

Various Deities Still Sorting Through Tragic Queens Bus Accident

AMERICAN ATHEIST

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Halloween
Is A
Beautiful
Thing



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- Why Humans Walk On Two Legs
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- For God So Loved The World He Did What?
- Albert Ellis: A Glimpse At A Real Guru

American Atheists Essential Reading List

Books on this list have been selected to provide introductory information on topics of interest to Atheists. They address a wide range of important subjects such as: the history of Atheist thought, the origins of modern religion, the role religion plays in modern culture and politics, Atheist parenting, and the ongoing battle for the separation between church and state. While these titles represent only a fraction of the books available from American Atheist Press, collectively they provide a broad overview of Atheist thought.

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American Atheist Magazine

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cover photo by **Tony Boling**



Was Pat Tillman Murdered?

Ellen Johnson



Pat Tillman was a professional National Football League player who gave up a multimillion-dollar salary to join the U. S. Army, along with his brother Kevin, after 9-11. On April 22, 2004, Pat Tillman died in Afghanistan. Pat's family are not Christians and some people say that Pat was an Atheist.

Pat's family had been working for years to get the truth from the military about the cause of his death. The military originally reported that he died in a heroic battle with the enemy in the mountains of Afghanistan. They even posthumously awarded him the Silver Star. But it wasn't until his battalion, whose members were more aware of what really happened, was sent to redeploy that the truth came out.

There have been five different investigations into Pat's death by the Defense Department. The military concluded that nine high-ranking Army officers, including four generals, erred in their reporting of Pat's death. But thanks to the constant pressure from

Pat's family, the Congressional House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform held hearings on this matter. During testimony, Pat's mom, Mary Tillman, talked about what U. S. Army Colonel Kauzlarich said in an interview with ESPN.

M. TILLMAN: Well, basically, I have to—I would like to address that. Colonel Kauzlarich said—and I am appalled that he would make these comments. He's entitled to his opinion, of course. But he said that we were—we would never be satisfied, because we're not Christian.

Spirituality doesn't enter into this, I guess, in his mind. But, you know, we're not Christian so we can't put him to rest. And he then did—and that's why we will—never be satisfied, and we're just a pain in the ass, basically.

Then he did an interview on ESPN where he basically reiterated this, I mean, to a reporter, who then put it on a web site and in an actual article. He also said that it must make us feel terrible that Pat's "worm dirt."

In an attempt to draw attention away from the real issue, which was the cover up of how Pat Tillman died, Colonel Kauzlarich blamed the whole thing on those "non-Christians." He said that Christians also lose loved ones in friendly-fire situations but they "get past it" because they believe their loved ones will be in a better place. Christian families accept the deaths and aren't pestering the military like the Tillman family was.

He added that since Atheists say that this is the only life we will know, families like the Tillmans don't just accept the deaths of their loved ones.

How right he is! Atheists say that this is the only life we will ever know and we don't just accept the deaths of our loved ones when we are not given the right information. We do take death a lot more seriously than anyone else. And if more people embraced this same regard for the only life we will ever have, then maybe the world would be a much better place.

Documents obtained by the Associated Press now reveal that Army medical examiners are suspicious about some of the forensic evidence in Tillman's autopsy.

The AP story follows:

As bullets flew above their heads, the young soldier at Pat Tillman's side started praying. "I thought I was praying to myself, but I guess he heard me," Sgt. Bryan O'Neal recalled in an interview Saturday with The Associated Press. "He said something like, 'Hey, O'Neal, why are you praying? God can't help us now.'" Tillman's intent, O'Neal said, was to "more or less put my mind straight about what was going on at the mo-

ment. He (Tillman) said, 'I've got an idea to help get us out of this,'" said O'Neal, who was an 18-year-old Army Ranger in Tillman's unit when the former NFL player was killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan in April 2004.

O'Neal said Tillman, a corporal, threw a smoke grenade to identify themselves to fellow soldiers who were firing at them. Tillman was waving his arms shouting "Cease fire, friendlies, I am Pat (expletive) Tillman, damn it!" again and again when he was killed, O'Neal said.

A chaplain who debriefed the entire unit days after Tillman's death later described this exchange to investigators conducting a criminal probe of the incident. But O'Neal strongly disputes portions of the chaplain's testimony, outlined in some 2,300 pages of transcripts released to the AP this week by the Defense Department in response to a Freedom of Information Act request.

The chaplain told investigators that O'Neal said Tillman was harsh in his last moments, snapping, "Would you shut your (expletive) mouth? God's not going to help you; you need to do something for yourself, you sniveling ..."

"He never would have called me 'sniveling,'" O'Neal said. "I don't remember ever speaking to this chaplain, and I find this characterization of Pat really upsetting. He never once degraded me. He's the only person I ever worked for who didn't degrade anyone. He wasn't that sort of person." The chaplain's name is blacked out in the documents.

Congress is preparing for another hearing this week, while the Pentagon is separately preparing a new round of punishments. Soldiers and commanders who worked with Tillman have repeatedly testified that he was respected, admired and well-liked.

In the same testimony, medical examiners said the bullet holes in Tillman's head were so close together that it appeared the Army Ranger was cut down by an M-16 fired from a mere 10 yards or so away. O'Neal said the shooters were "close, close enough for me to recognize them, but they sure weren't 10 yards away. They were further than that. I've thought about this plenty of times. They wouldn't have been more than 50 yards away."

Another key issue raised in the transcripts involved never-before-mentioned snipers who were apparently there when the firing broke out, got out of their vehicle and walked alongside the convoy, cutting up the canyon firing. O'Neal said Saturday that he knew there were snipers in the convoy that fired at them, but that he can't remember their names. Were they fired at by the snipers? "Not that I know of," O'Neal told the AP.

His recollections of the snipers reflected other testimony in the transcripts, including answers given by Capt. Richard Scott, who conducted the first, immediate investigation:

Q: Are you aware whether or not any U.S. forces snipers were at the scene?

Scott: They were in serial two.

Q: And, do you know whose GMV (ground mobility vehicle) they were traveling in? **Scott:** I don't think they were in a GMV. I think they were in a cargo Humvee.

Q: Okay. Do you know if the snipers fired any rounds during this incident involving Cpl. Tillman?

Scott: I do not, no."

Now some Atheists are wondering if Pat Tillman was murdered. The circumstances of his death were covered up for so long that it's a reasonable assumption. But why would anyone want to murder Pat Tillman? We don't know the answer to that, but one thing we do know is that the Christian Commander and the Chaplain can't be trusted to tell the truth. *

representing YOU

5/31 — Kentucky State Director Edwin Kagin was quoted in 5/31 Los Angeles Times article on the opening of the Creationism museum in Kentucky.

7/30 — Ellen Johnson was interviewed for an article in the National Post Newspaper in Canada on the sale of the Jesus doll in WalMart.

7/31 — Ellen Johnson was a guest on the Sirius Satellite radio's Catholic channel's Speak Now program to discuss the One2Believe religious action figures being sold in WalMart.

7/12 — Texas State Director Joe Zamecki was quoted in an article in the Wharton Journal-Spectator on the addition of the words "under god" to the Texas state pledge.

7/19 — Joe Zamecki had a letter published in the Austin Chronicle against prayers at Austin City Council meetings.

8/9 — Ellen Johnson was a guest on the Glen Beck program on CNN Headline News discussing the lawsuit against the Texas school moment of silence law that was being heard in federal court in Dallas.

8/8 — Ellen Johnson was interviewed for an article in the Detroit Free Press on the decision in our Detroit lawsuit.

8/13 — Ellen Johnson was interviewed by the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare about the decision in our Detroit lawsuit.

Scooter Journals By Chester Smalkowski



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—Frank R. Zindler,
Editor, American Atheist Press

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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

In the recent interview with Douglas Adams in an issue of "American Atheist," I found my own views expressed eloquently, and to the point.

I am an Atheist, and as Adams, author of "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," a self-proclaimed "radical atheist," said, "I am convinced there is no god." I have been searching for the right words to express my thoughts for a long time. I am surrounded by Christians, who, whether fundamentalist, evangelical, practicing, or non-practicing, all profess belief in their cruel, silly delusion of a divine being, a creator. So, since I am not shy about expressing my opinions on the matter, I thought I would like to put my thoughts into writing.

I thank the process of natural selection that brought a mind such as his to exist in my lifetime. This brings me to the reason for writing this letter. I subscribed to "American Atheist" after having purchased a gift subscription for my sister. In reading the issues I've received, I've read the articles, all of which exactly mirror my sentiments on the matter of god and religion. What a crime it is to brainwash innocent children with the mind-virus of concepts like god, heaven, and hell.

I have a problem in dealing with folks, once I know they believe in god. If they're so easily willing to set reason aside in the matter of religion, what's to prevent them from inventing their own personal reality about anything else? In a science fiction novel (I don't recall which one) by A. C. Clarke, he had an afterword where he defined three classes of people: Sane—reasoning individuals with a basis in reality in all things and completely functional; Un-Sane—superstitious individuals with a fantasy belief structure, yet functional otherwise within society and In-Sane—completely dysfunctional to the point of incarceration."

I bring this up with reference to our current pro-religion-military-industrial-complex administration. It seems as if in their fervor they think that what they represent is what should be good for everyone. At least that's the message they send to obfuscate the issue that they're all milking the corporate teat at the expense of our constitution, the bill

of rights, middle class, etc.

I'm not eloquent, and am untrained in the ways of combating the evil of faith. I see no greater calling than to break the shackles we've imposed on ourselves, within EVERY society, with this silly notion of a supreme being. But the fact that I suspect stupidity in every facet of what a religious person does, says, writes, and thinks, leaves me hardly able to stand and converse with them; let alone spend the time needed to coax a deluded mind from its lifetime of programming. As an offshoot, I can barely give agnostics any credit either. They are silly fence-sitters—to not decide is to still have made a choice, so why not examine the two sides and pick one?

So...I want to learn to be more patient with religious folks, in order to become more effective in challenging faith and encouraging reason, and otherwise contribute to the battle for the minds of humanity. The time for folks like me to stop sitting around and letting these "fundy-religio-facists" ruin themselves, and the world around us, has got to be now.

Michael G. Davis
Carlisle, IN

Editor:

The Holy Closet

Why does the word "Atheist" have such a bad connotation? Why is it not possible for people to understand what it actually means? Not too long ago, I was reading about congressman Pete Stark (Representative from California) a member of congress since 1973, who in January declared himself to be a non-theist. He is the first open non-theist in the history of Congress. Don't get me wrong; I think it's an historic event of the utmost importance. However, what concerns me is the usage of such a broadly defined term, i.e., non-theist. Americans who hold no god beliefs are the most distrusted minority in the country, and that situation won't change until more respected, and trusted people come out of the holy closet. But let me get back to congressman Stark. Is he a pantheist? Is he agnostic or an Atheist? From what I understand he is an Atheist or maybe an agnostic Atheist. However, to publicly state that one is an Atheist has a price that can be too high to pay.

Non-theism and Atheism both imply the non-belief in deities. However, for some awkward reason non-theist sounds less "evil." I have personally encountered a lot of people who claim to be agnostic. However, after talking to them for a while, it became obvious (to me) that they are either Atheists or agnostic Atheists. According to Richard Dawkins the mere rejection of a personal god who is interventional and concerned with human affairs will make you an Atheist right away. If someone declares that, with our knowledge it is impossible to know whether god exists, he or she would be an agnostic. However, if on top of that, if someone ceases to believe in god on the grounds that it **cannot** be known, that person would be an Atheist as well. He or she would in fact be an agnostic Atheist.

The bottom line is that there are many more Atheists out there than we think and it is just high time western society stops associating Atheism with unethical, amoral, and evil people. Here is my proposal to help change that: **let's all come out of the holy closet.** I don't think Atheists are to blame for their reputation, even though some might have failed to contribute to improve our image. Again, I'd like to point out what it doesn't mean to be an Atheist. It doesn't mean lack of principles or morality. It definitely does not mean that we know god doesn't exist; at least, not necessarily. Some Atheists believe in the non-existence of god, others don't believe in the existence of god. There is a subtle but very important difference. The former implies faith, which is an unfounded belief in something, whereas the latter means exactly the opposite: lack of faith. As with most things in life, Atheism comes in many shades of gray. Coming out of the holy closet does not mean that you necessarily should become an activist. However, just by stating in public that we are Atheists, we can change the conception most people have about Atheism and Atheists. I humbly and respectfully would like to ask you all to help improve Atheists' public image by helping a "closeted" friend come out. The more people know about us, the easier to succeed in getting our point across!

Edward S. Moreira
Cleveland, OH

Various Deities Still Sorting Through Victims Of Tragic Queens Bus Accident

by the onion—www.theonion.com
(Humor)

NEW YORK—AN emergency coalition of deities from several major world religions is still sorting through the wreckage of a tragic bus accident that claimed 67 lives Friday in the culturally diverse Jackson Heights neighborhood of Queens.

According to authorities, at approximately 6:45 p.m. the Q45 bus crashed into a power generator at a busy street corner after swerving to avoid a slow-moving group of elderly Chinese pedestrians. Police say that a Korean laundry, an Irish pub, a Senegalese restaurant, and a churro stand were also severely damaged in the resultant smoke and flames.

More than half a dozen gods reportedly responded to the scene within moments of the crash. Because the victims hailed from 14 countries and professed an as-yet-undetermined number of religious faiths, however, the soul-placement process has been laborious, and fewer than a third of the deceased have so far been escorted to their appropriate afterlives.

"What a mess this is," said Ganesha, the Hindu lord of success and obstacles. "Assuming we ever manage to figure out who worships our particular pantheon, there's still the problem of divvying up the Buddhists, Jains, and other non-Hindus who worship me, Lakshmi, Vishnu, and about 1,000 other gods."

In the gods' haste to resolve the matter, some of the souls were apparently misplaced. In one instance, an adherent of Buddhism slated to be reborn into an Ohio family was temporarily reincarnated as a tree sloth. And as of press time, a self-avowed atheist who at the last minute took God into his heart has yet to be retrieved from the void and placed among the faithful.

'I don't have the time to hang around here all week like some of the niche gods do.'

God of Abraham

'Despite my many arms, cases will have to be handled one at a time to avoid mixups.'

Ganesha

Many of the gods were struggling just to maintain order.

"Honestly, who ever heard of a Jew named Shinjoku Muri-kami?" the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu said. "I had that guy halfway to haunting a shrine as a kami spirit before I realized my mistake."

The religious triage suffered severe setbacks from the beginning because many gods serve a relatively low number of devotees and are unaccustomed to rapid response.

"The moment we saw that there was someone named Hawkwind, we knew we'd be there for a while," said the Sikh god, Waheguru who explained that, due to a verbal agreement struck several millennia ago, no deity is allowed to leave until all souls have been claimed. "On top of that, it took the Wiccan goddess of the Moon, Earth, and Sea three full days to show up."

One god, who asked that His name not be spoken aloud, said the theological muddle was a rarity, and that He and the other deities usually have no trouble operating without an official post-disaster protocol.

"We don't normally have to deal with these kinds of details," the god said. "If there's a rocket attack in the Middle East, it's pretty easy to figure out who goes in to mop up."

Further complicating matters is the presence of the devil, Beelzebub, who has demanded that the coalition relinquish all souls to him.

"These are all vile, vile sinners, and I'm not leaving until I get them," the dark lord said, though other gods appeared un-receptive. "Look, my numbers have been way down this month. I'm sure everyone here did something damning at some point, right? Come on."

Several lesser-known gods, such as Jengu, an archaic water deity still worshipped by some of the Sawa people in Africa, arrived on the scene despite having no devotees among the dead. Jengu said he knew there was a "really good Cameroonian place" in the neighborhood and assumed that he might be needed.

"I guess not," the minor god said. "I'll probably hang out anyway, though, just in case."

While the aftermath has been generally chaotic, the most inconvenienced deity appeared to be the God of Abraham, who is worshipped by billions of Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

"Ideally, I'd just take all of them in one pile, but there are about a thousand little sects and denominations and all that nonsense that I have to act like I care about," God/Yahweh/Al-lah said. "Did you know there was a guy who practiced Santeria on that bus? Christ, what a nightmare."

The deities were all unanimous in agreeing that the sole Catholic fatality should be condemned to forever roam the Earth as an anguished, wretched ghost, as Catholicism is the only truly false religion and has no god to accept its faithful when they die. *

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letter to the editor COMPETITION 2008

The Letter to the Editor Competition 2008 is open only to members of American Atheists. To enter, send the uncut and complete newspaper page containing your published letter to:

Neal Cary, P.O. Box 828, Glen Allen, VA 23060-0828

Letters must be published between January 1 and December 31, 2007. Include your address and telephone number, and your e-mail address should you have one. Letters can cover any issue of importance which advances the Atheist cause. Letters will be judged by educational content, persuasiveness, and how well they portray Atheism in a positive light. Members of the board, officers, and State and Regional Directors are ineligible to enter. The winner will be announced at the National Convention 2008, receive an American Atheist award plaque, and one free year of membership in American Atheists. All entered letters will be displayed at Convention 2008.

Why Humans Walk On Two Legs

(Sciencedaily.com)

A team of anthropologists that studied chimpanzees trained to use treadmills has gathered new evidence suggesting that our earliest apelike ancestors started walking on two legs because it required less energy than getting around on all fours.

"When our earliest ancestors started walking on two legs, they took the first steps toward becoming human," said lead researcher Michael Sockol of UC Davis. "Our findings help answer why."

"This is the first time anyone has succeeded in studying energetics and biomechanics in adult chimps," said Sockol, who worked for two years to find an animal trainer willing to coax adult chimps to walk on two legs and to "knuckle-walk" on all fours on the sort of treadmill found in most gyms. The five chimps also wore face masks used to help the researchers measure oxygen consumption.

While the chimps worked out, the scientists collected metabolic, kinematic and kinetic data that allowed them to calculate which method of locomotion used less energy and why. The team gathered the same information for four adult humans walking on a treadmill.

The researchers found that human walking used about 75 percent less energy and burned 75 percent fewer calories than quadrupedal and bipedal walking in chimpanzees. They also found that for some but not all of the chimps, walking on two legs was no more costly than knucklewalking.

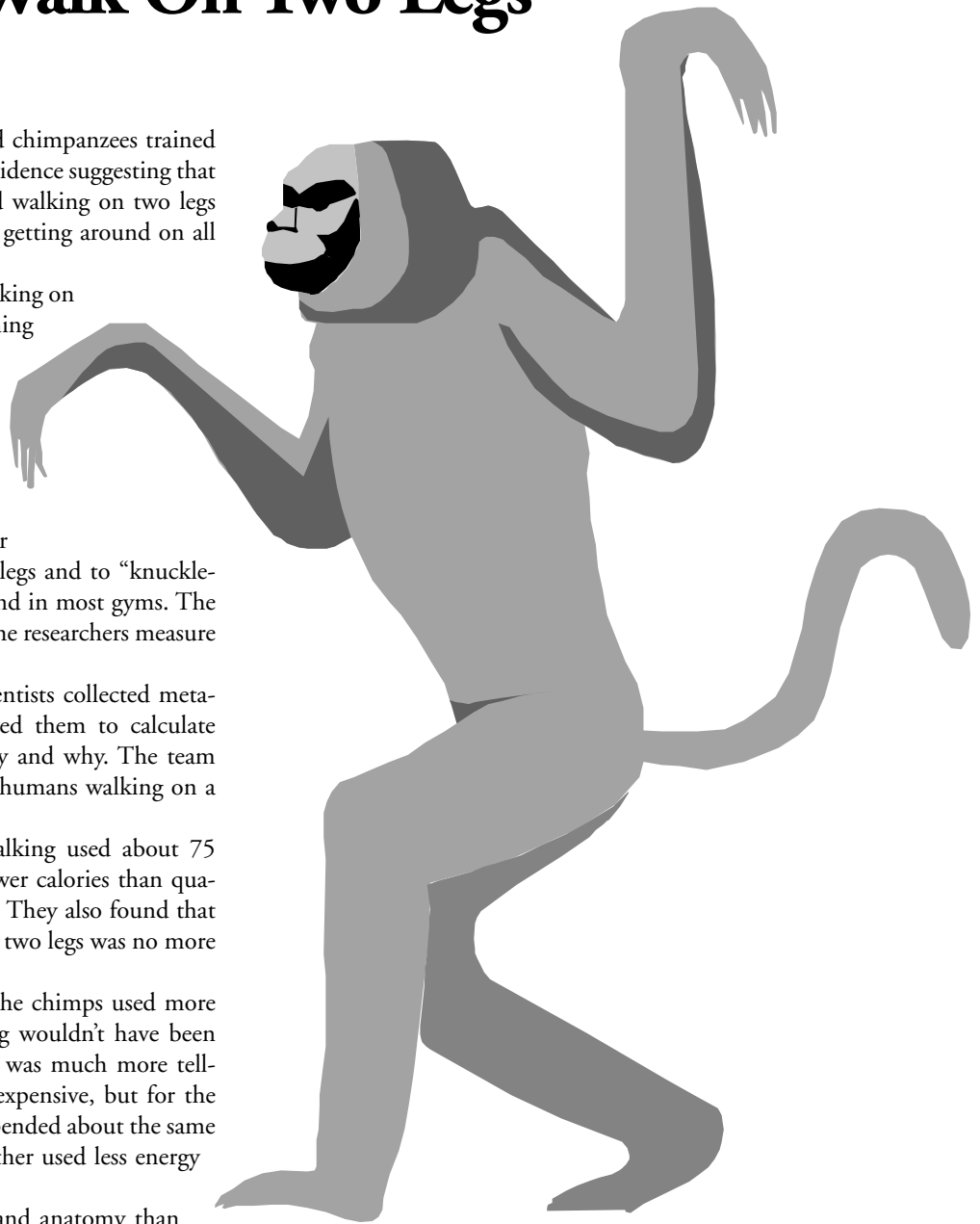
"We were prepared to find that all of the chimps used more energy walking on two legs—but that finding wouldn't have been as interesting," Sockol said. "What we found was much more telling. For three chimps, bipedalism was more expensive, but for the other two chimps, this wasn't the case. One expended about the same energy walking on two legs as on four. The other used less energy walking upright."

These two chimps had different gaits and anatomy than their knucklewalking peers. And when the researchers examined the early hominid fossil record, they found evidence of these traits—skeletal characteristics of the hip and hind limb that allow for greater extension of the hind limb—in some early bipeds.

Taken together, the findings provide support for the hypothesis that anatomical differences affecting gait existed among our earliest apelike ancestors, and that these differences provided the genetic variation natural selection could act on when changes in the environment gave bipeds an advantage over quadrupeds.

Fossil and molecular evidence suggests the earliest ancestors of the human family lived in forested areas in equatorial Africa in the late Miocene era some 8 to 10 million years ago, when changes in climate may have increased the distance between food patches. That would have forced early hominids to travel longer distances on the ground and favored those who could cover more ground using less energy.

"This isn't the complete answer," Sockol said. "But it's a good piece of a puzzle humans have always wondered about: How and why



did we become human? And why do we alone walk on two legs?"

Sockol, a doctoral candidate in anthropology, has been pursuing his research for four years as part of his dissertation. He conducted the research at UC Davis and at a private animal refuge and training facility in Northern California with colleagues Herman Pontzer of Washington University in St. Louis and David Raichlen of the University of Arizona.

His work was featured in the July 2006 issue of National Geographic. A video of the chimpanzees walking and knucklewalking on the treadmill can be seen at <http://www7.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0607/feature5/multimedia.html>

The research appears in the online early edition of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and in the July 24 print edition.

Note: This story has been adapted from a news release issued by University Of California – Davis. *

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American Atheists' State Director Participates In State Department Meeting

by Wendy Britton

At the invitation of the U. S. State Department's World Affairs Council, *American Atheists* Washington State Director, Wendy Britton, participated in the greater citizen diplomacy program "One Handshake At A Time!" on June 26. The program is part of the Department's International Leadership Program

The program brings over 4,500 high-level delegates to the U.S. to meet with their professional counterparts. The delegates are chosen by the U.S. Embassies abroad as future leaders in their areas of expertise.

The delegation from the Kyrgyz Republic wanted to meet with someone who represented separation of church and state because that is a fundamental premise upon which their government operates. The group consisted of three dynamic and diverse visitors who were visiting Seattle for their professional program during the last two weeks of June. Their program's theme was "Inter-Religious Diversity and Dialogue." The delegation consisted of community leaders, who wanted to meet with an American to discuss the contested topic of prayer in schools, and the role that the *American Atheist* organization has in promoting Atheists' rights and the separation of church and state. The participants exchanged gifts; Britton received a handmade wall hanging and she gave them each a personal pocket-sized copy of the U. S. Constitution.

Communication was with the help of an interpreter. All those



involved said they enjoyed the meeting very much and learned a lot about each others' countries and politics while speaking about how Atheists are perceived in the United States. They took a lot of photos.

This was a valuable opportunity for *American Atheists* who made a great contact at the Western Division of the World Trade Center in Seattle. *

WINTER SOLSTICE GALA

Saturday, December 22, 2007

The Crowne Plaza Hotel
36 Valley Road, Clark, New Jersey
Grand Ballroom (12:30 pm – 5:00 pm)

Get together with other Atheists for an afternoon of holiday fun, food, music, dancing and camaraderie in a celebration of the Winter Solstice!

Evening Events

At 6 pm all are invited to tour the American Atheist Center in nearby Cranford.

Everyone is then invited to participate in the taping of The Atheist Viewpoint Cable TV program in our TV studio at the American Atheist Center.

Lunch

\$29.00 per person
\$14.00 for children ages 3-10

For more information and to register online please visit <http://www.atheists.org/wintersolstice.html>

Or mail your payment to:
American Atheists
PO Box 5733, Parsippany, NJ 07054
Fax: 908-276-7402

Deadline is December 19

Best/Worst Places To Live In America

Survey Of Atheists

We recently surveyed our readers to find out if the cities and towns they lived in were Atheist friendly. We did not receive results from every city and state. These are just the results from the places where some of our readers happen to live.

In answer to the question, "Would you recommend your town, city or state to other Atheists, two states receiving an equal number of "no" votes. They were Florida and Texas. These were followed by Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Indiana.

The cities and towns in Florida that you chose as the worst were (in alphabetical order) Inverness, Jacksonville, Melbourne, Orange Park, Orlando, Pensacola, Port Charlotte, Spring Hill and Venice.

The worst cities and towns in Texas were (in alphabetical order) Denton, Gilmer, Granite Shoals, Houston, Marble Falls, Plano, Rockport, San Angelo, and Schulenberg.

A Good Place For Atheists

Those who said, "yes" to recommending their state overwhelmingly chose California. New York State came in second. These were followed by Washington State, Michigan, Massachusetts and New Jersey.

The cities most often chosen in California were San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and Santa Barbara.

The cities you liked in New York were New York City, Forest Hills, Ithaca, Massapequa, Montrose, New Paltz, Rochester, Rotterdam, Saugerties, Smithtown, Southampton, and Tappan



California Wins



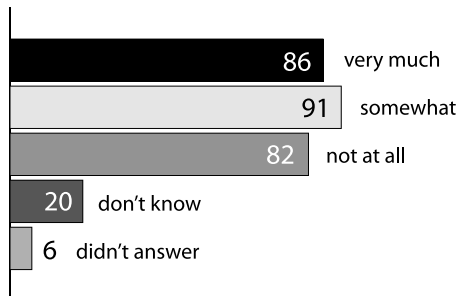
Florida Loses

We want to thank everyone who took the time to respond to our survey. I know that most people will definitely consider moving to those cities and states that were liked and will try to avoid those that were not liked. Quite frankly it should be the other way around. Florida needs more Atheists and not less, so does Texas, Kentucky and every other place on the negative list. Atheists who live in these places need support. We should move there and get jobs as teachers, politicians, business owners and managers, and police and firefighters. We should get established there so we can make it a place that is friendly to all Americans.

Below are the responses to the questions we asked.

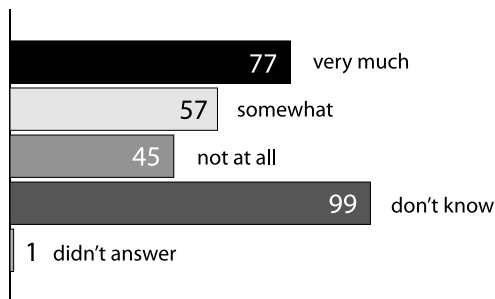
Government

Are your governor, US Senators, US representatives and local politicians overwhelmingly right wing theists who support anti state/church separation legislation?



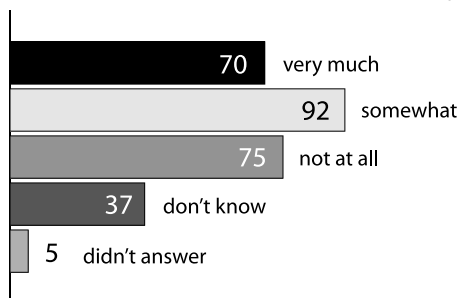
Schools

Are your public schools inundated with Christian propaganda, groups, after school groups, released time programs, religious songs in the choir, graduation prayers etc.?

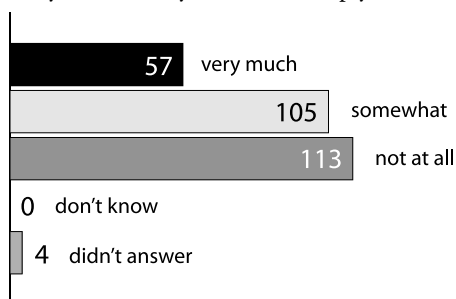


Neighbors & Community

Are the people who live near you mostly right-wing theists?

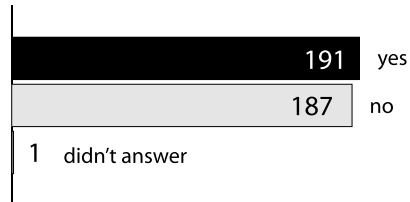


Do you feel like you have to keep your Atheism to yourself?

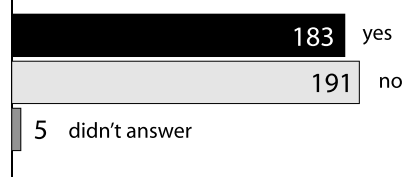


I know other Atheists in my city/town.

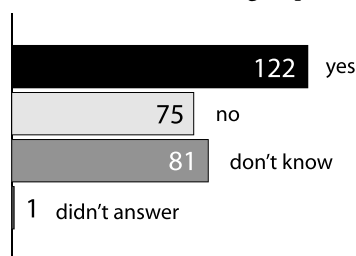
When asked how many, no responses were given.



Do you have acquaintances in your area who are Atheists?

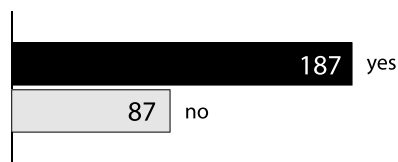


Are there local Atheist groups who meet in your area?

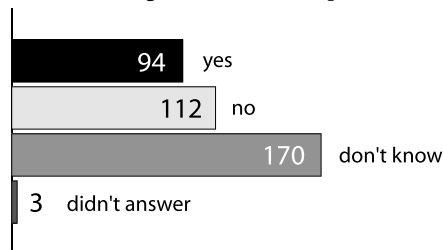


Churches & Religious Culture

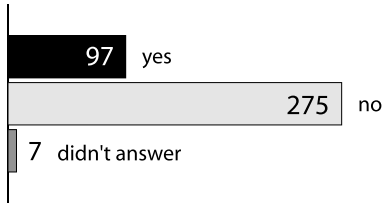
Is there an inordinate amount of houses of worship in your area?



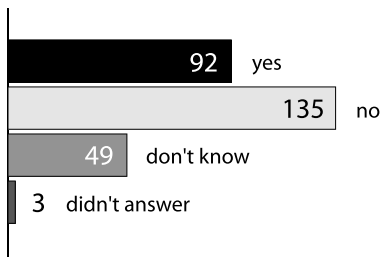
Are there megachurches in, or planned for your community?



Is your community governed by local religious standards like Sunday Blue Laws, liquor laws? Please identify.
(none were identified)

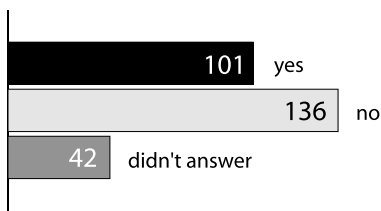


Are there a lot of religious symbols on public property in your area?
Are there crèches and/or menorahs on public property in December?
Is there a Ten Commandment placard or monument on public property in your area? Are Latin crosses put on public property with the approval of the local government?

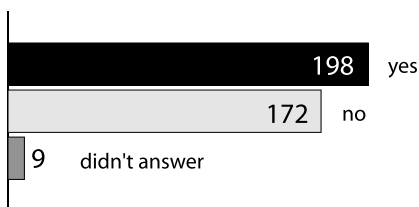


Workplace

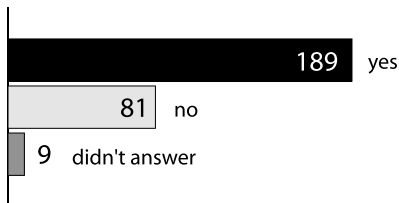
Do you feel like you have to keep your Atheism to yourself in the workplace, while religious people flaunt their theism?



Are you happy living as an Atheist where you are?



Would you recommend your town, city or state to other Atheists?



The Founders Friends...

So many of you help American Atheists with donations and other financial support—and we want to find a way to say “Thank You!” We are pleased to announce the re-establishment of an American Atheist tradition—The Founders’ Friends, begun by the Murray O’Hair family.

Those contributing \$50 or more to American Atheists will have your name and amount entered in subsequent issues of the AA Magazine. Just fill out the blue card with the information requested, include your gift, and mail it back to us in the enclosed envelope. Be sure to check the appropriate box authorizing us to thank you by printing your name and contribution amount in the Magazine. Mailing addresses will not be mentioned.

This is our way of saying THANK YOU to an extraordinary group of people—those of you who want to “do more” and financially support the critical work of American Atheists!

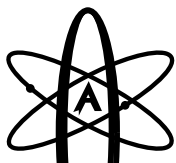
American Atheists Thanks The Following Persons For Their Generous Contributions To Our Cause.

Shane W. Roper, AZ – \$60
Margot C. Pyle, MA – \$100
Frank H. Titus, OK – \$50
Richard D. Hogan, \$150
Gene Miller, LA – \$50
Terry N. Tappan, CA – \$50
David M. Ross, CA – \$50
Alexander Louis Loutsis, VA – \$50
Kay Rousseau, CA – \$50
Mark and Gail Dybdahl, MI – \$50
Rohan L. Ebanks, VA – \$50
Laird Coates, NJ – \$50

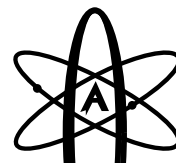
NEW Life Members

AMERICAN ATHEISTS Welcomes New Life Members

David Obrien – Los Altos Hills, CA
Jonathan Noll – Seattle, WA
Stephen F. Uhl, Ph.D. – Oro Valley, AZ
Richard L. James – Marina Del Rey, CA
Robert O. Rozanski – Eden Prairie, MN



Membership Application
American Atheists
www.atheists.org (908) 276-7300



Name _____ Email _____
(Email required if you choose online access to magazines. – See below for price.)

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

This signature is to certify that I am in general agreement with the “Aims and Purposes” and the “Definitions” of American Atheists, as listed on the other side of this application.

Signature _____ Date _____

NEW: All membership types (except Associate) now include a subscription to *American Atheist* magazine! So, it is no longer necessary to pay a separate fee for the magazine.

Please choose a membership type: (Please see the back of this form for information about tax deductions.)

Simply mark the type you want and enclose your check, money order, or credit-card information.

(For online magazines, multiple years, or foreign addresses, please see the additional calculations below.)

- ☐ **Individual:** \$35 per year
☐ **Couple/Family:** \$60 per year Name(s) of partner/family members: _____
☐ **Associate:** \$15 per year (magazine subscription not included)
☐ **Distinguished Citizen** (65 or over): \$25 per year (copy of ID required)
☐ **Student:** \$25 per year (copy of ID required)
☐ **Wall Builder:** \$150 per year (includes an American Atheists tote bag)
☐ **Life Member:** \$1500 (includes a life member pin and your name in the magazine)

Price for multiple years: Price/Year Number of Years Price Before Discount
\$ _____ X _____ = \$ _____

Optional online access to magazines (not available with Associate membership):

- ☐ I'd like to access magazines **online only**, INSTEAD OF receiving printed ones. (same price)
☐ I'd like to access magazines online AND receive printed ones. **Add \$15 per year:** \$ _____

Subtotal: Subtotal: \$ _____

Discount for multiple years: 2 years – 10% discount; 3 or more years – 20% discount - \$ _____

For foreign addresses, please add an additional postage fee, unless you chose “online only.”

For Canada and Mexico, add: \$10 per year X _____ years = \$ _____

For all other countries, add: \$30 per year X _____ years = \$ _____

Additional donation: ☐ I (we) also wish to make an additional donation of \$ _____

Total: **(All payments must be in US dollars.) Total:** \$ _____

- ☐ I am paying by check or money order ☐ I am paying by credit card (see below).

Credit card number: _____ Expiration date: ____/____ (month/year)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please mail this form to: American Atheists, P.O. Box 5733, Parsippany, NJ 07054.

AIMS & PURPOSES

American Atheists, Inc. is a nonprofit, nonpolitical, educational organization dedicated to the complete and absolute separation of state and church, accepting the explanation of Thomas Jefferson that the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was meant to create a "wall of separation" between state and church.

American Atheists is organized:

- To stimulate and promote freedom of thought and inquiry concerning religious beliefs, creeds, dogmas, tenets, rituals, and practices;
- To collect and disseminate information, data, and literature on all religions and promote a more thorough understanding of them, their origins, and their histories;
- To advocate, labor for, and promote in all lawful ways the complete and absolute separation of state and church;
- To act as a "watchdog" to challenge any attempted breach of the wall of separation between state and church;
- To advocate, labor for, and promote in all lawful ways the establishment and maintenance of a thoroughly secular system of education available to all;
- To encourage the development and public acceptance of a humane ethical system stressing the mutual sympathy, understanding, and interdependence of all people and the corresponding responsibility of each individual in relation to society;
- To develop and propagate a social philosophy in which humankind is central and must itself be the source of strength, progress, and ideals for the well-being and happiness of humanity;
- To promote the study of the arts and sciences and of all problems affecting the maintenance, perpetuation, and enrichment of human (and other) life; and
- To engage in such social, educational, legal, and cultural activity as will be useful and beneficial to the members of American Atheists and to society as a whole.

DEFINITIONS

Atheism is the Weltanschauung (comprehensive conception of the world) of persons who are free from theism (free from religion). It is predicated on ancient Greek Materialism.

Atheism involves the mental attitude that unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a life-style and ethical outlook verifiable by experience and the scientific method, independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority and creeds.

Materialism declares that the cosmos is devoid of immanent conscious purpose; that it is governed by its own inherent, immutable, and impersonal laws; that there is no supernatural interference in human life; that humankind, finding the resources within themselves, can and must create their own destiny. It teaches that we must prize our life on earth and strive always to improve it. It holds that human beings are capable of creating a social system based on reason and justice. Materialism's "faith" is in humankind and their ability to transform the world culture by their own efforts. This is a commitment that is, in its very essence, life-asserting. It considers the struggle for progress as a moral obligation that is impossible without noble ideas that inspire us to bold, creative works. Materialism holds that our potential for good and more fulfilling cultural development is, for all practical purposes, unlimited.

INFORMATION ABOUT TAX DEDUCTIONS

IRS rules state that the tax-deductible portion of membership dues can be found by subtracting the fair-market value of any goods or services that you receive in return. For most of our membership types, your dues are actually LESS than the fair-market value (\$40 per year) of a subscription to our magazine. This means that your membership dues are NOT tax-deductible. Life membership dues are also NOT tax-deductible. (If we sold Life magazine subscriptions, they would cost at least as much as life memberships.)

The only membership type that is fully tax-deductible is the Associate membership because Associate members do not receive a magazine subscription. For the Couple/Family (\$60) and Wall-Builder (\$150) membership types, \$40 covers your magazine subscription. The remainder of your dues (\$20 for Couple/Family and \$110 for Wall-Builder) are considered to be a tax-deductible donation. For multiple-year memberships, the same fraction of your dues (1/3 for Couple/Family and 11/15 for Wall-Builder) is tax-deductible (in the year that those membership dues were paid).

Also, any donations that you make IN ADDITION TO your membership dues are fully tax-deductible.

WINTER SOLSTICE

CARDS & GIFTS



Pendant

You'll get many thanks for this shining statement for Atheism. 1-5/8" diameter.
A matching 18" chain is included.

#3179	Symbol Pendant Silver	\$20.00
#3180	Symbol Pendant Gold filled	\$20.00

Smaller Pendant

(1 inch in diameter) available in gold or silver.
A matching 18" chain is included.

# 3182	Silver	\$15.00
# 3183	Gold	\$15.00



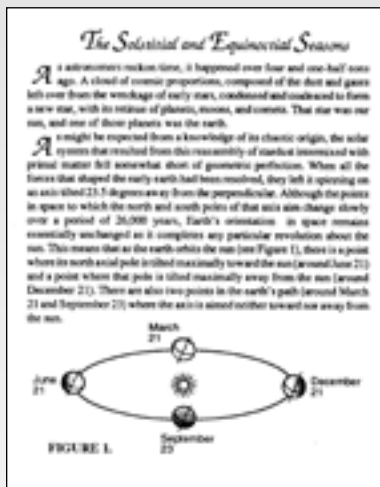
American Atheist Lapel Pin

The lettering around the Atheist symbol proclaims,
"American Atheists, Freedom from Religion."
1/2" diameter.
Cloisonné Pin.

#3230	\$5.00
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Yo- God Detector Key Chain

#7024	\$9.00
-------	--------



A handy handout:

The Solstitial and Equinoctial Seasons by Frank R. Zindler

Sending your seasonal greetings to a friend, but unsure of how to explain what the Solstices and Equinoxes are all about? Help has arrived! This small leaflet explains these astronomical events scientifically and poetically. Easy to read, with clear diagrams, The Solstitial and Equinoctial Seasons will tell your friends not only what these events are, but why they should be celebrated. Printed on attractive blue parchment, they are a perfect insert into your seasonal letters and greeting cards. Or pop one in with your presents! They are sold in sets of two dozen. 3-3/4" x 4-3/4". 4 pp.

#2006	Solstice Explanation. (2 doz.)	\$3.00
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Atheist Bling!

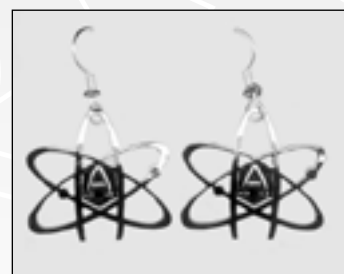
Rhinestone Atheist symbol pin.
1" diameter

#15011	\$12.00
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Blue Lanyard

#9103	\$8.00
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Earrings

Don't think of these dainty earrings as a "statement for Atheism."
Think of them as exquisite because that's the best description.
Available with a French hook ear wire only. 1" diameter.

#3175	Pierced Earring Silver	\$10.00
#3176	Pierced Earring Gold	\$10.00

BUMPER STICKERS

\$2.00 EACH

stock #3270	God Is Santa Claus For Adults!
stock #3301	Merry Solstice!
stock #3302	Solstice is the reason for the season.



Contrary to Popular Opinion

I'm the reason for your holiday season.
Inside has jolly Solstice doggerel

Woodcut on ivory. 5 1/2" x 4 1/4"
#7006 \$18.00

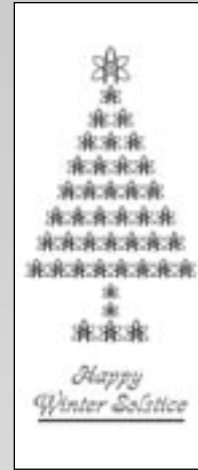


Tobogganing Penguins

Red, green, and black on white.

Blank interior. 5 1/2" x 4 1/4".

#2077 \$18.00



Atheist Symbol Tree

Green, gold, and red

Atheist symbols adorn this card.

Inside is "And a Great New Year."

3 1/2" x 8 1/2"

#7010 \$18.00



Orangutan

Blank on the inside

for your own

Solstice tidings.

3 2/3" x 8 1/2"

#2014 \$18.00

Stonehenge

A colorful print of Stonehenge at the solstice.

Inside is a cheerful wassail verse.

4 1/4" x 5 1/2"

#7004 \$18.00



Crucified Bunny

Message inside:

"In a World of Myths, Isn't it Nice to Know
There's Something Meaningful We Can Celebrate?
Wishing You a Very Merry Winter Solstice

#2080 \$18.00

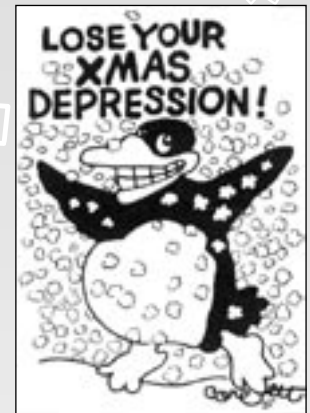
Penguin Xmas Card

Inside, "Celebrate Winter Solstice."

Green and black on white

4 1/4" x 6"

#2030 \$18.00



Jesus Ski Team

Inside: "Greetings of the Winter Solstice Season."

Black on white. 5 1/2" x 4 1/4".

#2027 \$18.00



Solstice Ban

Yellow and red on

5 1/2" x 4 1/4" (open

#2078 #



Remember

Whose Birthday It Is this Season. Silver star over teal.

Inside all the Solstice deities.

5 1/2" x 4 1/4"

#7005 \$18.00



Solstice Greetings

Inside, "Greetings of the Solstice season."

Earth tones on beige.

4 1/4" x 5 1/2"

#2068 \$18.00



Atheist Symbol Card

Red and green Atheist symbols bedeck this card. The interior message completes greetings "of the Winter Solstice Season."

3 1/2" x 8 1/2"
#2034 \$18.00



Cardinal Card

Inside is, "Have a cheery Winter Solstice." Brown, red, black, and sky blue on white.

4 1/4" x 5 1/2"
#2073 \$18.00

Inner Card

on white.
s to 16 1/2" x 4 1/4")
18.00



Winter Stream Scene

#2011 \$18.00



Sun Face Card

Opens to say
"Winter Solsticecelebration!"

4 1/4" x 5 1/2"
#2042 \$18.00



Einstein Card

Inside is "May your Winter Solstice Season bring you equations of grandeur and gastronomic delights!" Brown, aqua, red, and black on white.

4 1/4" x 5 1/2"
#2041 \$18.00



Solar Card

Inside is "Greetings of the Winter Solstice Season."

Blue, green, yellow, and black on white.

5 1/2" x 4 1/4"
#2066 \$18.00



Mother Orangutan with Two Babies

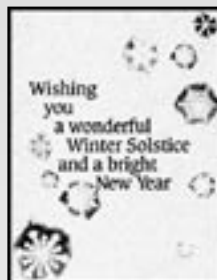
Inside is, "From One Primate to Another, Happy Solstice." Brown and Green.

5 1/2" x 4 1/4"
#2072 \$18.00



Owl in the Woods

#2008 \$18.00



Snowflakes

#2013 \$18.00



Icicle

#2009 \$18.00



Brr!

#2040 \$18.00



Sun Collage

#2043 \$18.00



Ingersoll

#2071 \$18.00

Axial Tilt

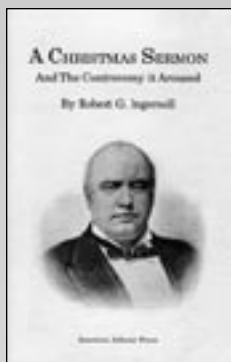
Message inside: Happy Winter Solstice
#2079 \$18.00

All sets of a dozen cards are in color and include matching envelopes. They may be ordered from American Atheists, Inc. for price indicated. Please see order form for member discount and shipping and handling.

Unless otherwise noted, all our Winter Solstice cards carry the following explanation of the Winter Solstice celebration:

December 25, by the Julian Calendar, was the winter solstice. This day, originally regarded by the pagans as the day of the nativity of the sun, the shortest day of the year—when the light began its conquering battle against darkness—was celebrated universally in all ages of man.

Taken over by the Christians as the birthday of their mythological Christ, this ancient holiday, set by motions of the celestial bodies, survives as a day of rejoicing that good will and love will have a perpetual rebirth in the minds of men—even as the sun has a symbolic rebirth yearly.



A Christmas Sermon and the Controversy It Aroused

by Robert G. Ingersoll

On Dec. 19, 1891, Robert G. Ingersoll's Christmas Sermon was printed in the Evening Telegram newspaper. It was immediately answered by the Rev. Dr. I. M. Buckley, editor of The Christian Advocate, the recognized organ of the Methodist Church, under the title "Lies That Are Mountainous." In his reply he suggested that a newspaper which published the words of Ingersoll should not be allowed in the homes of Christians or Jews – thus calling for a boycott of the paper. The Telegram promptly accepted the issue raised by Dr. Buckley and dared him to do his utmost. This set off a fight that was heard around the world. Stapled. 47 pages.

#5148

#6.00



The Winter Solstice Book

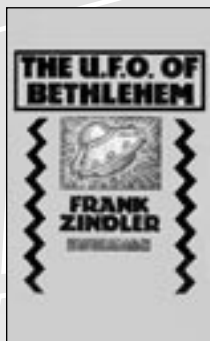
by Ellen Jackson

illustrated by Jan Davey Ellis

This is a beautifully illustrated children's book. In simple, easy-to-read print, it covers Winter Solstice celebrations of past and present cultures. Children learn about various Solstice traditions including Roman, British Isles, Scandanavian, and Native American. The book includes a simple explanation of the seasons and a story adapted from a Cherokee tale of creation. 32 pp.

#5590

\$7.95



The U.F.O. of Bethlehem

by Frank R. Zindler

Each time Christmas rolls around, newspapers carry articles purporting to be factual discussions of the Star of Bethlehem, quoting astronomers and religious writers. How reliable are such proofs of the story of Jesus' miraculous birth? Not very reliable at all, explains Frank Zindler. He demonstrates that the story of the three Magi and the Star of Bethlehem is not only scientifically impossible, it is biblically implausible. Stapled. 14 pages.

#5568

\$4.00



Door TV's GODSTUFF

Three Shows:

- 1) "God Stuff" – the original television pilot produced by Joe Bob Briggs that was too hot for commercial TV.
- 2) "The Joke's on You" – the fabulous heavy metal anthem to televangelism produced by the spirit-ripping band XLR8. and
- 3) "Channel Surfing Through Religious TV" – 30 minutes of non-stop Oral, Benny, Bob and the gang offering free tickets to the Promised Land. See Jonathan Bell condemn "intellectuals" to hell! See Don Clowers explode on stage! See 25 Jewish Rabbis line-dance with chairs on their heads! See Bob Tilton cause midgets to grow and squeeze \$1000 vows out of welfare recipients!

VHS Video (78 minutes).

#6001

\$20.00

Beer Is Better Than Jesus

Mug has black letters on clear glass

Side 1:

- Nobody's ever been burned at the stake, hanged, or tortured to death over their brand of beer.
- You don't have to wait 2,000+ years for a second beer.
- There are laws saying that beer labels can't lie to you.
- You can prove you have a beer.
- If you have devoted your life to beer, there are groups to help you stop.

Side 2:

- No one will kill you for not drinking beer.
- Beer doesn't tell you how to have sex.
- Beer has never caused a major war.
- They don't force beer on minors who can't think for themselves.
- When you have beer, you don't knock on people's door trying to give it away.

#6102

\$7.00



CD - Liberty & Justice For All

by Mike Newdow

From the Pledge of Allegiance Blues to EstabliRap, these educational and entertaining songs are sure to have you smiling and humming along

#4550

\$18.00

Cookie Cutter

This cookie cutter is approximately 3" point to point

#7013

\$3.00



Merry Christ Myth

1-3/4" Green Button with red lettering

#6121

\$2.00

American Atheists Mug

This is a big, shiny, hard plastic mug with a travel top. Other side: "Leading The Way for Atheists' Civil Rights".

#6099

\$12.00



Atheist License Plate

For Atheists who live in states where only one end of a car has to have an actual license plate, this is just the thing to mount on the other end!

#3217

\$6.00



Santa Fe style coffee mug

Robin's egg blue with mocha-colored edging along the top.

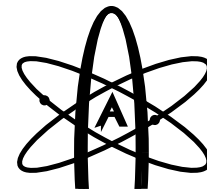
#16050

\$10.00



MAIL ORDER TO:**AMERICAN ATHEIST PRESS**

P.O. BOX 5733, Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733

908-276-7300 *voice*908-276-7402 *fax*

Ordered by: _____

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Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Daytime Telephone (_____) _____

Ship To: *(If different address)*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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For God So Loved The World He Did What?

by Gary J. Whittenberger Ph.D.

The roots of Christianity lie in the Bible's Old Testament, and one of its most important stories (which foreshadows things to come) is the story about Abraham and his son Isaac in Genesis 22:1-19. According to this narrative, God commanded Abraham to kill his only son Isaac by burning him as a sacrificial offering. The loyal Abraham didn't protest and diligently prepared to kill Isaac by tying him down on an altar laden with kindling wood and holding a knife above him. For Abraham so loved his god that he was ready, willing, and able to give his only begotten son to this god. However, according to the story, at the last moment Abraham's deity rescinded the order. An angel, acting as an emissary, told Abraham that he didn't have to kill his son after all. The angel then promised Abraham that he would have many descendants and that they would be prosperous and victorious over enemies.

Essentially, this is a case in which a particular alleged god required a person to kill a loved one in order to prove his love for that god and then rewarded the person for preparing to comply! Most Jews, Christians, and Muslims, conditioned to an uncritical acceptance of their "holy books", see no problems with the story. They not only accept it as literally true but view it as providing a valuable moral lesson. To the Atheistic Humanist, however, the story advocates a barbaric moral prescription: Prove your love to one person by killing another one you love! In his Categorical Imperative, Immanuel Kant suggested that we test moral prescriptions by imagining their universal application. So, suppose we put this to the test. Imagine if everyone killed a loved one to prove his love to another who required this action. The results would be disastrous! Not only is it ethically wrong for a person (even a god, if any existed) to require others to prove their love in this way, it is also wrong for a person to comply or prepare to comply with such a heartless and unfair request or command. An all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good god would be a just and rational god. If such a just and rational god existed, he would surely not impose such a requirement on his subjects.

We can imagine Abraham expecting some grand display of love from God in return for his willingness to kill his son. Sure enough, according to the story, God came through by providing Abraham with many descendants who would achieve successes and victories against enemies. Thus, we are led to believe that compliance with an irrational, cruel command will be rewarded. The whole story is morally repugnant.

In the New Testament story about the crucifixion, death, resurrection, and atonement of Jesus, the tables are turned, but the theme is the same. Here, God himself arranged for his only son Jesus, whom he dearly loved, to be tortured and killed in order to prove his

love for humankind. God placed his son in a situation and required his son to behave in such a way that, God knew in advance, would result in the torture and murder of his "only begotten son". From an Atheistic Humanist perspective, God's behavior in this story is even more reprehensible than Abraham's behavior in the earlier story. God actually implements a killing, and there is nobody who stops him at the last moment. One might think that the Holy Ghost, being an equal partner in the Holy Trinity, would have intervened in the nick of time and said "God, you really don't want to do this. Step back, take a deep breath, and reconsider the situation." God's arrangement of the torture and killing of his only son is primitive, barbaric, evil, and just plain wrong! And yet, most Christians throughout the world accept the story as literally true and in celebration parrot the verse "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son..." (John 3:16, KJV). If a just and rational god existed, he would surely not engage in this kind of behavior. Perfectly good gods would find other ways to express their love. Therefore, the most common Christian interpretation of the story is bizarre and ethically wrong, and most or all parts of the story are surely historically false.

All this is bad enough, but things get even worse. It is alleged by Christians that through Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection, their god provided a new forgiveness program to humankind. This implies that the former forgiveness program for humans was inadequate or defective and that their god changed his mind and improved on what he had done earlier. Now, flip-flopping is a big enough problem for modern politicians, but for a supreme god it would be a disaster of epic proportions. All the talk of a new forgiveness program through Jesus just can't be true. An all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good god would have implemented the perfect justice system at the advent of humankind and would have given Adam and those who lived before Jesus the same rights and responsibilities, rewards and punishments, and justice system as he gave those who lived after Jesus. If this perfect god existed, he would be expected to get it right from the outset. He wouldn't need to tinker with perfection.

What's the deal with forgiveness anyway? According to Christian theology, humans can only be forgiven for their bad acts and beliefs and be given a waiver from eternal damnation by sincerely adopting a particular set of beliefs about Jesus. We will discuss this specific forgiveness program later. For now, however, let us focus on the idea of forgiveness itself. Is forgiveness a good thing--a godly thing? From the perspective of many Atheistic Humanists it is not, because forgiveness subverts justice. We can suppose that for every crime or unethical act and the circumstances under which it is committed there is a proper punishment which can and should be imposed on the

perpetrator. In general, the greater the harm done by the act, then the greater the punishment should be. For example, stealing a candy bar should be followed by a lesser penalty than murdering somebody. In addition to proper proportionality in punishment, two other important principles are fairness and reliability. We can reasonably suppose that for committing the same crime or unethical act under the same circumstances, all people should receive the same punishment. There should be no favoritism shown to one group of people over another or for one person over another. Also, punishment should be reliable or dependable. If a rational punishment has been determined in advance, then it should always be administered when a specific undesirable act is committed, without exception. Any deviation from a 100% application will reduce the rehabilitative and deterrent effects of the punishment.

Imagine what happens when these principles of punishment are not followed. Suppose a robbery is followed by a lighter punishment than trespassing. Suppose people of African descent are given stronger punishments for the same crime or unethical act than people of German descent. Or imagine a system in which persons found guilty of rape are penalized 80% of the time, but are exempted from penalty, i.e. forgiven, 20% of the time. All of these circumstances involve a miscarriage of justice. When a justice system is well designed on the principles of proportionality, fairness, and reliability, which have arisen from the wisdom of human experience, there is no need to inject an element of forgiveness into it. In fact, it seems irrational to do so.

According to Christians, a supreme god can actually forgive people for the act of murder if they sincerely adopt a particular set of beliefs about Jesus sometime before they die. Just imagine if judges in various countries made similar exemptions from punishment for murder. The result would be chaos and a civil rebellion by the families of murdered victims. It is extremely doubtful that a just and rational god would have a forgiveness program at all. With perfect fairness and reliability any god "worth his salt" would administer punishments whose severities and/or durations would be properly proportional to the severities of crimes or sins committed under specific circumstances. If such a god existed, his perfect justice system would neither need forgiveness, nor have it. The Christian doctrine that claims their god brought a forgiveness program to humans through his son Jesus simply cannot be true. The god we've been contemplating wouldn't behave like that.

According to the Christian doctrine of atonement, Jesus died for the sins of all of humanity. As the story goes, God arranged for Jesus to accept the penalties normally due to humans because of their sins through a kind of proxy system. Jesus was sinless and yet was punished as though he had committed sins. Some Christians even believe that Jesus spent a few days in Hell where he accepted the unfair punishment given to him. According to their dogma, because Jesus has already paid for everybody's sins, God is able to grant waivers from damnation to those people who have sinned, asked for a waiver, and in return agreed to sincerely believe a set of propositions about Jesus. This is the picture of atonement given by most Christian apologists. What is wrong with this picture? In the first place, the atonement calculus seems a little fishy. How could one person's stay in Hell for a few days balance out the eternal stays in Hell of tens of billions of people? One can only guess that the Christians think that the suffering of a divine person is so much greater than that of a regular human such that the short intense suffering of the former somehow balances out the interminable intense sufferings of billions of the latter. But the bigger problem with this idea of atonement is that it violates a justice principle of personal accountability. This is the idea that a person should accept the consequences of his own behavior and not transfer those consequences to somebody else. It means that if a person behaves well, then he alone should be rewarded, and if he behaves badly, then he alone should be punished. He should not be able to shift his penalties to somebody else, and nobody else, uninvited, should be able to just take away his earned penalties and then offer salvation deals.

One reason the Christian religion is so attractive to people is that it appeals to their wishful thinking—their wish that they can simply transfer the penalties for their sins to Jesus! "You mean I can get Jesus to take the rap? Where do I sign up?" Such a system of penalty reassignment is unfair and unethical. A just and rational god just would not do this. Instead, he would hold a person individually accountable for his own behavior. The Christian dogma of atonement is not only irrational and unethical, but undoubtedly false.

Just as Abraham expected a reward from his god for proving his love by preparing to kill his only begotten son, according to Christian theology, so too does a supreme god expect a quid pro quo from humans for proving his love to humankind by arranging the torture and killing of his only begotten son as a scapegoat for the sins of the human race. This god supposedly expects that people will return his love by sincerely adopting a particular set of beliefs about Jesus. The full deal is described by the rest of the famous verse in John 3:16, KJV: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The verse suggests that this god offers everlasting life, contingent on a person's acceptance of a few beliefs about Jesus. "Everlasting life" here means not only avoiding the severe and eternal suffering of Hell, but more importantly, relishing abundant and eternal joy in a new life with the Christian god in Heaven. Apparently this god does not require some amount or type of behavior to be performed as penance by a person in order to obtain forgiveness. A stay in some divine work camp is not needed. This god simply requires the sincere, and perhaps public, acquiescence to a set of beliefs about Jesus. A person can avoid the suffering of eternal damnation which he would normally experience by "turning over his life to Jesus". This sounds like a pretty good deal—getting something for nothing or almost nothing. The deal is especially good for the most severe sinners. If it were true, even a person like Ted Bundy, the serial killer of women who was executed in Florida in 1989, could get off the hook

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in an afterlife by trusting in Jesus before he departed his earthly life. No wonder Christianity is embraced by nearly two billion people in the world. But, like Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy, the deal is too good to be true! No just and rational god would implement such an ill-conceived and unbalanced forgiveness program. In a perfect justice system, as we would expect from a perfect god, the deity would not allow a few beliefs to expiate serious crimes or unethical acts. This god would not so easily exempt people from the punishment they deserved.

The fallacy of the Christian forgiveness program becomes clearer when we examine the specific beliefs about Jesus which we supposedly sinful humans must adopt in order to obtain forgiveness. We are expected to believe: 1) Jesus existed. 2) Jesus was without sin. 3) Jesus was the son of a supreme deity named "God". 4) Jesus was crucified and died as a result of his injuries. 5) Jesus was resurrected. 6) Jesus ascended into Heaven to be with God. 7) Jesus atoned for the sins of humanity. And 8) The credit for Jesus' atonement, and thus forgiveness, can be accessed by proper belief. A rational thinker might be able to accept the first and fourth of these beliefs, but only an irrational thinker could accept the other six. Thus, according to Christianity, in order for a "sinner" to be saved from eternal damnation, he must be forgiven of his sins, and this forgiveness is only granted if he accepts a small set of irrational beliefs about Jesus.

Perhaps the Christian salvation deal is not as good as it first appears. Essentially, in return for the Christian god arranging for his son to be tortured and killed in order to prove his love for us, we must prove our love for him by killing our reason. But this can't be true! If he existed, a supreme god as the ultimate creator gave humans the wonderful tool of rational thinking. Can there be any doubt that he would want humans to use it? When humans think rationally in their lives, success is more probable and failure is more improbable. When humans think irrationally, failure is more probable and success is more improbable. Would a god, the creator of our brain with its rational faculty, act like a mad scientist and arbitrarily switch things around so that our use of reason would bring results in the afterlife opposite to what it brings in this life? Of course, he wouldn't! A rational and just god would reward rationality and punish irrationality in any afterlife. Therefore, he would not require humans to adopt a set of irrational beliefs about Jesus in order to secure salvation.

So now we can appreciate the full meaning of John 3:16: For "God" so loved the world that he proved his love by arranging the torture and killing of his only begotten son, so that whosoever accepted irrational beliefs about his son would be exempted from just punishment through a reassignment of penalties to his son and would thereby live happily ever after. This doctrine truly reaches the summit of Mt. Irrationality. This foundation of Christianity impedes the moral development of humanity and should be rejected. Even a supreme god, if he existed, would oppose it.

In today's world, especially in the United States, there is a strong taboo against criticizing religious beliefs, especially those of Christianity. However, if the recent sky-rocketing book sales of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and others is any indication, the taboo is starting to crack. This is happening none too soon. The light of rationality must be directed at all religious beliefs. Although this endeavor may prove painful for some in the short run, it will pay huge dividends to humanity in the long run. From the preceding discussion we can see that the standard Christian theology in regard to the crucifixion, death, resurrection, and atonement of Jesus has several core beliefs:

1. One person X should sometimes request or command another person Y to prove his love for X by killing somebody else Z whom Y loves.
2. If asked or commanded by person X, another person Y should prove his love for X by killing somebody else Z whom Y loves.
3. One person X should sometimes spontaneously kill somebody else Z he loves in order to prove his love for another person Y.
4. If a person X or group of persons has rationally developed a justice system which works perfectly well, then he or the group should change it.
5. If a person X or group of persons has rationally developed a justice system which works perfectly well, then he or the group should subvert it by exempting some people from just punishment after they have behaved wrongly.
6. If a person X or group of persons has rationally developed a justice system which works perfectly well, then he or the group should subvert it by sometimes transferring penalties earned by one person Y to another person Z who has not earned them.
7. If a person X or group of persons has rationally developed a justice system which works perfectly well, then he or the group should subvert it by exempting some people from just punishment after they have behaved wrongly if they agree to accept irrational beliefs.
8. There exists a god X who would do or has already done these things.

All these core beliefs are irrational, unethical, and/or false. They are examples of the viruses of the mind which Dawkins and others have described. They are not the kind of ideas that promote a better world, a world of peace and cooperation among peoples. Atheistic Humanists already reject these beliefs. Now is the time for the rest of society to do the same. In the end our survival as a species may depend on it. *

Gary Whittenberger Ph.D., a skeptic and freethinker for most of his life, now lives in Tallahassee, Florida. After working as a psychologist who developed and managed drug abuse programs in prisons for over 20 years, he now spends most of his time writing on philosophical and religious topics. Comments and questions on his article may be addressed to tallyskeptic@comcast.net



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Albert Ellis: A Glimpse At A Real Guru

by Gil Gaudia, Ph.D.



In early spring of 1977, I read an advertisement in the latest issue of the “American Psychologist” that changed my life forever. It described a one-year post-doctoral fellowship with world-renowned Dr. Albert Ellis, one of the twentieth-century’s leading theorists in psychology, at the famous Institute For Rational Emotive Psychotherapy (RET)* in Manhattan. As a young professor teaching developmental psychology, I had always admired Ellis for his pioneering work in psychology, as well as for his reputation as a freethinker. He was an outspoken humanist, skeptic, and an Atheist, and I looked forward to becoming an RET practitioner. My wife, Jeanne had recently received an invitation to be an artist-in-residence at Edward Albee’s “Barn” in Montauk, so now we both had a chance to further our careers together in New York City.

When I told Jeanne about applying for the fellowship we both could not contain our excitement and we danced around the living room singing “We’ll take Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island too.” We had both been born and raised in New York City and had left there twenty-five years before.

In July, I received the notice that I had been awarded the fellowship, and Jeanne and I rented out our home in Western New York State to three college students and took an apartment on East 10th Street in lower Manhattan. On September 6, the Tuesday after Labor day, I left the small apartment and rode uptown on the IRT subway, headed for “The Institute,” which was located in the Roosevelt Mansion on East 65th Street. The beautiful old brownstone had been the town house of Franklin and Eleanor and still had historic building status, but now served as the clinical offices, classrooms and lecture hall for Albert Ellis and his attractive assistant, Janet Wolfe, as well as the rest of the staff. Albert and Janet also lived together on the top floor.

All of the fellows were supposed to meet Dr. Ellis for the first time at one o’clock, but at 12:45 we had already assembled in the waiting room outside his conference room. “We” included the eleven other fellows who had come from all over the world, Holland, England, California and even someone from Australia. I was one of the few from the State of New York. We were all very keyed up as we gathered in the anteroom just outside Ellis’s office, and the susurrations were palpable.

At two minutes after one, Ellis stuck his head out of his office door and yelled, “WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU WAITING FOR? GET THE FUCK IN HERE! When I say 1:00 o’clock I mean one o’clock not fucking five after one....” And on and on. He must have said “fuck” and “fucking” twenty times in the tirade that lasted for the next five minutes. The twelve of us were dumbstruck. For several seconds we were literally frozen with confusion and stood like statues in the waiting area, some even thinking that Ellis was joking. As he saw our paralysis, he became even louder and continued at the high pitch of a cornet blasting staccato notes. Slowly we all began trooping meekly into the inner sanctum of Albert Ellis, world renowned leader in psychology, founder of Rational Emotive Therapy, 1970 Humanist of the Year and expert on emotional control and interpersonal relations, who at the moment sounded very much like a college football coach whose team was behind by thirty points at half time. This was the guy for whom I had just left my home in the possession of three college students for a year, and for a minute I almost turned around and walked out of the Roosevelt Mansion, thinking to myself “What the Hell did I get myself into?”

For the next fifteen minutes we fellows listened to Albert lay down the operating rules of his program, as we slumped into the plush leather couches and armchairs around the perimeter of his huge conference room—and not a soul uttered the slightest word of protest, or any words at all. Meanwhile, Albert was stretched out on his recliner in one corner of the mahogany-paneled room, munching on a sandwich, and between swallows, continued outlining the program and issuing orders. Surely, I thought, they were all as astounded as I was, and I sat there thinking about the huge loss to me and Jeanne if I were to act out my impulse to tell the guy off and stomp out of the room in protest ... and so I managed to keep quiet.

It was just as well that I did, because over the course of the following ten months I found myself enjoying the most exciting and rewarding experience of my professional career and my respect for Albert Ellis eventually became as high as for any person I have ever met. I also learned an important lesson in self-control that day and for the rest of my life I was far less inclined to shoot off my mouth when a situation started out looking ominous. I also found out that Albert Ellis was most generous of his time, not only to his clients but to the fellows and other professionals he dealt with as well. He was not a phony or a hypocrite, and so he did not often engage in very much small talk, but when you spoke to him about psychology or yourself, he was right there and listened intently.

Midway through the program when we fellows had all developed an easygoing, cordial camaraderie with Ellis, I asked him one day about his behavior on that memorable occasion of our initial meeting. Ellis smiled his crooked grin and shrugged it off saying, "It was like the farmer with the two-by-four and the mule. I was just getting your attention." It also emerged in a later discussion that Albert was a diabetic and it is very probable that his blood chemistry was somewhat out of equilibrium that afternoon.

In the course of our regular meetings with Ellis, I encountered the wide-ranging ideas and opinions of the man who had developed a formidable school of psychology based on the teachings of the stoic philosophers, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Epictetus' famous epigram, "Men are not disturbed by things, but rather by their view of things," forms the basic idea underlying cognitive psychology, and its promulgation by Ellis led to a twentieth-century revolution against the Freudian dictums that humans are enslaved by their emotions and can only hope to triumph over them by mysterious interpretations of dreams and unconscious processes by gurus and other mystics.

"Mysterious interpretations" require shamans and priests, and science eschews such individuals because knowledge is not the exclusive possession of the few members of a cabal. Rational thought could be attained by anyone who wanted it, Ellis taught us, and I became a believer in RET, one of the few beliefs I ever held; other than my belief that science and logic were the only means by which knowledge could ever hope to be obtained. I had intuitively known that the absurd constructs of the psychoanalytic school—the Oedipal Complex, for example—were anti-scientific, almost spooky in their formulation, and that many other psychological theories which were derived from Freud and his cohorts could never become part of science.

One of our required duties as fellows was for the twelve of us to meet with Albert on Wednesday afternoons and present to him our cases in "supervision." Everyone was free to offer comments, advice or criticism, and Albert was always helpful to those of us who were new to the role of trying to help others solve the emotional crises of their lives. His favorite question was, "What is he telling himself?" By this was implied the basic theme of RET; find out what are the client's "view of things" that are disturbing to him and help him to change that view.

During these sessions, Albert always encouraged the fellows to deal with our own problems and to use the supervision as a group therapy session, and I took advantage of that opportunity to get feedback from one of the world's greatest psychologists (but I'm still as nutty as ever; no reflection upon Albert.) Ellis usually conducted his sessions very casually dressed, either in open-toed sandals or stocking feet. Occasionally he wore shoes that had the leather cut away from the toes so that his white socks stuck out, and to this day, my visual image of our sessions were of Albert's white-stockinged toes facing us.

To me, the most important benefit I obtained from my association with Dr. Albert Ellis was that finally, I had come upon a way of

viewing the workings of the mind that was consistent with what science believed. Most importantly, I became aware that some leaders in scientific fields were not afraid to reveal their objection to organized religious dogmas, and Albert Ellis was one of those few. Not many prominent scientists, the majority of whom must be Atheists, are willing to openly declare their Atheism. Albert, as with every other viewpoint he held, was never afraid to declare his position, and to some extent, I became more willing to be open about myself in all matters where social taboos tended to stifle free expression.

When I was writing my semi-autobiographical novel in 2003, I wrote to Albert and asked him if he minded my inclusion of the "opening day" incident in the book. I sent him a copy of the chapter and asked him to comment on anything I had written and especially to check for inaccuracies. His answer was, "That's about how I recall it, Gil, except that I disagree with you about me saying 'fuck and fucking twenty times.' I probably said it only about five times."

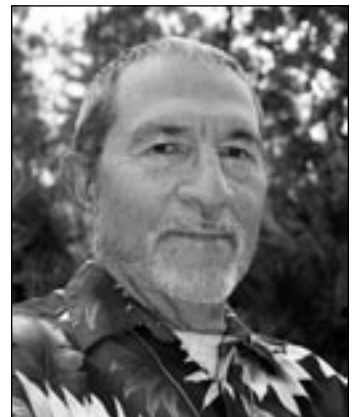
Albert was, (as are many gurus) a true ascetic. He eschewed fancy clothes, bought few material things and did not drive a car, nor did he even own one. His work was his life. If he had a failing, it was his devotion to his work and the scrupulous management of the time required to carry it out. This was probably part of the reason for our never-to-be-forgotten first encounter with him. Punctuality and efficiency were what helped enable him to write over seventy books, and maintain a busy speaking schedule.

When we had become colleagues and I occasionally sat next to him in a social setting, usually after a presentation or celebration of some kind at "The Institute," he never departed from "character," by which I mean, Ellis was the same Ellis, no matter where you encountered him. At a luncheon at the Institute one afternoon, Jeanne invited him to come to our apartment where she offered to cook a delicious Italian meal for him, to which he responded with his characteristic smile, "Who has time to eat? My schedule doesn't allow for dinner invitations. I'm sorry, I can't." And that was that.

The last time I saw Albert was at a convention of psychotherapists in Orlando Florida about five years ago. He was the featured speaker, and when he climbed the steps to the stage of a huge, packed auditorium, the overflow crowd, many of them seated on the floor in front of the platform, rushed forward to snap photos and try to obtain his autograph. "Get back in your seats," Albert barked, "We've got work to do. This fucking session only lasts another fifty-five minutes." I was one of the photographers who turned and scurried back to my seat.

* When I was a fellow, the name of Ellis's theory was Rational Emotive Therapy-RET was the way I knew it. Later on the word "Behavior" (and the letter "B") was added, and currently it is called Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). *

Gil Gaudia is professor Emeritus at the SUNY college at Fredonia. He was also a clinical psychologist and a fellow at The Albert Ellis Institute in Manhattan, and now devotes his time to writing. His novel, Outside, Looking In, is a thinly-veiled autobiography of an Atheist. Dr. Gaudia can be reached at jggaudia@comcast.net



Celebrating Superstition

Why Halloween Is A Beautiful Thing

by Aimee Romero

All Hallows Eve... a chilly autumn night set aside for children to dress up like ghouls and superheroes and take to the streets to gather goodies from generous neighbors. It's a night for adults to recapture the imagination and silliness of childhood and dress up in tasteless and provocative outfits too thoroughly inappropriate for any other day of the year. Jack-o-lanterns, cobwebs, and candy corn (one of the few candies designated for consumption only once a year, other than those Easter-only marshmallowy chickens called "Peeps") audio cassettes of screeching sounds and black lights shining down on inviting front porches... it's the exact same scene every 31st of October. There's one religious holiday on the calendar that I truly enjoy, and that's Halloween.

The ancient, superstitious origins of Halloween date back thousands of years. The History Channel shares a brief history of the autumn festival:

Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in).

The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom, and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1. This day marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death. Celts believed that on the night before the new year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. On the night of October 31, they celebrated Samhain, when it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth. In addition to causing trouble and damaging crops, Celts thought that the presence of the otherworldly spirits made it easier for the Druids, or Celtic priests, to make predictions about the future. For a people entirely dependent on the volatile natural world,



these prophecies were an important source of comfort and direction during the long, dark winter.

By the 800s, Catholicism had spread throughout Europe, and Pope Boniface IV decided to replace the Celtic festival with a church-sanctioned holiday called "All Saints' Day," a time to honor dead saints and church martyrs. Two centuries later, another Catholic holiday appeared called "All Souls' Day," a time to honor the dead with a celebration virtually identical to the traditional Samhain. Nice try Pope, but apparently our ancestors liked their bonfires and costume parties just the way they were, and the custom survived the attempted cultural hijacking. Not even the church could steal our favorite ghoulish event.

Over the years, Halloween has taken some interesting cultural spins like "Punkie Night" celebrated in Somerset, England, and Dia de Los Muertos celebrated in Mexico, which was originally an Aztec tradition that was co-opted by the Catholic Church (All Souls' Day) and has since evolved into a Mexican version of Halloween.

Of course, despite Halloween's longevity and culturally-diverse appeal, not everyone's a fan of the festival of ghosts and goblins. Some superstitious folks are dodgy about celebrating what they think is real "evil" and don't seem to get that the secular celebration of this ancient festival is just all in good fun. Wikipedia has a bit about how some conservative religionists shy away from the party.

The majority of Christians ascribe no doctrinal significance to Halloween, treating it as a purely secular entity devoted to celebrating imaginary spooks and handing out candy. The secular celebration of Halloween may loom larger in contemporary imagination than does All Saints' Day.

The mingling of Christian and Pagan traditions in the development of Halloween, and its assumed preoccupation with evil and the supernatural, have left some modern Christians uncertain of how they should react towards the holiday. Certain fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants, along with some Eastern Orthodox Christians as well as conservative Jews and Muslims, strongly object to the holiday and refuse to allow their children to participate, citing its pagan origins (and, in some cases, its Roman Catholic connections) as well as what they regard as its Satanic imagery.

It's too bad that those kids have to miss out, but it brings me back to my original point: why is Halloween such a wonderful religious holiday? The reason is simple: because we don't believe in it anymore. We keep the tradition because it's beautiful. We honor an ancient tribal people whose lives must have been so difficult, and that which they didn't know, so terrifying that the only answers they had were based on superstition. Two millennia later, we know that evil spirits do not destroy crops. We now know that a huge harvest moon will not summon ghosts of the dead to terrorize us on this night. We know these myths were just a way for primitive people to better cope with the fact that there was so much about the universe that they didn't understand. That's all religion has ever been: just made-up answers to the questions of the world. Halloween is really a celebration of the human spirit; a recognition of our ancestry and our pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the world around us.

The secularization of ancient religious holidays has already begun in many parts of the world. We celebrate secular versions of holidays like Christmas and Easter just as we do Halloween, purely for our own childhood nostalgia, a sense of community and the beauty and imagination the festivities have sparked throughout history. For Freethinkers, the birth of a god from a virgin mother and a magical resurrection are given the same credence as the Celts' mischievous crop-goblins. As we become a more and more freethinking world, eventually all religious holidays will be celebrated with this same humanist spirit, as a gentle tribute to a people who simply didn't know any better.

Have a safe and happy Halloween. *

Aimee Romero reports from Charlotte, North Carolina where she is a broadcast journalist. She is also a freelance news and opinion writer and staff contributor to Freethought Forum and a member of the local American Atheists affiliate. She can be reached at aimee@freethoughtforum.org



ask the expert

Jesus Demands Obedience To Jewish Bible?

by Frank Zindler

Recently I got in an argument with a Christian who claimed that the "abomination" stuff in Leviticus is not part of the Christian religion. But I seem to remember that Jesus demanded that his followers obey every word of the Jewish Bible. Do I remember correctly?

Can you give a reference in the Christian Bible where he says this? This seems like something you might want to have on your home page, as Christians seem to want to claim they have rejected the "bad parts" of the Jewish Bible?

Hope you can help! Thanks!

*Robert Bernstein,
Goleta, CA*

Frank Zindler Replies:

Thank you for writing to American Atheists concerning the Hebrew Bible and the so-called New Testament. You are correct that Jesus is quoted as requiring belief in the Jewish "Law." In Matthew 5:17-20 (RV) we read:

"think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Some apologists try to twist this passage to mean that Jesus fulfilled the law and thus it is no longer in force. But note that the law will be in force "till heaven and earth pass away." The last time I checked, earth at least had not yet passed away. *



Russian Orthodox Church Calls For Teaching Of Morals In School. Deplores 'Ideology Of Science'

by Mansur Mirovalev
Associated Press Writer

MOSCOW (AP)—A Russian Orthodox Church spokesman said Wednesday that the country's schools should teach religious principles and moral values, and he accused some leading scientists of trying to impose the "ideology of science" on the education system.

Father Vsevolod Chaplin was responding to a group of prominent scientists who recently protested the church's growing influence on society.

Chaplin urged teachers to instruct children not to follow the examples of "homosexuals and prostitutes."

His remarks come after 10 leading academics wrote to President Vladimir Putin last month to protest the introduction of a class on Orthodox Christian culture. The group also opposed an initiative to give universities the power to award degrees in theology.

"The scientific viewpoint cannot be a state ideology," Chaplin told journalists at a discussion between clerics and scientists. "It never made anybody happy and failed to answer fundamental questions of human existence."

The church, he said, should play a leading role in setting moral standards for youths.

"We have to show them an unhappy homosexual in his 40s and an aging prostitute," he said. "Otherwise, in 30 years our children will turn into animals influenced by the cult of glamour and debauchery."

The Russian church has experienced a revival since the collapse of the officially atheist Soviet Union in 1991. It now claims more than 27,000 parishes and 700 monasteries throughout the former U.S.S.R.

Government and religion are separated under Russia's post-Soviet constitution, but some Russians atheists claim that religious symbolism is as omnipresent and oppressive as atheism was during Soviet times.

An outspoken Orthodox cleric at Wednesday's conference called on the government to exercise more control over religious affairs and help the church fight superstitions spread on its behalf by poorly educated priests.

"We are ready to put part of our life under government control," said theology professor Andrei Kuraev. "The church has been living without censorship for too long."

The revival of the Orthodox church's centuries-old ties to the state, meanwhile, have prompted concern among religious minorities and scientists.

"Education of schoolchildren should be based on teaching scientifically proven knowledge," said Andrei Vorobyev, a leading medical researcher and one of the authors of the letter to Putin. "Interference of the church in government affairs (has) always been deplorable in Russian history."

Administrators at dozens of Russian schools say the class on Orthodox Christian culture will be taught in the new academic year, but attendance will be voluntary. *

Afghan Hostage Crisis Forces Church To Evaluate Thriving South Korean Evangelical Work

by Anthony Deutsch
Associated Press Writer

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (AP)—The pews of the 12,000-seat auditorium are packed for Sunday services and the capital's skyline is aglow with red neon crosses. Those not inside the Yoido Full Gospel Church—the world's largest congregation—can watch the sermons online in 16 languages.

South Korea has an ancient tradition of Buddhism, but in recent times evangelists have put Christian-

ity on track to becoming the nation's dominant faith. Korean missionary work, second only to the United States, places it at the forefront of the global search for converts.

But the kidnapping of 23 church volunteers in Afghanistan July 19 is forcing churches to think again.

In recent years, hundreds of volunteers have been expelled from Afghanistan, Egypt and China, while others were detained or killed in Iraq. Some press ahead in Somalia, even though it was declared off-limits by the Korean government.

Two of the hostages in Afghanistan—a clergyman and another man—have been shot to death and abandoned by the roadside. The fate of the remaining five men and 16 women, remains uncertain.

The church and the hostages' relatives say the volunteers were working on humanitarian projects and were not evangelizing.

They are mostly in their 20s and 30s, and belonged to the Presbyterian Saemmul Community Church, which has roughly 3,800 followers, in the town of Bundang just south of Seoul.

Many attended Bible school together and trained as nurses, teachers, musicians, engineers, and a hairdresser before setting off to Afghanistan on a trip headed by a pastor with the Korean Foundation for World Aid, a non-governmental agency guided by Christian beliefs.

There were 16,616 South Koreans posted in 173 countries as of January, according to the Korea World Missions Association.

The country's recent embrace of Christianity, once a tiny minority, has spurred one of the most dramatic national religious shifts in the last century. It now equals Buddhism at around 26 percent out of a population of 49 million, according to conservative estimates. The remainder have no stated religious affiliation.

Americans successfully introduced Christianity to Korea 120 years ago, but it has really gained a foothold since the 1960s, after 35 years of Japanese occupation and the 1950-1953 Korean War that left about 2 million Koreans dead.

South Korean missionary work is driven by a sense of postwar moral debt to the foreign missionaries who built schools, hospitals and orphanages. The church won further sup-

port for helping bring democracy to South Korea in the 1980s.

Christian groups also provide extensive humanitarian help to neighboring North Korea, as well as its citizens who flee into China to escape Kim Jong Il's dictatorship.

At U.S. theology centers, Korean missionaries are trained to work in potentially hostile environments by teaching culture and language rather than preaching.

"Many (Korean) ministers, theologians, and seminary professors have been educated in the U.S.," Sung-Deuk Oak, an assistant professor of Korean Christianity at UCLA, told The Associated Press. "American theology is powerful in Korea."

Cross-culture church planting, as it is known in Christian circles, has become "a worldwide trend" that is popular at Korean's dominant Presbyterian church, he said.

South Korean missionary work targets a geographical region of the northern hemisphere, known as the "10/40 window," between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, said Pastor Oh Sung-kwon, Secretary General of the National Council of Churches in Korea.

The area comprises roughly two-thirds of the global population—predominantly Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, animist, Jewish or atheist—and 55 countries considered the poorest and least evangelized. Several governments there, particularly Middle Eastern Islamic nations, prohibit Christian aid work and arrest or deport missionaries.

The hostage standoff shows how badly guidelines are needed, Oh said. He feels his government is "too conservative" in assessing potential risks, but acknowledges the church made mistakes.

"It was not a mistake to help Afghans in need, but it was a mistake not to consider security. We are sorry," he said in an interview. "Church leaders are reconsidering our missionary work."

Kim He-jung, a 27-year-old attending services at the Yoido church, said she wrote a will before traveling to Kazakhstan this year on a church trip. "I have received love from God and want to share it. I am ready to sacrifice myself," she said.

Seoul is home to 11 of the world's 12 largest Christian con-

gregations, including Yoido, which began Bible classes in a tent in 1958 and now has 800,000 members and a goal of having 5,000 churches worldwide by 2010.

It runs the Osanri Prayer Mountain retreat, where the devout can lock themselves in cubicles for prayer and fasting, and attracts a million pilgrims annually, tens of thousands of them foreigners.

South Koreans “are very hard-working and deliberate in their faith,” said Amanda Thompson, who attended the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the United States with a sister of one of the slain hostages.

“They are a praying people,” she said. “They have inspired me and I believe that they could do a great work of inspiration for other Christians as well—especially in America.” *

Southern Baptist Seminary To Offer Academic Program In Homemaking

by Rose French
Associated Press Writer

NASHVILLE, TN (AP)—The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary offers coursework in Greek and Hebrew, in archaeology, in the philosophy of religion and—starting this fall—in how to cook and sew.

Southwestern Baptist, one of the nation's largest Southern Baptist seminaries, is introducing a new academic program in homemaking as part of an effort to establish what its president calls biblical family and gender roles.

It will offer a bachelor of arts in humanities degree with a 23-hour concentration in homemaking. The program is only open to women.

Coursework will include seven hours of nutrition and meal preparation, seven hours of textile design and “clothing construction,” three hours of general homemaking, three hours on “the value of a child,” and three hours on the “biblical model for the home and family.”

Seminary officials say the main focus of the courses is on hospitality

in the home—teaching women interior design as well as how to sew and cook. Women also study children's spiritual, physical and emotional development.

Yet the program is raising eyebrows among some Southern Baptists, who say a degree concentration in how to be a Christian housewife is not useful, and a waste of seminary resources.

Seminary President Paige Patterson, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, which has its executive committee headquarters in Nashville, said wives of seminary students asked for the homemaking courses. The program was approved by seminary trustees in the fall.

“We are moving against the tide in order to establish family and gender roles as described in God's word for the home and the family,” Patterson said at the denomination's annual meeting in June. “If we do not do something to salvage the future of the home, both our denomination and our nation will be destroyed.”

Terri Stovall, dean of women's programs at Southwestern, which has its main campus in Fort Worth, Texas, said the purpose of the program is to strengthen families.

“Whether a woman works outside or strictly in the home, her first priority is her family and home,” she said. “We just really want to step up and provide some of these skills.”

Stovall said the homemaking degree is one of 10 women's programs at the seminary and is “only targeted to women whose heart and calling is the home.”

A description of the homemaking program on the seminary's Web site says it “endeavors to prepare women to model the characteristics of the godly woman as outlined in Scripture.”

“This is accomplished through instruction in homemaking skills, developing insights into home and family while continuing to equip women to understand and engage the culture of today.”

The Rev. Benjamin Cole, pastor of Parkview Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, and a frequent Southern Baptist critic, wrote about the homemaking program on his blog.

“At first it was almost incredible to me,” Cole said. “I thought this is not happening. It's quite superflu-

ous to the mission of theological education in Southern Baptist life. It's insulting I would say to many young women training in vital ministry roles.

“It's yet another example of the ridiculous and silly degree to which some Southern Baptists, Southwestern in particular, are trying to return to what they perceive to be biblical gender roles.”

Patterson took a leading role in the 1980s in a successful campaign to oust moderates from leadership posts in the Southern Baptist convention. While he was president of the convention from 1998 to 2000, Southern Baptists issued a statement that women should not be pastors and that wives should “graciously submit” to their husbands.

In 2003, when Patterson left his post as president of North Carolina's Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary to serve as Southwestern's president, he was asked whether women would teach in the seminary's theology school under his leadership.

“The New Testament is crystal clear that pastors are to be men,” he said.

In March, a former Southwestern professor filed a federal lawsuit against the school and Patterson, alleging she was fired from her tenure-track position because she was a woman.

Professor Sheri Klouda was hired in 2002 and was the only woman to teach at the School of Theology. But last spring, school officials informed Klouda that her contract was terminated because she was “a mistake that the trustees needed to fix,” the lawsuit states.

Patterson's wife, Dorothy Patterson, is the only woman faculty member now teaching in Southwestern's theology school.

David Key, director of Baptist studies at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, said part of the reason why the seminary may be introducing the new homemaking program is in reaction to the Klouda lawsuit.

“Women continue to make more inroads into traditional male bastions, which could be provoking Patterson to do this,” Key said. Patterson is “trying to draw the line in the sand of where women need to be.”

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., also offers programs for women, including a 13-hour certificate of ministry studies. Required courses cover child-rearing, “God's plan for marriage,” and managing a budget.

Key said neither seminary will allow women to be pastors, but notes that Southern hasn't “articulated homemaking like Patterson.”

“Southern at least appears to realize the realities of modern day life—that often times husbands and wives must both work outside the home to support the family,” said Key. *

Would-Be Shoe-Bomber Trusts God Will Set Him Free

LONDON (AP)—THE man imprisoned for trying to blow up an American passenger jet with explosives hidden in his shoes says he has no regrets and trusts that God will set him free, according to a British newspaper.

“I had a couple of good dreams about my situation changing for the better ...” Richard Reid reportedly wrote from prison, the Daily Mirror said Monday.

Reid is serving a life sentence at a maximum-security federal prison in Florence, Colo. after a 2001 attempt to blow up a Paris-Miami flight. He was subdued by passengers and crew as he attempted to ignite his sneakers.

The Mirror did not say when the letters were written or to whom they were sent, although Reid addresses his father, Robin, in some passages.

He asks his father whether he has been praying five times a day, and says his aunt could not have reached heaven if she died while believing in Christianity.

“What you wrote about Aunt Lynn being in a better place, you should know that while Allah is merciful and forgiving, this applies only to those who upheld His rights, at least at a basic level,” the newspaper quotes him as writing.

The Mirror did not disclose how it obtained the letters, which came with an undated photograph of Reid sitting on a cot in a white prison uniform. *

A REALIZATION

by Gena Marie Hendrix

Briefly I think, "...if only I did believe, if I could believe—it is now that I would be praying."
Then I come to my senses and realize what, in my head, I was just saying.
I laugh that the thought had even crossed my mind,
I have never needed a god, prayer or anything related to the "divine".
I pull myself together because I am all I have to make things right.
I begin to think and—low and behold—the answers come quickly into sight.

Suddenly the problems that seemed so overwhelming and sad
Become less of a burden as I recall life lessons that I've had.
The problems are still there but when it is for myself I think
The severity, the hopelessness and the doom all begin to sink.
I know that I can overcome this and all else that comes unto me.
Simply because I think, the cures, answers and means become so plain to see.

I never rely on a god that doesn't exist; I don't wait on divine intervention.
Nothing in my life has ever been achieved without my personal attention.
And as I look around at strangers, family, friends and all the religious on earth;
The same is true for them but they have been brainwashed in times of trouble—or since birth.
Their life in this world has now become a farce and with false hope they're daily embattled;
When if they would open their minds, look at reality and think—they wouldn't be so addled.

Those who claim to be so happy, alive and joyous because of their belief in religion
Miss so very much of life's wonders and possibilities while they stay focused on a delusion.
I believe that this one life is all that I will ever live; I am glad that I am an atheist
Because of an open mind and a hunger for knowledge, I feel there's nothing in life I've missed.
I've had pain and troubles; I've had pleasures and happiness and everything in between.
I hold only myself accountable for it all and yet, my life is one of the happiest I've ever seen!



Gena Hendrix is an Atheist who has lived in Georgia all her life. Though her entire family believes in the "Christian God", Gena has been an Atheist for as long as she can remember and will be for the duration of her life. She has been married to another Atheist for 23 years and says that they are extremely happy people. She can be reached at jhendrix101@bellsouth.net

Foxhole Atheist of the Month

Sgt. Steven L. Secor



I grew up in a very casually religious household. While there was a vague reverence for the Christian god neither of my parents ever tried to push a particular belief system on me or force me to attend any kind of worship service. My mother was especially “hands off” in her approach, encouraging my siblings and me to question and not to just accept what we were told.

I have been an Atheist as long as I can remember. There was no specific occurrence that brought about my Atheism; I simply never had any religious belief and one day I put a name to it. I’ve identified myself as an Atheist ever since.

In early 2003 I enlisted in the Infantry and later attended Airborne school. After graduating Airborne school I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division at Ft. Bragg, NC and deployed to Iraq twice, once in 2004 and again in 2005.

After leaving Ft. Bragg for the 25th Infantry Division at Ft. Richardson, AK, I deployed to Iraq again in the fall of 2006 and am still here as of this writing (Jul 2007).

As “foxhole” moments go, those times when Atheists supposedly fearfully turn to a god, I will relate two from this deployment. Both happened in early 2007.

The first occurred while I was on a Humvee mounted patrol in western Iraq. My vehicle was crossing a small dirt bridge over a canal when it was struck by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). The blast destroyed the engine compartment, buckled the armor of the cabin portion and left the remainder of the truck perched in the blast crater. The depth of the crater pinned most of the doors shut, making it very difficult for everyone in the truck to exit (except the

driver, his door was blown off entirely). Being trapped inside an immobile truck while my comrades outside engaged the enemy was an uncomfortable experience, but it never occurred to me to ask a fictional deity for help. I simply fell back on my training and continued the fight.

In the end everyone made it out mostly intact, with only a short hospital stay for the driver. Our good fortune was a combination of good armor, poor timing on the enemy’s part and the excellent response of the other members of my platoon who were with me that day.

A few weeks later during another operation my best friend in the unit was badly wounded by a sniper during an ambush. I was the closest to him and was able to get him into a vehicle for evacuation to our base just a short distance away. Once there, our medics immediately went to work on him.

Meanwhile the enemy had broken contact and the patrol returned shortly after the medics had begun working. Another soldier in my unit approached me and told me not to worry, that god was looking out for our friend. All I felt was disgust that someone would offer such a lie and puzzlement that anyone would be comforted by it. Once again, prayer didn’t enter my mind as an option. I washed the blood off my hands, switched out my empty magazines for full ones and prepared to medivac my friend to the surgical center at the larger nearby base once the medics stabilized him.

In the end our medics, and then higher medical services, were able to save my friend’s life and he should make a complete recovery.

In both cases it was the skill, courage and determination of the men I served with that saved lives and gave me something to count on. That is why Atheism is such an inspiring worldview for me. It teaches that we have only ourselves to rely on and encourages people to make the world a better place; no one else will do it for us.

When I get back from Iraq I’ll be spending a few more years in Alaska. I grew up in upstate New York.

I’ve been married for five years and we just had twin boys this spring. My brother and two sisters, all older, live in NY along with my father. My mother died right before I deployed.

When I’m home I mostly read a lot and take turns ruining dinner with my wife. Neither of us can cook at all.

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