pilot used the plane's public address system and asked any passengers on board to "raise their hand if they were Christians." He then reportedly informed passengers that "everyone who doesn't have their hand raised is crazy... Well, you

have a choice: You can make this trip worthwhile, or you can sit back, read a book and watch the movie."

Flight attendants reportedly became concerned and contacted ground control about the pilot's behavior, said a passenger.

American Atheists president Ellen Johnson said that this latest report is another example of "inappropriate" religious proselytizing. She called upon Gerard J. Arpey, CEO of the airlines parent company, AMR, to make sure a similar incident did not happen again and institute guidelines against such behavior.

"No passenger of customer should be made to feel unwelcome or harassed because of their religious beliefs, or the lack

of them," Johnson said. "These passengers were a 'captive audience.' No passenger or customer of any airline should ever have to worry that they will be verbally abused by airline employees." She added "Up to now it has been the airline employees who have had to worry about threatening behavior from passengers. In this case, we have an airline employee abusing the passengers."

"What's next? Interrogating passengers about their politics or sexual orientation?"

Johnson said that her organization is urging its membership to contact AMR. "How would fundamentalist Christians like it if a

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CONGRESSIONAL INDECENCY

Congress is patting itself on the back after passing legislation last week that expands the power of the Federal Communications Commission to crack down on broadcasters with heavy new \$500,000 fines. Most politicians were all too eager to appease those demanding that Congress “do something” about racy Super Bowl shows and distasteful radio hosts, especially in an election year. It is clear that most members of Congress gave little thought to the legality or wisdom of the bill, caring only that they be seen as defenders of all things decent.

In doing so, Congress ignored a fundamental truth: government control over radio and television broadcasts is incompatible with a free society. FCC control of broadcast content, whether through licensing, regulations, or fines, is naked censorship that is utterly at odds with the plain words of the First Amendment. It could not be any clearer: “Congress shall make no law.”

The censors from both political parties argue that because the broadcast spectrum is publicly owned, the public has a right to control the content. But “public” ownership really means government ownership. And government ownership means the current gang of bureaucrats in power gets to decide what is heard and seen. Airwaves are far too precious to be owned or controlled by government- like other scarce and valuable natural resources, airwaves

should be controlled by market forces. One mistake- nationalizing the airwaves- does not justify another. We should not violate the First Amendment today because of the sins of the past.



Ron Paul, M.D.
REP. TEXAS 14TH
CONGRESSIONAL
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www.house.gov/paul

There’s nothing new about this latest congressional attack on expression. The political right wing has always embraced censorship, believing that government can foster and protect moral values through strict regulation of speech. But this curious attitude conflicts with the central tenet of conservatism, namely a healthy mistrust of government. Why do conservatives feel compelled to have a federal nanny state protect their children from indecency? Why do conservatives, who once questioned and resisted the growing involvement of government in our lives, now trust FCC bureaucrats to determine moral standards? Conservatives should know that a decent society is rooted in strong families, churches, and civic institutions, not government control of broadcasting.

The political left is no better when it comes to free speech. The left may be more permissive toward lurid or obscene material, but it has zero tolerance for political, religious, and social commentary that falls outside the bounds of rigid political correctness doctrines it created. Liberals are happy to restrict so-called commercial speech; happy to jail those who commit phony hate crimes merely by speaking

their minds; and happy to impose speech codes on college campuses.

Conservatives must understand that the powers they grant the FCC today may one day be used against them. It is not hard to imagine a future where criticism of abortion is deemed hate speech against women, or criticism of affirmative action considered an unlawful attack on minorities. It is not hard to imagine President Hillary Clinton ordering the FCC to shut down Rush Limbaugh for using the term “feminazi.” Already a petition has been filed with the Justice department to investigate The Passion of the Christ for possible hate crimes against those who dislike the film’s theology! Big-government conservatives will learn that heavy-handed federal control of speech is far more likely to result in a rigidly secular, politically-correct society than a moral society imbued with Christian virtue.

The First Amendment is worthless if it does not protect unpopular, controversial expression. It is precisely when the sensibilities of many Americans are offended that the First Amendment is needed most. Many of our cherished religious, political, and legal traditions are rooted in once-radical ideas. It’s a short step from regulating words and images to regulating thoughts and ideas.

Ultimately, broadcasters air indecent material only if the market demands it. Congress cannot raise the moral bearing of the American people by edict, but it can destroy liberty in the process. When it comes to decency, the American people should stop looking to government and start looking at themselves.

Representative Paul was one of twenty-two representatives to vote against the “Broadcast Indecency Act of 2004”.

Mr. Paul serves on three Congressional committees. He serves on the Committee on International Relations, the Committee on Financial Services, and the Joint Economic Committee. Each of the House committees are divided into subcommittees. Rep. Paul serves on several subcommittees. On the Financial Services committee, he serves as vice-chairman of the Oversight and Investigations subcommittee. He is also a member of the Domestic Monetary Policy, Technology, and Economic Growth

subcommittee. On the International Relations committee, he serves on the Western Hemisphere subcommittee and the subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific.

Mr. Paul serves the 14th Congressional District of Texas, which stretches from the Gulf Coast south of Houston almost to Corpus Christi; north through Victoria and west close to San Antonio; extending north to Hays county near Austin. From Hays county, the District stretches east to Fayette and Colorado counties, south through Wharton county, and back to the Gulf through the lower half of Brazoria county.

Pledge – From page 1

government in the unconstitutional position of promoting religious belief,” said Johnson.

The Amicus brief begins with a frank declaration concerning Atheism authored by the founder of American Atheists, the late Madalyn Murray O’Hair. Her case, *MURRAY v. CURLETT*, was one of two combined case pivotal in removing mandatory unison prayer and Bible verse recitation from the public schools in 1963.

The brief argues that the Drafters of the Bill of Rights sought to separate government from religion; that Atheists are included in the protections offered by the First Amendment; and that the intent of the 1954 Act of Congress was to “Denigrate and Dispar-

age” Atheists as part of a political strategy to identify Atheism with “Godless Communism.”

“This is both a First Amendment issue and a civil rights issue for millions of Atheists, Free-thinkers and other non-believer who reject religious creeds and rituals,” said Johnson. “This is not just about ‘religious liberty,’ but freedom FROM government promoted religion as well.”

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, added that a favorable outcome for Michael Newdow would be “a victory for all Americans whether they embrace religion or not.”

“Religious belief or the lack of it is not and should not be a litmus test for American patriotism or citizenship,” said Silverman.

“This is not just about ‘religious liberty,’ but freedom FROM government promoted religion as well.”

Ellen Johnson

AMERICAN ATHEIST PRESIDENT

Pilot – From page 1

pilot went on the plane’s PA system and starting insulting or challenging their religious beliefs?”

“We don’t want to see people fired, or have some law passed. But we think that major corporations, and especially airlines which have been receiving public subsidies after the 911 incident, should be working hard to do what they do best, which is provide goods and services, and not proselytize customers.”

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that religious proselytizing on the job is becoming a problem for employees and members of the public. “We’re hearing more stories where religious workers get carried away preaching to fellow employees, where managers and owners push religion in the workplace. The American Airlines incident, if true, is just the latest example of inappropriate religious recruiting.”

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The Consolations of Philosophy

Dale McGowan

ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL

“Superstition sets the whole world in flames; philosophy quenches them.” - Voltaire

How are you doing with Death?

Forgive me for asking. But since you are reading this, I assume that you've set aside the consolations of theology – and that you're asking your children to do the same. But I'm frequently surprised to see disbelievers of all stripes merrily addressing the epistemological questions of how and what we know without acknowledging the gaping existential questions that are, after all, the real reasons religion was born and persists. We are, each of us in turn, going to die. Most likely our consciousness will vanish into nothingness. We live a very short while, then are dead forever.

So how are you doing with that? And if the answer is “not too well,” how are you going to help your kids resist the temptations of the heavenly hoax?

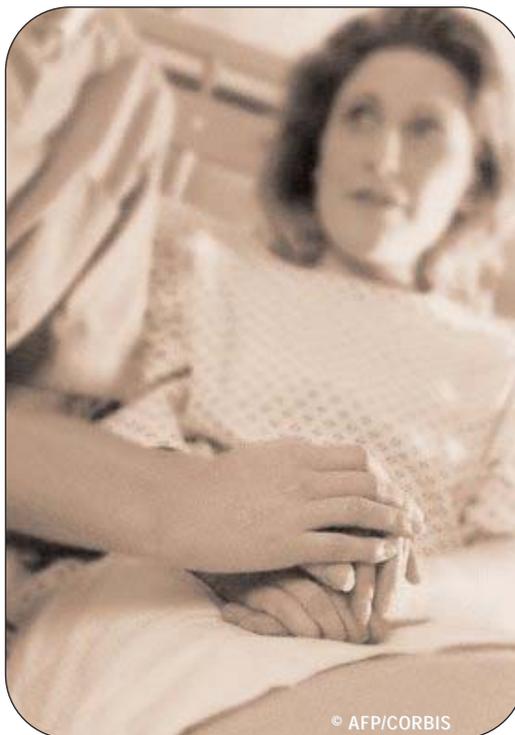
What does it really mean to cease to exist? I can't imagine it myself. It is literally beyond our ability to form a conscious notion of our own utter nonexistence. Hence the alternative so many choose: deny it. We don't really die after all: we ascend to a higher reality.

It works! Try it. It'll make you feel ever so much better. And you won't find out you're mistaken until...well, shoot, you'll never find out!

So then...what kind of fools ARE we?!

Well, no greater fools than Thomas Huxley, anyway. After the death of his beloved four-year old son, the 19th century biologist, agnostic, and champion of natural selection Thomas Henry Huxley asked himself much the same question in a letter to the Reverend Canon Kingsley. Kingsley had urged Huxley to renounce his agnosticism in the face of his loss, and to embrace the consolations of faith. Huxley replied with moving candor in a letter that many consider the single greatest and most profoundly moving testament to intellectual integrity ever conceived: “My convictions, positive and negative, on all

the matters of which you speak, are of long and slow growth and are firmly rooted. But the great blow which fell upon me seemed to stir them to their foundation, and had I lived a couple of centuries earlier I could have fancied a devil scoffing at me and them, and asking me what profit it was to have stripped myself of the hopes and consolations of the mass of mankind? To which my only reply was and is, Oh devil! truth is better than much



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profit. I have searched over the grounds of my belief, and if wife and child and name and fame were all to be lost to me one after the other as the penalty, still I will not lie.”

Huxley is among my great intellectual heroes. But even Huxley, turning from false consolations in the midst of his grief, offered little in the way of true compensation beyond a picture of breathtaking intellectual courage. Yes, I want to reject the false consolations of theology – but might there be a resource for TRUE consolation?

Yes indeed. They are the consolations of philosophy.

The secularization of the West that began in earnest five hundred years ago has pro-

ceeded at light speed along intellectual paths, replacing superstitious conjecture with empiricism and reason. But the development of naturalistic moral and conceptual frameworks to replace supernatural ones has taken place not in the bright light of scientific inquiry but in the quiet, reflective works of the moral and existential philosophers. It is to these works we can turn for what is literally “true consolation.”

For example: yes, we do die, for real and for good, notes the Greek philosopher Epicurus (third century BCE), but our fear of death is partly a reflection of our failure to truly grasp nonexistence. Creatures of consciousness, we can only conceive it as “me-floating-in-darkness-forever,” a positively horrific notion. The key, Epicurus suggests, is to fully realize that death is the END of experience. One can only experience life, up to its final moment, so he asks: “If I am, death is not. If death is, I am not. Why should I fear something I will never experience?”

Sufficient meditation on that simple insight can produce some real consolation – and as parents, we are provided one more small way to help our children deal with death without immersing them in myths that we can only hope they will one day set aside.

Of similar conceptual help is Epicurus' “symmetry argument,” which says that anyone who fears death should consider the expanse of time before he was born. The 'past infinity' of nonexistence before one's birth is identical to the 'future infinity' of nonexistence after death. 'You' have already been there, in other words, though that is precisely the wrong way to phrase it. We don't generally consider not having existed for an eternity before our births to be a terrible thing, so we shouldn't think of not existing for an eternity after our deaths as a terrible thing. There is literally no difference in the two other than our ability to contemplate and anticipate the future.

Though Richard Dawkins probably wouldn't call himself a philosopher, he has offered similar insights that can combine with the “two eternities” idea to produce an explosion of awe in the reflective per-

son. Dawkins notes that for every person who has existed, trillions of potential but unrealized genetic combinations represent “people” who never had the chance to exist. But you and I, in all our ordinariness, beat the odds. We rose out of potentiality into actuality. By a roll of the dice, our consciousness came into being for a brief look around. The only difference between me and one of the “people” who never came to be is this fleeting, precious moment of consciousness. It is THIS, the brief moment of life, that is precious, that is unusual, that is truly inconceivable – precisely the moment that Christianity teaches us to abhor, to reject, to look beyond.

We can look to philosophy for insights into morality as well, with that added benefit that moral pronouncements (such as “Thou shalt not kill”) are undergirded with reasoned arguments (such as Aristotle’s virtue theory, Bentham’s Utilitarianism or Kant on duty theory), most of which can be understood clearly enough to be explained to children. How much more satisfying to answer the “why” questions of morality with actual reasons instead of the theistic equivalent of “because Dad says so.”

Duty theory begins with the Golden Rule, then asks just what it is, exactly, that we wish others to “do unto” us – and requires us to do the same. In 1930, British philosopher W.D. Ross built on Kant’s work to lay out seven rational moral imperatives, all of

which are easy to understand and to teach:

- ♦ Fidelity – the duty to keep promises –
- ♦ Gratitude – the duty to thank those who help us
- ♦ Justice – the duty to treat others fairly
- ♦ Beneficence – the duty to work for the benefit of others
- ♦ Self-improvement – the duty to improve our intelligence and virtue
- ♦ Nonmaleficence – the duty to not harm others
- ♦ Reparation – the duty to compensate others we have harmed

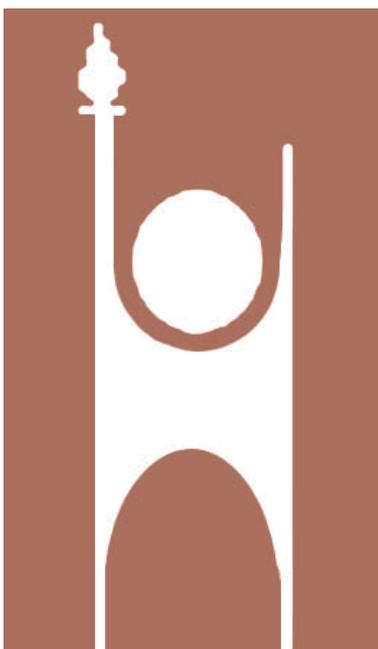
So yes, it’s true that we can find consolations, answers, moral guidance and insights without theology, but too often we pretend it’s as easy as falling off a log. Common sense only goes so far before it can begin to mislead. That’s when we turn to philosophy, which is nothing more than the history of serious thinking about the problems of being human.

I remember the first time I read the thoughts of Aristotle and was transfixed by the realization that his experience of life 2400 years ago was much more similar to mine than I could have imagined – but he could think and write about it so much more clearly and deeply than I. And on it went as I read Montaigne, Erasmus, Descartes, Hume, each of whom was born, learned to walk, woke each morning, ate breakfast, belched, sang, felt lazy, felt inspired, fell asleep each night, dreamt,

made love, thought well and hard about how to be a good person and whether death was the end – and then sat down and wrote about it all. It is a great tragedy that our modern myopia – what has been called our “chronocentrism” – often blunts our appreciation of the treasury of insights of these great thinkers of past generations. We get the idea from somewhere that they’re hard to read or irrelevant to our lives and too often we believe it. Well it ain’t so – and for those seeking secular wisdom and secular consolation, there’s no better place to go.

And there’s no greater consolation for disbelievers, by the way, than the realization that so very many of the greatest philosophers of every age – Socrates, Epicurus, Voltaire, Hume, Mill, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Russell – were partial or complete skeptics about the religious beliefs of their times.

It’s reasonable to feel daunted by the vast expanse of the philosophical landscape, and not all philosophers are equally apt entry points, so I’ll recommend a couple of good accessible guides. Read Bryan Magee’s THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY and Alain de Botton’s CONSOLATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY (this month’s book review feature) for a wealth of consolation and relevant knowledge for our lives, both as secular individuals and as secular parents.



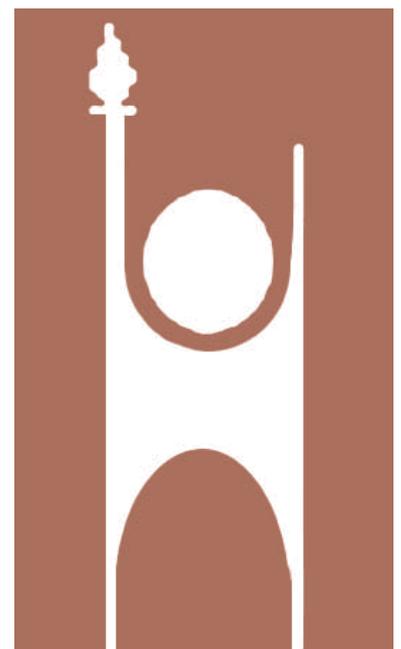
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Ala. judicials display commandments again

AMERICAN ATHEIST

"A Janet Jackson-Style Stunt in the Culture Wars," Says Atheist Official

A new display of the Ten Commandments placed in the Alabama Judicial Building may violate the constitutional separation of church and state, and certainly misleads the public about the origins of our nation's legal system, an Atheist civil rights group charged today.

The 10' x 8' display depicts a text of the Commandments adjacent to copies of the Magna Carta, U.S. Constitution and other documents. It replaces a two-ton granite monument that had been placed in the building by former State Chief Justice Roy Moore. A federal court ordered that unconstitutional religious presentation removed. Roy Moore said that the new display is not blatant enough in promoting religion, and accused state officials of trying "to hide it (the Commandments) among other historical documents."

Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists called the latest display "a stunt" by Alabama officials including Attorney General Bill Pryor.

"In a sense, former Justice Moore is correct. They ARE trying to obscure the reli-

gious nature of this display by 'secularizing' it with other writings."

Johnson noted courts have ruled that display of the Commandments on government property, especially schools and other public venues, serves "no secular" purpose (STONE V. GRAHAM (1980)). She added that there is no original "Ten Commandments" document, that Catholic, Protestant and Jewish religious texts have different, often confusing, versions of these Commandments, and that many of them concern religious, not civil matters.

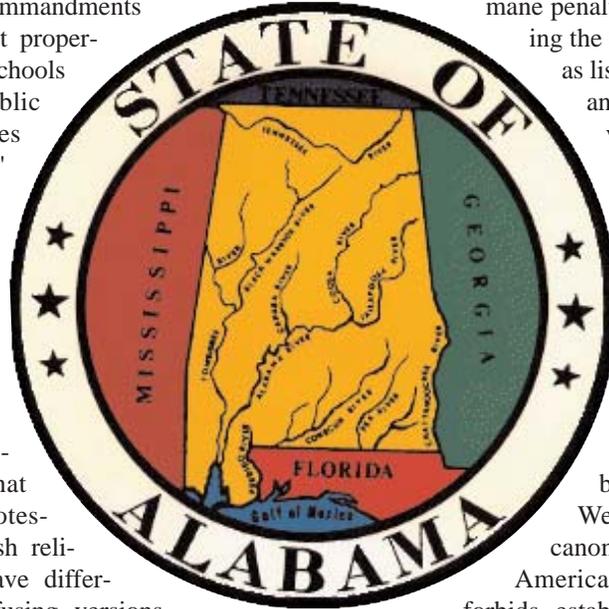
Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that the Alabama display conveniently omits Biblical references to the Draconian penalties the Commandments impose. "If the current Justices of the state Court really wanted to

give school children and others visiting the Judicial Building a complete lesson in history, they would also list the harsh, inhu-

mane penalties for disobeying the Commandments as listed in the Bible, and include conveniently omitted Commandments that order slaves to obey their masters."

Silverman added that the Ten Commandments are not the basis of the Western legal canon, and that the American constitution forbids establishing an Old Testament-style theocratic government.

"All Americans, especially women, blacks, sexual minorities, intellectuals and anyone else concerned with freedom should be grateful that some version of the Commandments do NOT serve as the template for our how society operates," Silverman said.



SC: No money for divinity training "Scholarships"

AMERICAN ATHEIST

American Atheists today praised the US Supreme Court decision permitting states to ban the use of tax money for students majoring in theology and divinity training.

The 7-2 ruling in LOCKE v. DAVEY concerned a Washington State program that provided public scholarships. A student majoring in divinity studies obtained a grant; but the money was withdrawn in keeping with a state law that bars the use of public funds to aid religious groups, practices or institutions. Nearly three-dozen states have similar statutes.

The high court ruled that free exercise of religion does not mean that those studying for the ministry are entitled to public assistance.

"Training someone to lead a congregation is an essentially religious endeavor," wrote Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist. "That a state would deal differently with religious education for the ministry than with education for other callings" is not evidence of "hostility toward religion," he opined.

"We're delighted that the Supreme Court stood firm against public subsidies for religious groups and training," said Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. "This case wasn't about legitimate freedom of religion. It was about taxing tens of millions of Americans - including Atheists, Free-thinkers, Secular Humanists and other non-believer - to train priests, ministers, rabbis, mullahs and other religious leaders."

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that the decision in LOCKE v. DAVEY could be a powerful legal argument against other public aid-to-religion programs, including President Bush's faith-based initiative, and voucher schemes to assist religious schools.

"We think that today's decision by a large majority of the high court will bring into question the constitutionality of much of the Bush social agenda," said Silverman "If you can't use public money to train religious leaders, you cannot be raiding the public treasury to fund social programs that incorporate religious teaching, or provide subsidies for students to attend religious schools."

Book Review: All I See Is Part Of Me

ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL

Imagine if you will a children's book that turns up with five-star reviews on atheist and Christian booklists, both with the rapt assurance that it is a perfect expression of their point of view. That's the situation with *All I see Is Part of Me*, a book that can only be described as extraordinary. Illustrated in vibrant penciled pastels, it is visually stunning. But it is the text that is especially fascinating - positively guaranteed to confuse and irritate as many as it pleases.

A little child (intentionally drawn androgynously) "realizes" that he/she is deeply connected to the entire universe - a sort of "death of dualism" in children's book form.

"I used to think that I was small... A little body, that was all. But then one day I asked the Sun, 'Who are you?' He beamed, 'We are one.'"

The child's inquiry moves on to stars, animals, trees - all siblings, but even more than that: in the parlance of the book, they are all ONE.

So what's the message? Well, read it as you will. It's straightforward pantheism, if anything, with a heavy dose of the evolu-

tionary perspective that notes our ultimate origins as stardust. But Christians have no trouble seeing an endorsement of their own perspective ("It is a book inspired by God!" raves one Amazon reviewer), and a Listmania list of "Books for Pagan Children" includes it with the same sense of perfect fit. My guess is that Curtis is of a New-Age persuasion if anything - a theory borne out by blissridden Amazon reviewers with handles like "blessed-bythemoon."

There's no problem seeing it as a thought-provoking and wonder-inducing book for atheist kids as well. There is no overt reference to theism or to any specifically religious notions (with one exception that I'll cover in the next paragraph). In fact, it can encourage some excellent discussion and insight regarding non-duality and unity of origins, something that is quite decisively non-Christian.

The book does take a couple of strange

turns that give it a particularly New Age flavor at times. And four layouts from the end (pages are unnumbered) is a couplet in

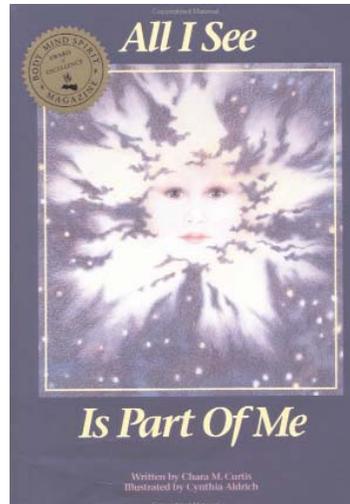
which the atheist reader gulps hard for the first clause, while the Christian gulps in the second: "I said a prayer I know was heard... 'Cause all that is hears every word!" It's a prayer, yes, but an utterly pantheistic one - or at most an "immanent" rather than "transcendent" Christian prayer.

Turn the page again and the praying child has burst into dazzling rays of light. An evan-

gelical moment? No no, not in the context of the book. She/he is becoming the light of the sun and the stars.

The text concludes with an odd assertion as he/she "realizes" that "there can be no end..." - and we're back to Age-of-Aquarius fuzzywuzzyness.

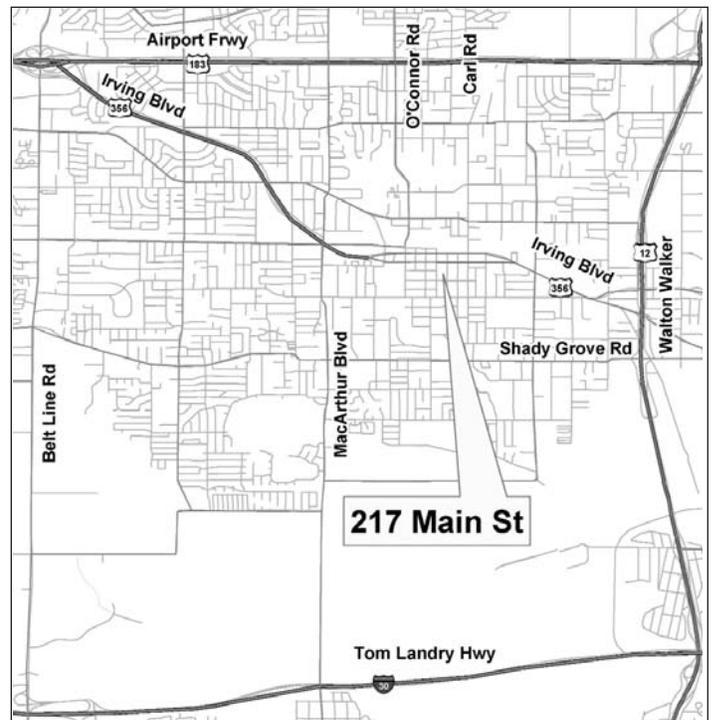
All in all, it's just too interesting and unusual a book to pass up.



METROPLEX ATHEISTS

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Movie Review: The Passion of the Christ

Zon

GUEST COLUMNIST

Before I begin, I feel I need to preface the nature of this viewpoint for clarity, as some people seem to misunderstand my points. I'm not commenting here on the historical accuracy of the film. I'm commenting on the effects of artistic and other media showings (depictions and news coverage) of a particular kind of violence - glorified violence - on a significant portion of the populace who are especially susceptible to that. A large percentage of children (and also "adults") are very negatively influenced by graphic showings of violence, even to the point of being drawn to such showings sheerly for the visceral effect of the violence, not for any edifying reason.

My stand is that the glorification of violence is not healthy, and to those who say they're not negatively affected by it, there's also the issue of the ethics of putting so much resources into the production and distribution of glorified violence images. And I certainly know that for many readers this next point will put me in an "out-on-a-limb" category, but I firmly believe that anyone who finds violence involving live people to be fun has more than a passing sadistic outlook, even in terms of widely accepted competition scenarios such as boxing, pro hockey, pro wrestling, extreme sports, etc., and survivor TV shows where people are put into real physical jeopardy.

It seems to me that the focus of the film is actually the glorification of violence on a scale that might make Cecil B. DeMille

blush and Quentin Tarantino smirk. Also, some people are having discussion groups called "The Man Behind the Movie." I hope people realize that the man behind the movie is Mel Gibson. Film violence has continually increased in volume and intensity since about the late 70's. Now I'm hearing critics saying this movie works better as a horror movie than as a religious movie.



One woman in Kansas has already had a heart attack while watching this film's crucifixion scene, supposedly from its "intensity." And most critics are recommending that children not view it because of its violence. When I think of the very real emotional violence that religion perpetually inflicts on children and others (violence which is far more maiming and debilitating to humanity than physical violence), it seems to me that the icon of violence that so many people look up to in the form of a cross symbolizes the violence that religion has done "unto" them emotionally.

Yes, violence does happen in life, obviously, but to glorify violence and present it as a positive thing--which is exactly what Christianity does by showing that violence to be the key to humankind's salvation--in-

dicates severe traumatic sublimation of need expression and the complete normalization of sado-masochism (in a general sense of how people treat themselves and each other, not in a sexual sense necessarily). We're not talking Santa Clause fairy tales here (which are abusive enough on their own). We're talking teaching fear, alienation and emotional abuse all on such

a wide scale that to not buy into it is to be considered strange and suspect. What is shown in the 2001 documentary "Hell House" is a growing religious phenomenon in this country set up to "scare" people into salvation, much as this film does.

I believe in free expression, and censorship would only create more problems. This film has a right to exist, but we have a responsibility to nurture people and not use entertainment as shock therapy (or shock

therapy as entertainment). Those who actually try to shock people and think that will help just don't understand real nurturance issues.

What about making other blockbuster films that show clearly what religion actually does to people? How much trouble would film-maker have in banking those kinds of projects? Even the most positive films hardly ever go much beyond showing people having "hope" for a better world, or establishing a personal relation with someone in which to retreat and abandon the world. People never see that the world can change and improve without violence. Violence on film and TV is not news and it's not entertainment. It's vicarious, sadistic retribution for self-alienation. Do we really need to see cop car chases on TV where someone actually gets shot for

real and dies in front of us, yet we're not allowed to view state-supported murder in the form of capital punishment, especially since it's supposedly done largely for the purpose of deterrence?

People are offered countless slasher movies, murder TV movies and series, technically dazzling bloodfests, and now children's video games that train children in how to kill people, or how not to care whether they kill people. We're developing a whole society of people who beat themselves up emotionally, much like monks who flagellate themselves, except emotionally and often with a laugh track, a remote control and by watching a few cute actors "who just need the work." The answer is not to take away their "toys." The answer is to give them something better and more interesting. It really can be done. I would like for people to take serious the impact of constant, increasingly intense violence on our culture, explore why it exists and intensifies, and realize that no amount of violence can fill a void created by insufficient self-nurturance and self-exploration.

People want meaning but they're spoonfed large daily doses of violence. Obviously,

there's a market for showing violence but I believe in responsible art and responsible journalism. People don't exist in an emotional or intellectual vacuum. We all affect each other. The issue, as always, comes back to ratings and money. First of all, I'm not so sure people "want" so much violence in their film and TV shows, but it's easy ratings and box office. If you believe art and TV shows of live people don't need to be nurturing, then this argument isn't for you, but people are not objects to make money off of.

To be clear, I'm not against violence in movies per se because not all violence is glorified, but this film presents the glorification of violence as a positive thing essential for those desperately seeking a positive "after-life," recklessly manipulating an already vulnerable large segment of the population. In doing so Mel Gibson has found a way to equate "god" with violence,...and people are eating it up. Hmmm, interesting. "Gladiator" was a big hit a few years ago. Is this "Gladiator 2: The Religion of Violence"? The term "passion" may have referred to martyrdom long ago, but today I think its meaning is more a matter of very strong feeling and not of self-sacrifice. The "passion" for exploring

and depicting profound nurturance is much more helpful to society than showing "magical supernatural miracles", "antique" ethics and "positive" violence.

When I was a small child I remember facetiously wishing the Christians would hurry up and be whisked off to heaven as they kept saying would happen "soon." I wanted real peace on this planet and Christianity (along with other religions) continues to interfere with that. Well now I'm older and "wiser" and I admit that those of us who really know what peace can be have a lot of educating to do. I'm not willing to let this planet and this world society rot like those who live for an afterlife. We don't need to be angry, but we do need to reach those who have closed off even to themselves. Laughter is not always the best medicine, and neither is another graphic horror movie, especially one that treats violence as the best thing that ever happened to humankind. To this and to any kind of serious glorification of violence, Thumbs Way Down.

Passionately caring about what we do to each other,

Zon

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 church is, in the strictest sense, nothing; it exists on no principles; it proceeds by no authority; it has no data; it can draw outside no thing; and it admits of no conclusion.
— Thomas Paine, American Patriot

Ethan Allen, American Patriot
In those parts of the world where lightning and volcanoes have prevailed, miracles have ceased; but in the paths of ignorance and superstition, wonders are still in vogue.

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www.atheists.org

An honest god is the noblest work of man.
Robert Ingersoll, 19th Century Orator

Reason believes otherwise than that He, the infinite Father, expects or requires no worship or praise from us, but that He is everywhere above it.
— Benjamin Franklin, Founding Father

I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end... where every man has the same right to attend or not attend 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 will always fail. The conscience of the people will not be permitted to worship his own god, in any way. 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

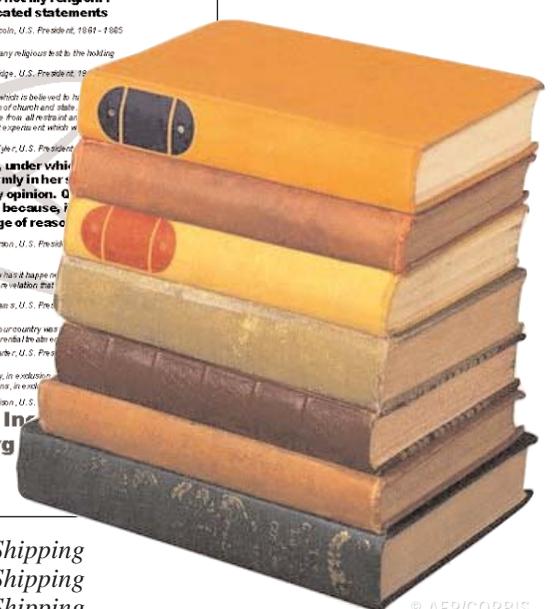
Shake off all the fears of servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat and call on her tribunal for every fact, every opinion. O with boldness even the existence of a God, because, if he be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear.
Thomas Jefferson, U.S. President, 1801-1809

As I understand the Christian religion, it was, and is, a rebellion. Sorrow has happened to a noble, brave, and generous people, who have been divided with both Jewish and Christian revelation, 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 prayer in school because our country was not built on particular religious faith, but on the principle of religious liberty.
— Jimmy Carter, U.S. President, 1977-1981

Who does not notice 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, 1791-1836

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10 for \$10 + Shipping
20 for \$15 + Shipping
30 for \$20 + Shipping

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

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

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, Irving

EVENTS

American Atheists:

What: 30th annual convention

Date: April 9th – 11th

Time: TBA

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

Atheist Alliance Int'l.:

What: Annual convention

Date: April 9th – 11th

Time: TBA

Place: Colorado Springs, CO; For more information visit:
www.atheistalliance.org/conv2004

RALLY

Secular Pledge:

What: To show support of a case seeking to remove under God from our Pledge of Allegiance

Date: March 24th

Time: 11:00 a.m. (local time)

Place: The steps of the U.S. Supreme Court Building

IN THE MEDIA

St. Clair Mellard:

What: Discuss current First Amendment issues of concern such as the upcoming Pledge of Allegiance rally and case

Date: March 19th

Time: 12:15 p.m.

Place: www.wday.com

Wayne Aiken:

What: Wayne Aiken, North Carolina State Director for American Atheists, will be a guest on the

Date: March 20th

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Fox News Channel's *Heartland*

Dave Silverman:

What: Discuss current First Amendment issues of concern such as the upcoming Pledge of Allegiance rally and case

Date: March 23th

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Fox News Channel's *The O'Reilly Factor*

Do you have a special event?

Submit it to:

editor@metroplexatheists.org

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

March 2004

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|------------------------|--------|-------------------|------------------|----------|--------|-------------|
| | 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 Reg. Meeting & MARG | 22 | 23 | 24 J. Gilligan's | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 J. Gilligan's | | | |

April 2004

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

May 2004

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|----------------------|--------|-------------------|------------------|----------|--------|-------------|
| 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 J. Gilligan's | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 J. Gilligan's | 27 | 28 | 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
c/o Metroplex Atheists
Box 48116
Watauga, TX 76148

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?