



# THE SECULAR HUMANIST PRESS

*Freethought Journal of the Humanists of Washington*

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Summer 2007

## RESIGN

by Keith Olbermann

*[The following call for the resignations of President Bush and Vice President Cheney was delivered on MSNBC's Countdown on July 3, 2007.]*

"I didn't vote for him," an American once said, "but he's my president, and I hope he does a good job."

That -- on this eve of the 4th of July -- is the essence of this democracy in 17 words. And that is what President Bush threw away yesterday in commuting the sentence of Lewis "Scooter" Libby.

The man who said those 17 words -- improbably enough -- was the actor John Wayne. Wayne, an ultra-conservative, said them when he learned of the hair's-breadth election of John F. Kennedy instead of his personal favorite, Richard Nixon in 1960.

"I didn't vote for him but he's my president, and I hope he does a good job."

The sentiment was doubtlessly expressed earlier, but there is something especially appropriate about hearing it now in Wayne's voice. The crisp matter-of-fact acknowledgement that we have survived, even though for nearly two centuries now our Commander-in-Chief has also served simultaneously as the head of one political party and often the scourge of all others.

We as citizens must, at some point, ignore a president's partisanship. Not that we may prosper as a nation, not that we may achieve, not that we may lead the world -- but merely that we may function.

But just as essential to the seventeen words of John Wayne, is an implicit trust -- a sacred trust: That the president for whom so many did not vote can, in turn, suspend his political self long enough, and for matters imperative enough, to conduct himself solely for the benefit of the entire Republic.

Our generation's willingness to state "we didn't vote for him but he's our president, and we hope he does a good job," was tested in the crucible of history earlier than most -- and in circumstances more tragic and threatening. And we did that with which history tasked us.

We enveloped our President in 2001. And those who did not believe he should have been elected -- indeed those who did not believe he had been elected -- willingly lowered their voices

and assented to the sacred oath of non-partisanship.

And George W. Bush took our assent and re-configured it, honed it, shaped it to a razor-sharp point, and stabbed this nation in the back with it.

Was there any lingering doubt otherwise, or any lingering hope, it ended yesterday when Mr. Bush commuted the prison sentence of one of his own staffers.

He did so even before the appeals process was complete; did so without as much as a courtesy consultation with the Department of Justice; did so despite what James Madison -- at the Constitutional Convention -- said about impeaching any president who pardoned or sheltered those who had committed crimes "advised by" that president; did so without the slightest concern that even the most detached of citizens must look at the chain of events and wonder: To what degree was Mr. Libby told to "break the law however you wish -- the President will keep you out of prison?"

In that moment, Mr. Bush, you broke that fundamental compact between yourself and the majority of this nation's citizens -- the ones who did not cast votes for you. In that moment, Mr. Bush, you ceased to be the President of the United States. In that moment you became merely the President of a rabid and irresponsible corner of the Republican Party. And this is too important a time, Sir, to have a Commander-in-Chief who puts party over nation.

This has been, of course, the gathering legacy of this Administration. Few of its decisions have escaped the stain of politics. The extraordinary Karl Rove has spoken of "a

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**SECULAR HUMANISM** is a rational, non-theistic, naturalistic philosophy which supports intellectual freedom, free inquiry, self-responsibility, and scientific progress for the benefit of humankind. When applied to everyday decision-making, Secular Humanism provides a foundation for ethical conduct and human compassion without the need of salvation or supernatural guidance.

permanent Republican majority," as if such a thing -- or a permanent Democratic majority -- is not antithetical to that upon which rests our country, our history, our revolution, and our freedoms.

Yet our Democracy has survived shrewder men than Karl Rove. And it has survived the frequent stain of politics upon the fabric of government. But this administration, with ever-increasing insistence and almost theocratic zealotry, has turned that stain into a massive oil spill.

The protection of the environment is turned over to those of one political party who will financially benefit from the rape of the environment. The protections of the Constitution are turned over to those of one political party who believe those protections unnecessary, extravagant, and quaint.

The enforcement of the laws is turned over to those of one political party who will swear beforehand that they will not enforce those laws. The choice between war and peace is turned over to those of one political party who stand to gain vast wealth by ensuring that there is never peace, but only war.

And now, when just one cooked book gets corrected by an honest auditor, when just one trampling of the inherent and inviolable fairness of government is rejected by an impartial judge, when just one wild-eyed partisan is stopped by the figure of blind justice, this President decides that he, and not the law, must prevail.

I accuse you, Mr. Bush, of lying this country into war.

I accuse you of fabricating in the minds of your own people a false implied link between Saddam Hussein and 9/11.

I accuse you of firing the generals who told you that the plans for Iraq were disastrously insufficient.

I accuse you of causing in Iraq the needless deaths of 3,586 of our brothers and sons, sisters and daughters, friends and neighbors.

I accuse you of subverting the Constitution, not in some misguided but sincerely motivated struggle to combat terrorists, but to stifle dissent.

I accuse you of fomenting fear among your own people, of creating the very terror you claim to have fought.

I accuse you of exploiting that unreasoning fear, the natural fear of your own people who just want to live their lives in peace, as a political tool to slander your critics and libel your opponents.

I accuse you of handing part of this Republic over to a Vice President who is without conscience and letting him run roughshod over it.

And I accuse you now, Mr. Bush, of giving, through that Vice President, carte blanche to Mr. Libby to help defame Ambassador Joseph Wilson by any means necessary, to lie to Grand Juries and Special Counsel and before a court in order to protect the mechanisms and particulars of that defamation. You gave your guarantee that Libby would never see prison, and, in so doing, as Ambassador Wilson himself phrased it here last night, you became an accessory to the obstruction of justice.

When President Nixon ordered the firing of the Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox during the infamous "Saturday Night Massacre" on October 20th, 1973, Cox initially responded tersely, and ominously.

"Whether ours shall be a government of laws and not of men is now for Congress and, ultimately, the American people."

President Nixon did not understand how he had crystallized the issue of Watergate for the American people.

It had been about the obscure meaning behind an attempt to break in to a rival party's headquarters and the labyrinthine effort to cover up that break-in and the related crimes.

And in one night, Nixon transformed it.

Watergate -- instantaneously -- became a simpler issue: a President overruling the inexorable march of the law by insisting -- in a way that resonated viscerally with millions who had not previously understood - that he was the law.

Not the Constitution. Not the Congress. Not the Courts. Just him.

The twists and turns of Plame-Gate, of your precise and intricate lies that sent us into this bottomless pit of Iraq; your lies upon the lies to discredit Joe Wilson; your lies upon the lies upon the lies to throw sand at the "referee" of Prosecutor Fitzgerald's analogy. These are complex and often painful to



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follow, and too much, perhaps, for the average citizen.

But when other citizens render a verdict against your man, Mr. Bush -- and then you spit in the faces of those jurors and that judge and the judges who were yet to hear the appeal -- the average citizen understands that.

It's the fixed ballgame and the rigged casino and the pre-arranged lottery all rolled into one -- and it stinks. And they know it.

Nixon's mistake, the last and most fatal of them, the firing of Archibald Cox, was enough to cost him the presidency. And in the end, even Richard Nixon could say he could not put this nation through an impeachment.

It was far too late for it to matter then, but as the decades unfold that single final gesture of non-partisanship, of acknowledged responsibility not to self, not to party, not to "base," but to country, echoes loudly in history. Even Richard Nixon knew it was time to resign

Would that you could say that, Mr. Bush. And that you could say it for Mr. Cheney. You both crossed the Rubicon yesterday. Which one of you chose the route no longer matters. Which is the ventriloquist and which the dummy is irrelevant. That you have twisted the machinery of government into nothing more than a tawdry machine of politics is the only fact that remains relevant.

It is nearly July 4th, Mr. Bush, the commemoration of the moment we Americans decided that rather than live under a King who made up the laws, or erased them, or ignored them -- or commuted the sentences of those rightly convicted under them -- we would force our independence and regain our sacred freedoms.

We of this time -- and our leaders in Congress, of both parties -- must now live up to those standards which echo through our history: Pressure, negotiate, impeach -- get you, Mr. Bush, and Mr. Cheney, two men who are now perilous to our Democracy, away from its helm.

For you, Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney, there is a lesser task. You need merely achieve a very low threshold indeed. Display just that iota of patriotism which Richard Nixon showed on August 9th, 1974.

Resign.

And give us someone -- anyone -- about whom all of us might yet be able to quote John Wayne, and say, "I didn't vote for him, but he's my president and I hope he does a good job."



"YOU KNEW THAT BUSH WAS EITHER ON THE BOTTLE OR OFF HIS MEDS WHEN HE CONCEDED THE IRAQ-VIETNAM ANALOGY IN AN INTERVIEW THE OTHER DAY. AS ONE OF OUR WAGGISH READERS NOTED (AND IT SOUNDS LIKE A LENO LINE): THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IRAQ AND VIETNAM IS THAT BUSH HAD A PLAN TO GET OUT OF VIETNAM." BUZZFLASH.COM, 10/20/06

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

**FRIDAY, JULY 27, 7:30 – 9:30 PM**

**FILM AND DISCUSSION**

***ROOT OF ALL EVIL?***

HOW will sponsor a showing of Richard Dawkins' controversial video, *Root of All Evil?* This meeting will be free, in Room 6 of the Phinney Neighborhood Center and open to the public.

*Root of All Evil?* is a television documentary, written and presented by Richard Dawkins, in which he argues that the world would be better off without religion. The documentary was first broadcast in January 2006, in the form of two 45-minute episodes, on Channel 4 in the UK.

Dawkins has said that the title "The Root of All Evil?" was not his preferred choice, but that Channel 4 had insisted on it to create controversy. His sole concession from the producers on the title was the addition of the question mark. Dawkins has stated that the notion of anything being the root of all evil is ridiculous. Dawkins' book *The God Delusion*, released in September 2006, goes on to examine the topics raised in the documentary in greater detail.

*Directions to Phinney Neighborhood Center, located at 6532 Phinney Ave. N. in Seattle: From I-5, exit at 50th and travel west for 1.5 miles. At the Woodland Park Zoo, angle right onto Phinney Avenue N. and proceed about 1 mile. A large light blue building with dark blue trim will be on the right. Park in the large lot on the north side of the building.*

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 7:30 – 9:30 PM**

**FILM AND DISCUSSION**

***A CRUDE AWAKENING: THE OIL CRASH***

An unforgettable and shocking wake-up call, the film *A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash* offers the rock-solid argument that the era of cheap oil is in the past. Relentless and clear-eyed, this intensively-researched film drills deep into the uncomfortable realities of a world that is both addicted to fossil fuels and blissfully unaware of the looming "peak oil" crisis.

The screening will be in Room 6 of the Phinney Neighborhood Center (see above for directions).

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2008, 7:30 – 9:30 PM**

**ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING**

Come out to hear annual reports from the board, participate in planning for 2008, and discuss HOW business.

**FREETHINKER:** A Person who rejects authority and dogma, forming opinions about religion on the basis of reason and rational inquiry independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

*American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition*



## SECULAR SEATTLE

Secular Seattle is a social group sponsored by the Humanists of Washington to provide a venue for bringing together Secular Humanists, Atheists, and others unencumbered by religion. Our purpose is to provide an opportunity for people of like mind to meet and have fun together. Secular Seattle events are open to the public. There is no charge; participants pay only for their own restaurant orders.

Secular Seattle's Yahoo Group website is located at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SecularSeattle>. This site is open to the public. It includes a calendar of upcoming HOW events and a convenient way to sign up to receive email reminders of these events. HOW members, SHP subscribers, and non-members alike are welcome at all listed events. Please email the moderator at [tiffany\\_ann\\_27@yahoo.com](mailto:tiffany_ann_27@yahoo.com) if you have any questions or would like to add an event.

Secular Seattle Second Thursday Dinners: Please join us for discussion of current events from a Humanist perspective, or just to visit with like-minded skeptics. Check out the Secular Seattle calendar at the Yahoo Group above or contact Jerry (see below) for the time and location of the next dinner.

We also have many other events (game nights, dancing, hiking, bicycling, etc.). Check our full calendar of events at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SecularSeattle>. You may also contact Jerry Schiffelbein at 425-402-9036 or email him at [jerryschiffelbein@msn.com](mailto:jerryschiffelbein@msn.com).

- The Board of Directors of the Humanists of Washington meets at least quarterly. Members may obtain dates, places, and times by leaving a message on the HOW answering machine at 527-8518. An officer will call you back.
- If you misplace this journal or want to check the calendar of events, call 527-8518 to hear our 24-hour recording of upcoming events.
- To find out more about HOW and view the latest version of the *Secular Humanist Press*, go to our website at [www.humanistsofWashington.org](http://www.humanistsofWashington.org) or email us at [humanists@comcast.net](mailto:humanists@comcast.net).
- NOTICE: The deadline date for submissions to the Fall 2007 SHP is September 1st.

## UNIVERSITY UNITARIAN HUMANISTS

The UU Humanists meet at the University Unitarian Church (6556 35th Avenue N.E. in Seattle) from **7:15 - 9 PM** on the fourth Thursday of each month. The usual meeting format is a 40-minute presentation by a speaker (or speakers) followed by 30-35 minutes of discussion, or to have a topic introduced briefly by a discussion leader, who then moderates an open and free-wheeling discussion for about an hour. Either format may be followed by further informal discussion over coffee or tea until 9PM for those who wish to stay. To be added to the newsletter list, call Jeanette Merki at (425) 821-4605.

Meetings are held in the Knatvold Room (first room on the left, downstairs as you enter from the parking lot). All are welcome.

## Conference Report

Thursday, July 26, 2007

Several of us attended the 66<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the American Humanist Association in Portland, Oregon. Current and past board members will bring you some of the highlights from the conference and report on the happenings from the national scene.

## Looking Ahead

Thursday, August 30, 2007

From a Humanist point of view, what are the national and global issues that concern you most, and what brings you hope for the future. Join us and be prepared to discuss these issues.

## FREETHINKERS UNITED NETWORK

Join us for First Friday discussion group and dinner at the Maple Leaf Chinese Restaurant in Bellevue. We gather at 7:30pm.

Join us for Dim Sum Sundays, 11am, every third month on the 3rd Sunday. We are also seeking actors and improv characters for our not-yet-aired cable show, "The Naked Atheist." See calendar at yahoo groups for updates on these and for other events. By joining the yahoo grouplist, you will receive automatic e-mail reminders of events.

For more information on FUN, go to [www.freethinkersunitednetwork.com](http://www.freethinkersunitednetwork.com) or contact Wendy Britton at [wendita99@hotmail.com](mailto:wendita99@hotmail.com) or 425-269-9108

## HUMANISTS OF NORTH PUGET SOUND

The Humanists of North Puget Sound (HNPS) holds general membership meetings on every Third Sunday. They convene from 11am to 1pm at the Farmhouse Inn, 13724 LaConner Whitney Road in Mount Vernon. Come out and enjoy a good meal and social fellowship with like minded gents and ladies. HNPS posts their upcoming events on their web page at [www.HumanistsNPS.com](http://www.HumanistsNPS.com)

## ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF PUGET SOUND

The Ethical Culture Society of Puget Sound (ECS) meets to discuss and celebrate ethical and humanist living. ECS meetings are held on the First and Third Sunday each month only (not every Sunday) at the Tallmadge Hamilton House in the University District, located at 5225 15th Avenue. NE, Seattle 98105. Doors open at 10:00am and meeting begins at 10:30am. Meetings end approximately at noon. Coffee and snacks are served. Donations accepted.

**NOTE:** ECS does not hold meetings during the summer. We will resume meetings on September 2, 2007. Contact ECS at [info@EthicalCultureSociety.org](mailto:info@EthicalCultureSociety.org).

## EASTSIDE ATHEISTS/AGNOSTICS MEETUP GROUP

Eastside Atheists/Agnostics started because of the long commute to the Seattle meetups. We enjoy a social meeting and share contact information about many local groups. Meetings are held at rotating locations on the third Wednesday of each month at 7 PM.

For more information, see <http://atheists.meetup.com/500>. Meetings have been held in Kirkland, Bellevue, Redmond, Woodinville and Issaquah. We will continue to rotate, looking for opportunities to meet new

individuals on the Eastside. Email us at [atheists-500-announce@meetup.com](mailto:atheists-500-announce@meetup.com).

### JOIN THE DARWIN PARTY by Graham

*[Editors' note: The following is the content of a flyer created by Graham for leaving on the windshields of automobiles displaying the Darwin Fish. We have his permission to print it here and extend his invitation to like-minded readers, especially those who may be feeling a bit isolated in the Olympia area and find it difficult to make it to HOW activities and meetings.]*

THE DARWIN PARTY has lunch at 11:30am every Friday at Anthony's Home Port in Olympia. In honor of the foot-fish displayed on your car (or some other praiseworthy quality of mind or character), you are invited. It is no host, no dues, no fees. The world's problems are solved for the day. Jokes may be exchanged. (When an actual joke is not available, a quotation from Congress or the clergy may be substituted.)

Leave a message at 360-866-1286 by Thursday evening of your intention to try to drop in so we can save you a space. Should your work or other commitments make it difficult for you to break bread with like-minded people, do call, drop a card, or email to say hello anyway. Address: Real World Service, Suite 502, 3403 Steamboat Island Road, Olympia, WA 98502. Email: [therealworld@comcast.net](mailto:therealworld@comcast.net).

### SOCIETY FOR SENSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

Do you have a skeptical opinion about paranormal claims or pseudo-science and can't find anyone with whom you can intelligently discuss it? This is your chance! Society for Sensible Explanations offers an opportunity to connect with others who share a skeptical point of view on various topics. Although the group does not meet on a regular basis, Tim Kammer, President of SSE, keeps a mailing list for notifying skeptics about topics and events of interest. For more information, go to [www.seattleskeptics.org](http://www.seattleskeptics.org). To subscribe, contact Tim at [timk@cablespeed.com](mailto:timk@cablespeed.com).

### HUMANIST MEDITATION

Are you interested in being more mindful of yourself and your environment? Come practice meditation grounded in human nature. We discuss techniques, sit for half an hour, and listen to a reading. We are meeting Wednesdays from 7:30-8:30pm in the theatre on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Good Shepherd Center in Wallingford located at 4649 Sunnyside Avenue North. Beginners welcome.

For more information, contact Michael Waterston by phone at (206)779-1128 or email him at [michaelwaterston@gmail.com](mailto:michaelwaterston@gmail.com).

### SCIENCE ON TAP

Science on Tap is a place where anyone can come to explore the latest ideas in science and technology in a relaxed atmosphere. A forum for discussing science issues with local scientists, Science on Tap is based on Cafe Scientifique. We are committed to promoting public engagement with science and to making science accessible.

What to expect: meetings usually last about one to two hours. The speaker gives a short talk about their area of interest, followed by a break to fill up on coffee and a time for small group discussions. Afterwards there will be a question and

answer session and general discussion of the topic with the speaker and the audience at large.

Monthly meetings take place at the Ravenna Third Place Bookstore in Seattle at the corner of 20th Ave NE and NE 65th Street. Free parking is available.

### HUMANISTS IN PRINT: SHARING YOUR PUBLISHED LETTERS

*[Editors' note: We solicit copies of the printed letters of HOW members, subscribers, and friends for inclusion in this section. Space preference will be given to letters by members.]*

#### Rove Visit

*[Rob Moitoza's first letter of the quarter was printed in the Seattle Times on April 9, 2007]*

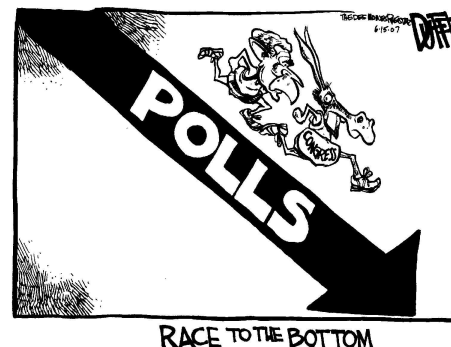
Karl Rove's recent visit to Seattle was about as surrealistic as it gets. First, he sneaks in and out, under cover, in order to avoid "We the People" who he is supposed to serve! Then he appears behind the "Lincoln" podium. I can't imagine a man more diametrically opposed to the work of Abraham Lincoln than Karl Rove! Then he talks about the wild spending Democrats, while his own administration has put us on the verge of bankruptcy with its out of control war spending . . . way beyond anything Clinton could have ever dreamed of. Anyone who believes any of Rove's lies has got to be on another planet. Unbelievable!

#### Slide Down Accelerated In Just The Past Five Years

*[Rob Moitoza's second appeared in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on April 15, 2007]*

Wow! Remember when the GOP used to be the "law and order" party? Your Wednesday article, "The terrorism trade-off," is just the latest example of how far we've come from that in just five years. Not only has the Bush administration undermined any justice for victims of identity theft and white-collar crime, they have violated the U.S. Constitution and even put an unabashed liar in charge of the highest law enforcement office in the land. Wealth and power are the only things that matter to criminals.

As for truth, justice, and the American way, where is Superman when we need him?



"AS DEMOCRACY IS PERFECTED, THE OFFICE OF PRESIDENT REPRESENTS, MORE AND MORE CLOSELY, THE INNER SOUL OF THE PEOPLE. ON SOME GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY THE PLAIN FOLKS OF THE LAND WILL REACH THEIR HEART'S DESIRE AT LAST AND THE WHITE HOUSE WILL BE ADORNED BY A DOWNRIGHT MORON."  
H.L. MENCKEN

### Caught In Crossfire

[The *Seattle Times* printed this third letter by Rob Moitoza on May 16, 2007]

The U.S. government now consists of Republican criminals at war with Democratic cowards, with American citizens caught in the crossfire.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could somehow return to a "government of, by, and for the people"?

"THE ACCUMULATION OF ALL POWER, LEGISLATIVE, EXECUTIVE, AND JUDICIARY, IN THE SAME HANDS, WHETHER OF ONE, A FEW, OR MANY, AND WHETHER HEREDITARY, SELF-APPOINTED, OR ELECTIVE, MAY JUSTLY BE PRONOUNCED THE VERY DEFINITION OF TYRANNY."  
JAMES MADISON, THE FEDERALIST PAPERS

### Ideology Embedded

[The *Seattle Times* printed the following letter by Bill Witherup on May 27, 2007]

Kate Riley's column in Sunday's *Seattle Times* is pretty thorough, giving some copy to both sides of the question. However, she closes with the sentence: "The solutions need to be more carefully pragmatic and less reflexively ideological."

There is no such animal as pragmatism without ideology, and the prevailing ideology is always that of the federal government. It took a little over three years to construct the original Hanford plant, and yet the environment is still not cleaned up. The Columbia River and the Eastern Washington aquifers are radioactive septic tanks.

To even think of adding more nuclear wastes to the environment is hardly helping to save the planet.

Let one of your investigative journalists document the number of cancers in the Tri-Cities and environs. I know from personal experience, having been raised in Richland. My father died of cancer in 1988 from having worked at Hanford for over 30 years. He always told me, "Son, this is one of the safest places to work in the world."

So "follow the money" here -- those who want to build more nuclear power plants only care about profit, profit, profit. It makes me extremely angry to read such propaganda about the safety of nuclear power. Hey, I have a radioactive bridge to sell you.

### Oregon Law

[The following letter by Robb Miller, Executive Director of Compassion & Choices of Washington, was printed by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* on May 29, 2007]

Offer more than pain and suffering to patients It's a shame Joel Connelly didn't do more homework before he wrote his column about aid in dying ("Personal experience shows Gardner is wrong," Wednesday). If he had, he would have learned that consistent independent analysis over nine years has shown that the Oregon law works: it is used rarely, and its use has been entirely voluntary. Nearly all terminally ill patients using the law were in hospice and received compassionate end-of-life care, including pain medications. NONE of the frightening outcomes predicted by opponents have come true.

The legalization of aid in dying in Oregon has resulted in more open conversation and careful evaluation of end-of-life options. Rather than undermining end-of-life care, it has been associated with national leadership in terms of opioid

prescriptions per capita, hospice referral rates, numbers of deaths occurring at home rather than in medical facilities, and training of physicians in palliative (comfort) care.

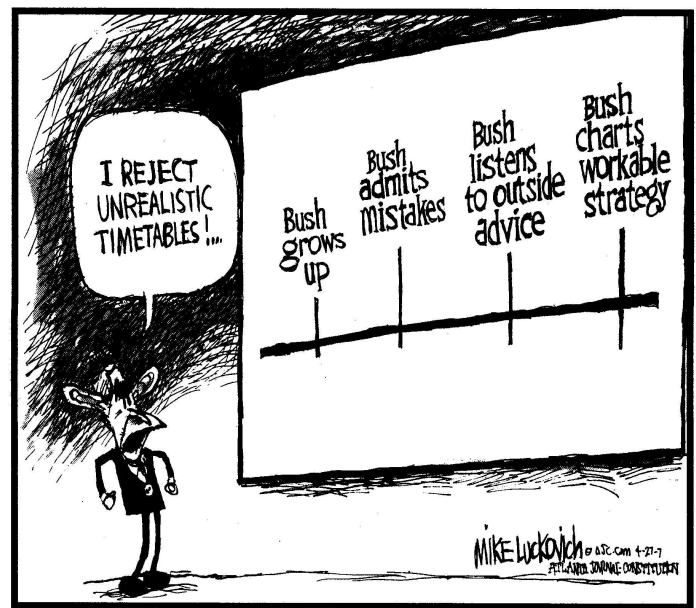
It's wonderful that Connelly's father was able to have the good death he describes. My life partner wasn't quite so lucky. Despite the excellent medical and hospice care he received, he spent his last months of life in grueling discomfort, in a condition that was totally abhorrent to him. Connelly offers nothing but more pain and suffering to these kinds of patients.

The Oregon experience has shown we have nothing to fear and much to gain from legalizing aid in dying in Washington.

### Longer Sentence Not Necessary

[This brief but poignant letter from Rob Moitoza was published in the *Seattle Times* on July 4, 2007.]

IMPEACH!!!!



### UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

[Editors' note: We solicit copies of your unpublished letters to newspapers and other media on topics of interest to our readers. Space preference will be given to letters written by HOW members. ]

### A Real Misnomer

[Jim Rybock sent this letter to the *Seattle Times* on April 7, 2007]

The Discovery Institute is clearly misnamed. Definitions of "discover" incorporate the principles of learning, exploration, and the search for facts or the truth from a position of ignorance or uncertainty. Yet in his column titled "Prophets of the new atheism" (*Seattle times*, 4/6/07) David Klinghoffer

**LIBERAL:** One who has, expresses, or follows views or policies that favor civil liberties, democratic reforms, social progress, tolerance, generosity, and the freedom of individuals to act or express themselves in a manner of their own choosing.

*American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition*



demonstrates not only a lack of rigorous discovery, but a complete distortion of those principles.

There are so many examples, but let's start with his first paragraph where he calls atheism a "new faith being born." Atheism is hardly new. This is a naturalistic worldview that precedes organized religion by millennia.

And to call atheism a kind of "faith" is pure ignorance. Faith is defined as a "firm belief in something for which there is no proof." Religion -- which accepts the concept of a supernatural being watching over and judging our every move, without any proof whatsoever -- is faith. Atheism -- which basically says it makes no rational sense to believe in something for which there has never been any tangible evidence and which is contrary to everything science and our own minds tell us -- is the opposite of faith.

If Klinghoffer and his colleagues were really interested in discovery, they would objectively examine the many other cultures that do just fine without the need for religion and spirituality. Over half of the population of such countries as Sweden, Denmark, Norway and France, for example, are atheists or non-believers, and they seem to function quite well without succumbing to "despair at life's apparent meaninglessness." Or maybe they should look in their own backyard, where they would find that communities like Seattle and Portland are very progressive and socially responsible, in spite of their relatively low percentage of believers and church-goers.

We prefer to read good books, learn new things, and discover the glorious wonders of life on earth. For us, atheism is life affirming.

### **A Response to David Klinghoffer's article "Prophets of the New Atheism"**

[Bill Root sent the following letter to the *Seattle Times* on April 08, 2007]

Typical of many Judaeo-Christian apologists, David Klinghoffer, of Seattle's Discovery Institute, gets it all wrong in his recent op-ed piece ("Prophets of the New Atheism" *Seattle Times* Editorials and Opinions April 6th, 2007). It seems the time-worn canard that atheism is a religion just won't go away. Such muddled thinking shows Mr. Klinghoffer needs to bone up on his terms. Webster's Third defines atheism as: "A disbelief in the existence of deity". Religion is defined by Webster's thusly: "The service and worship of God or the supernatural". The question begs to be asked: How can the absence of religion be defined as a religion? Simple answer: It cannot. It would be like calling a place where a loaf of rye bread has gone missing, "bread". Ridiculous!

Mr. Klinghoffer goes on to say that Richard Dawkins' description of God as, 'arguably the most unpleasant character in fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.' is "unrecognizable to any believer". Perhaps Mr. Klinghoffer should dust off his copy of the Torah and give it an honest and careful read. He will "Discover" that Mr. Dawkins' description is very close to the mark. Christians will find the same material in the first five books of the Old Testament.

Toward the end of his rant, Mr. Klinghoffer states, "But an atheist society could not survive.", without explaining why not. His only models for atheist states are revolutionary France and Russia. France was in the throes of discarding a despotic monarchy and a corrupt church, as was Russia. If Mr. Klinghoffer will crack open his copy of the United States Constitution, he will find a good start to a secular manifesto; the only mention of religion is in the First Amendment -- which clearly indicates the government will not establish a state religion and Article VI, paragraph 3: "...but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or Public trust..."

The tiresome association of communism and atheism is disingenuous. There are plenty of atheists who are not communists. One need look no further than the American Humanist Association: <http://www.americanhumanist.org/> Humanism is a manifestly fair guide that "...affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity." The only thing Humanism lacks is a hard-core dogma filled with threats and irrational rules...and who needs that?

### **Pull the Plug**

[Jim Rybock sent this letter to the *Seattle P-I* on April 16, 2007]

Tom Preston's comparison between Terri Shiavo and the current Iraq situation is most illuminating. The same people in Washington D.C. who argued against the removal of Shiavo's feeding tube are the ones who have refused to consider a troop withdrawal from Iraq. Just as the medical evidence showed without question that Shiavo was brain dead and beyond the point of recovery, evidence of the ever-worsening, irreparable damage to Iraq and its people caused by our military occupation is obvious. At least the Bush administration, the right wing and most of the Republican Party are consistent -- not only don't they care about the truth, they know nothing about compassion.

The only rational option is to pull the military feeding tube from Iraq now and allow the remaining imperialistic intentions for that country -- and its vast oil reserves -- die the death they deserve. Like the Shiavo situation, this is necessary not only for the patient's dignity but, perhaps more so, to recover and preserve our own humanity as survivors.

### **Labor Needs a Free Press**

[Bill Witherup submitted the following letter to the *Seattle P-I* on May 29, 2007]

There is no free press locally. By that I mean in the greater Seattle area, which can be seen as stretching from Seattle to the East Bay and southward to Tacoma. My definition of a free press is a newspaper that covers, and gives voice to, all the social and economic classes of people who live in the wider polis. Let us look at the two dailies, the *Seattle Times* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. I am not interested in the two weeklies, the *Seattle Weekly* and *The Stranger*, for though they refer to themselves as alternate newspapers, they merely ape the dailies, in that they get most of their revenue from advertising. And, as with the two dailies, neither of the weeklies cover labor at length or in any depth.

A press that excludes, for the most part, stories and reportage on labor and the working class is hardly a free press. At least one half of the population is kept out of the news. Look

at the format for both dailies: the front section is national news; second section is local news; third section is arts & entertainment; fourth section is sports, and the fifth section, capitalized here, is Business. And lastly there are the classifieds. The Sunday paper, a meld of both dailies, is so heavy with advertisements that you can bench-press it to stay in shape.

Occasionally news on labor and trade unions appears in the Business section or in the national news. But most of the copy in the Business section gives voice to, and butters up, the corporate world. Labor is almost invisible: the men and women who actually build and maintain the corporate office buildings, who maintain our streets and highways, who build our bridges, grow, process, butcher, catch, and distribute our food are seldom heard from or seen in the pages of our two daily newspapers.

When I asked one of the business editors of the two dailies, via email, why there was so little coverage of labor in the paper, and why the Business section was called the Business section, he replied that it was business that most readers were interested in. He did not say the obvious, that the corporate world provides most of the advertising revenue. (Check out the cost, for instance, for a full page mobile phone ad!)

One of the assumptions of the print media -- and television is not worth talking about in terms of a free press -- is that the working classes do not read and cannot think. Therefore the likes of Bill Gates get a bully pulpit (and he is but one example) to push technology and see to it that as many young people go to university so that he can keep his cubicles on the Microsoft campus full of white collar drones. Little does the newspaper reading public know that in the present greater-Seattle economy -- though this is not necessarily so across the entire United States -- a trade-union worker makes a better living and has better health-care than most university graduates. Granted, this situation may not last forever, given global warming and the repercussions for all of us.

Another side-effect of the lack of labor coverage is that it helps the corporations to spread their mythology and propaganda practically free of charge. The corporate and small-business hostility to the minimum wage and to immigrant workers is but a blatant strategy to suppress wages and to help keep a pool of cheap labor.

The history of corporations vs. labor -- always supported by the courts in favor of the corporations -- is a subject I won't go into in this brief essay. I will close by saying what is obvious to me: without a truly free press, you do not have democracy.

### Climate Warming Hysteria

[Jerry Matchett sent this letter to the *Seattle Times* on May 18, 2007]

When I was in school I was taught that one did not need to read the entirety of a newspaper article. One could read the title and subtitle and the first three paragraphs and get the full gist of the content. For the *Seattle Times* that is apparently no longer applicable.

I refer you to page A6 of this morning's *Times*. The headline says, "Study sounds another alarm on warming." This is followed by the subtitle, "Climate change researchers report that the Southern Ocean's ability to absorb carbon dioxide is fading."

After reading the first three paragraphs I felt it was an alarming story. However, I read it in its entirety and when I got to paragraph six it was reported that this terrible warning is based upon data so unreliable that they can be attributed to sampling errors.

Sampling Errors! Why on earth did you pick those words to use for the alarming title? Your headline should have read, "Equivocal results in another climate change study." You should not have withheld the truth until the sixth paragraph. Our populace is now falsely convinced that climate warming is mostly caused by human activity and we are in a live or die situation. Your news reporting skills help create such panic in people rather than informed reason.

## LETTERS to HOW

**EDITORIAL POLICY:** Alternative rational views or rebuttals from members and friends to articles, letters, or editorial comments presented herein should be no more than two single-spaced 8.5x11 sheets, must be signed, and must include a contact phone number. It is always our intention to edit for conciseness and clarity, not to alter your viewpoint in any way. Letters may also be edited to conform to space requirements. As this is a membership publication, space preference will be given to letters from members.

### Thanks

What a pleasant surprise to open the new SHP today and find my little I.D. poem in it! As I've said before, your journal is one of the most entertaining and instructive things that comes over my desk. Thanks for keeping at it, and doing it so well!

Phil Appleman, East Hampton, New York

### A Definition of Terms

Jess Grant's letter "Militant Atheists: Let the Mystery Abide" (SHP Spring 2007) shows that he's badly confused about what atheism means.

Let's be clear: all atheism states is the simple and obvious fact that there is no evidence for the existence of supernatural beings. That's all.

Contrary to popular misunderstanding, which Grant seems to share, atheism does not say that there are no such supernatural beings. Perhaps there are. And perhaps there are also flying elephants. I don't know. And neither does anyone else.

But all rational people realize that the burden of proof is on the affirmative. So anyone claiming the existence of supernatural beings (or flying elephants, sasquatches, tooth fairies, or the latest sightings of Jesus, Elvis, or Jimmy Hoffa) must prove it. If it is not proven, the claim fails.

And let's remember that my late pen pal Carl Sagan always said that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.

Finally, Grant claims to be a lifelong agnostic. Me, too. But once again, let's be clear about what agnosticism means. The man who coined the term, T.H. Huxley, was most emphatic that it meant one thing only: the ethical principle that it is morally wrong to make a claim unless you have shown the evidence to prove it. That's all.

Rationalism is under attack from all sides, and one of the worst tricks is to set up false claims about what atheism and



agnosticism really say, and then to try to beat us over the head with these phony straw men. I'm going to assume here that Grant is merely honestly confused. But in either case, it is imperative that those of us who are atheists and agnostics don't allow others to falsely define those terms.

Brian Templeton

### A Lesson on the Bible

"Once upon a time . . ." is a common expression to begin fables. These are also words which could be applied to a religious book that has been handed down in much the same way as myths and fables.

When I was much younger and involved in a social group, an illustration of the danger of tale-bearing and hearsay was demonstrated. We numbered about 15 and were directed to sit down and form a circle. (I suspect many others have had a similar experience.) The leader then whispered a brief "story" to the first young person, who was instructed to whisper it to the next, until the last adolescent had heard the story. The leader then asked that last juvenile to relate what had been transmitted. Everyone present was incredulous to learn that the story had metamorphosed into something unrecognizable. Granted, we were in our very early teens, and our minds might well have been devoted to other areas, myriad distractions which seemed important to us. Still, the story was short and simple. Surely, some facet of the story would have emerged that was familiar with the original. This was a single, short story, in language that we understood and spoke, with but a handful of actors. Yet today millions of honest people with conceivably unimpeachable character believe that the Bible has been passed down over eons through untold transmissions in an immutable fashion, whether oral or written.

Considering only one facet, that of (wo)man's fallibility and susceptibility to error, particularly when imparting -- or receiving -- facts and truth via oral communication, the Bible is not what its original authors were attempting to convey.

There are far too many versions of the Bible, over millennia, and errors of all sorts are not merely possible, but probable and factual. The problem is complicated by the great difference in time between the original manuscript, even when it assumed written form from its inception and its oldest extant exemplars. In some instances, this may amount to well over a thousand years of scribal activity. The possibility of inadvertent or deliberate change is something that impacts all manuscript copying. It is always present.

Is it more logical to conclude that an "angel" or a "spirit"

watched over every scribe, guiding his (male only for the Bible, please) hand accurately, correctly, meticulously -- in innumerable copies? Controlling the spoken word, inflection, enunciation and more? Or, is it more reasonable to deduce that humanity had similar -- if not identical -- frailties and imperfections as humans possess now?

The Hebrew language, as well as the Greek, can be particularly difficult, especially as one person dictates a "story" to another. Some groups of words are quite similar, like homonyms, and definitely a potential source of mistakes. On occasion, some words look similar, and it is easy to mistake one for another (witness letter inversions that entirely change the word) and, moreover, quite easy to miss. A scribe could readily and unintentionally duplicate letters or accidentally omit a letter. The Hebrew language doesn't utilize vowels. Different copyists are just as likely to place vowels between different consonants, or select other vowels, depending upon their personal education, inclinations, and dispositions. Variants are apt to be caused by a scribe attempting to make the work more readable by inserting a common word or phrase for his time, replacing an arcane or archaic one.

Numerous versions of the Bible have been produced in the past, under the aegis of myriad church officials. Seemingly, each was intended to clarify or explain or correct another edition that had been circulating but declared to be incorrect by a specific church official. Each version's adherents must have believed that "theirs" was the only proper rendering of scripture, only to have the words superseded at some later time.

There are no explicit or reliable traditions concerning the criteria of canonicity, the authorities that issue canon, or the process that has been adopted and preserved. No more than a plausible reconstruction of the multiplicity of stages can be provided by biblical scholars. If they cannot definitely establish unambiguous fidelity and sanctity in each and every stage -- not merely state that it is "faith" that establishes holiness and God's truth -- canonization of any biblical literature cannot proceed. The books are stories, nothing more, save for those who would follow them from faith, ignoring facts that simply do not support the countless claims of the religious community.

The Bible can be anything its reader wants it to be, but a lot of other literature can rightly perform this "duty." Any reader may opt to believe what is read, whether a novel or a documentary or a scientific article. The Bible relies solely and exclusively on faith, a belief that has no basis in known facts or logic. That seems no different than traditions, legends, folklore -- or myths or fables.

Frank Metzger

### NON SEQUITUR By Wiley Miller



P.S. Your Spring 2007 issue is among the very best, if not the best, I've read. Particularly memorable are the articles "Let Me See If I've Got This Right," by Nancy Greggs and "Four Years in Iraq," by Dr. Adrian Liston. I am always grateful for your generosity, thoughtfulness, and considerate attitude with me.

## A TRANSITIONAL FOSSIL OF RELIGION by Jim Corbett

I recently read an article on the CNN website (April 6, 2007) by Dr. Francis S. Collins, MD PhD, who is the Director of the Human Genome Project. Dr. Collins also has a new book titled, *The Language of God: A Scientist Provides Evidence for Belief*, and one presumes the article was meant to promote the book.

Collins says a big influence that started him questioning his atheistic leanings was that the world of science had no answers for the nagging questions that people tend to ask about the human condition. Questions like, "What is the meaning of life?" "Why am I here?" "If the universe had a beginning, who created it?" "Why do humans have a moral sense?" and "What happens after I die?" were all things that Dr. Collins felt science failed to address.

Collins acknowledges that science has gotten it right on topics like evolution through descent. Since he is the head of the Human Genome Project, we can feel good about the fact that he asserts that if any doubts lingered about evolution using only the fossil record as evidence, the study of DNA makes it abundantly clear that humans are related to all other living things. And he recognizes that this is in conflict with an ultra-literal interpretation of Genesis, but sides with religious thinkers like "St. Augustine, who found it impossible to be exactly sure what the meaning of that amazing creation story was supposed to be." (Actually, I have that same problem.)

Collins boldly asserts that "attaching oneself to such literal interpretations in the face of compelling scientific evidence pointing to the ancient age of the Earth and the relatedness of living things by evolution seems neither wise nor necessary for the believer." I'm in complete agreement with the unwise part, but I think he misunderstands the necessity that fundamentalists feel to retain the utmost in literal interpretations of Genesis. They recognize that the entire story is a house of cards and if they let one card topple, the total structure collapses (i.e., if Genesis is deemed to be simply an allegorical tale, then the entire Bible could be subject to that same interpretation, leaving Jesus and the whole salvation thing as merely a nice story). Collins wraps up the whole thing in a neat little package by waxing poetic with, "By investigating God's majestic and awesome creation, science can actually be a means of worship."

But, wait. I think something much more important is happening here. What struck me was that the premise presented by Collins is, unwittingly, a form of "transitional fossil" along the evolutionary line that leads away from religion and to complete acceptance of science as the only necessary tool for learning about and interpreting the universe in which we live. His observations are like a little mutation in a gene that may help people who are trapped in their fundamentalist way of thinking. And by exposing them to a radical new idea (i.e., Genesis doesn't have to be taken literally) they may move their thinking in the correct direction.

We know that life forms did not emerge all at once in their final iterations. Dr. Collins acknowledges this. Creatures evolve in tiny increments that provide some benefit to the organism and then another change occurs and another and so on until a new entity is created. There is neither a set time schedule nor a preferred end game to the process; it simply changes in the way

that nature provides. Well, ideas evolve in the same way and some ideas require a longer time to be accepted and integrated into a culture than others do.

For example, when Paul of Tarsus ("St. Paul" to some religions) began preaching about a new God named Jesus, shortly after the alleged resurrection of same, he was introducing a wholly new concept to the communities in which he visited. Those people already had gods of their own, with whom, we presume, they were perfectly happy. Those gods had served their purposes for many years and seen the people through thick and thin, to the extent that gods can do that.

So along comes this new idea about a god who sent his son to die, etc., etc., and we all get eternal life if we just play by these rules, yada, yada, yada. And the upshot of all this was that many of the people preaching these new ideas were sent to the lions for asserting such nonsense. But the new idea stuck around and it evolved to incorporate some of the existing lore from the surrounding communities and lo and behold, it became the new religion of the land. But remember this: it took 300 years from the time that Paul started preaching until Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the land.

Now, let's fast-forward a few centuries and what do we find? Charles Darwin comes along and asserts a new scientific theory that upends a number of the core tenets of this now-long-established behemoth of a religion and many people naturally resisted. They were content with their religion, their social structure was built around that religion, people are naturally resistant to change and, of course, they were really invested in the whole "life after death" thing.

But Darwin's idea is compelling so scientists continued to investigate and much to the dismay of the fundamentalist believers in religion, the scientists made an escalating number of discoveries that make it really hard to accept some of the religious tenets on their face. But, as noted above, ideas evolve. So now, instead of rejecting the scientific theory in its entirety (as Galileo was forced to do), the religious community is taking steps to accept the hard evidence. But it continues to pander to their audience with the "soft-sell" stuff of "we can have our cake and eat it too," which is, essentially, the position espoused by Collins.

This transitional phase will make the next phase easier to accept after the next wave of new compelling information is discovered. Scientists will get inside the DNA and unlock its secrets, life forms that share the DNA of earth creatures will be discovered on other planets and numerous presently-unthought-of discoveries will be made. When that happens, new generations will look back and realize that the comment by Collins, in which he says that science cannot answer the questions listed above, is really incorrect. Science CAN answer most of those questions right now -- Collins just doesn't like the answers. And in the future there will be more answers that humanity, guided by science, can fill in.

It took 300 years for Christianity to become fully accepted in the community at large. But Darwin's revolutionary idea was only introduced a little over 150 years ago. So, clearly, more work needs to be done to educate the masses; and patience and perseverance will be needed to wait out the evolutionary process of teaching a society a new set of rules and values. But along the way we should be thankful for the transitional fossils like the one provided by Dr. Collins. That will help move

people away from superstition to acceptance of rational thought.

It can be done, but it will take time. I am grateful for the service Dr. Collins provides by stepping into the role of gene mutation that may ultimately help humanity to move in the right direction.

Humanity needs all the help it can get.

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*"THE MEN THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ADMIRE MOST EXTRAVAGANTLY ARE THE MOST DARING LIARS; THE MEN THEY DETEST MOST VIOLENTLY ARE THOSE WHO TRY TO TELL THEM THE TRUTH."*  
H. L. MENCKEN

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## WHY I'M A HUMANIST

by Rob Moitoza

The other day I was having a discussion on whether being a Humanist meant human beings were "good." I will answer that in a minute, but the question started me thinking about why I began calling myself a Humanist in the first place. I am going to make an attempt here to define what a "Secular Humanist" is to me.

I will begin with the recent demise of the Reverend Jerry Falwell, who actually did me a great service by ranting and raving about those terrible "Secular Humanists." I had never heard either of those terms before, but I figured if Falwell was against them, it might be something I wanted to be. (I always was a rock and roll rebel!) So I did a little research and discovered the Humanists of Washington. I soon concluded that I have pretty much been a Humanist all my life and just didn't know it.

For me, it is relatively simple. A Humanist is someone who believes that human beings are perfectly capable of solving their own problems without divine intervention. Further, if there are things we cannot solve, that's okay too! We do the best we can. The term "secular" just means "wordly" or not associated with any religious dieties. I find that particular term a bit misleading, because there are humanists who may actually have some religious leanings. For example, I know of at least one man who says he is a Zen Buddhist and a humanist. I consider myself to be an "agnostic," or one who simply doesn't know whether there is a god or not, as opposed to an "atheist" who believes firmly that there is no god. So, you don't necessarily have to believe there is no god to be a Humanist. But most all of us "humanists" believe that human beings are perfectly capable of solving our own problems without divine intervention. Some may say, "Then, can you heal the sick?" Sure! We'd give them medical treatment. The religious person would pray. The Humanist would invest in stem cell research.

So, back to the original question. Do we believe human beings are "good?" Not necessarily. We are all capable of great good and great evil. That has certainly been well documented throughout history. But where I differ from a religious person is that I believe we are capable of choosing good over evil, and that we don't need a particular religion or god in order to make that decision. When given the choice, I believe most human beings are "good" people. Christians, on the other hand, believe we are all sinners or basically "bad" people. That's the difference.

So, if Humanists believe that human beings are perfectly

capable of solving their own problems, will we? Maybe not. I admit that the current situation in the world is not looking good! We *are* realists. And we never said being a Humanist was going to be easy! But we are not going to wait for Jesus or some great savior to come down and solve things for us. To me that is just a cop out and a way of avoiding our own responsibility for ourselves and the planet. Besides, it is a waste of time. I'd rather work toward solving climate change than pray that it doesn't happen or hope that some deity will come down and miraculously solve it all for us. And if something like that did happen to occur. I say, "Great! Thanks for the help." But it still wouldn't stop me from continuing my work for the planet and the people right now. Do we stop doing good work just because we think we might not be capable of achieving it? I don't think so.

I remember when I was protesting the Viet Nam war my dad told me that there has always been war and there will always be war. I never understood the point. Was his answer, then, to sit back and do nothing and just let us all destroy each other? A Humanist will always try to do something. Because we may not succeed is not an excuse to stop trying! We are not naive. We know we may not succeed. But to give up and just sit there, that to me is cop-out. Recently president Bush said he would pray for the people who lost their houses in the Kansas City tornadoes. Humanists send money and manpower. That's the difference.

One of the comments I hear the most is, "If there is no God, then life has no meaning?" Well, let's see. Do you have children? Do they give your life any meaning? How about your job? Any meaning there? Do you have any hobbies? Do you like to dance, run, ski, climb mountains? Any meaning for you there? How about music and art? Certainly no meaning there, right? If you walk out your door and you see a beautiful tree or flowers in bloom, do they have any meaning for you? Do you have to believe these things were all created by a God in order for them to have "meaning" for you? I don't. That's why I am a Humanist. When I look at just one awesome picture of the universe from the Hubble Space telescope, that has more meaning for me than all the words in the bible put together. What more can we possibly ask for? Just look around you. That's meaning!

My mom told me not to hit my sisters when I was growing up. That's all the "religion" I need.

Peace!

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*"ALL FREETHINKERS HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO GO PUBLIC. IT IS EASY AND COMFORTABLE TO EXCHANGE THOUGHTS WITH PEOPLE WHO SHARE YOUR POINT OF VIEW. IF THAT IS THE LIMIT OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE FREETHOUGHT MOVEMENT, YOU ARE NOT PULLING YOUR WEIGHT."* CHARLES CHEVES

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## PRO-CHOICE UPDATES

### The Supreme Court Federal Abortion Ban: Disdain and Disrespect for Women by Marcy Bloom

It finally happened.

The US Supreme Court has turned its back on women and rejected its own long-standing adherence to historical legal precedent. By banning a specific abortion procedure that at times is the best and safest technique determined by trained



physicians to aid in the preservation of a woman's fertility, the Court is telling us that the foundation of *Roe vs. Wade*, which legalized abortion in the US in 1973, is up for grabs.

I presume that the justices of the Court now fancy themselves to be doctors and that they now believe they have the appropriate medical training to determine what is best for my life and my health. So politicians and judges may now soon be performing our PAP tests, delivering our babies, counseling us about our pregnancy options, and performing our abortions. Wow.

The proverbial whipped cream on top of the cake: this decision gives the anti-choice, anti-woman movement a very big prize they have been demanding for years. They have done a very powerful and effective job of slowly and incrementally eroding access to safe abortion care at the state level and now the process of dismantling our federal right to abortion has begun.

This decision, which bans some abortions after 12 weeks and could be interpreted to affect earlier procedures as well, was held back by successful legal challenges for more than three years because this new law includes no exception for the health of the woman. In the past, the Court has always considered women's health to be paramount -- a core foundation of *Roe vs. Wade* -- and physicians were considered to be the best trained persons to decide on the type of procedure safest for a particular woman. After all, who else would be? This is the first time that the Court has not affirmed that restrictions on abortion must make exceptions to protect a woman's health.

THIS IS A SEISMIC SHIFT IN THE DISCUSSION ABOUT ABORTION AND THE FUTURE OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IN THE US. I am truly terrified.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, who wrote the decision, stated that the law does not violate the constitutional right to abortion as laid out in *Roe vs. Wade*, which declared abortion to be a part of a woman's constitutional right to privacy. In condescending and sexist terms that show no understanding of women's capabilities as intelligent human beings to choose motherhood, the Court's 5-4 majority have now banned a procedure that the Court found to be disturbing, gruesome, and never necessary. Indeed, the anti-choice movement calls the procedure "partial-birth abortion." What a brilliant smoke and mirrors strategy!

What is "partial-birth abortion?" It is a blatant scare tactic, political jargon invented by the religious right to frighten and confuse the public into believing that women are having abortions moments away from giving birth. It is not only totally inaccurate rhetoric, but it trivializes women's lives, ethics, and decision-making. It is a clever tactic to move the focus away from women and onto medical procedures and the fetus. It actually elevates the status of the fetus above that of the woman.

It is key to remember that women are either having babies

or having abortions. The phrase "partial-birth abortion" is not only a total lie (as if that were not bad enough), but it ignores the complexity of women's lives, our psychological and emotional abilities to fully comprehend, and act on, our own reproductive health choices and determine what is best for our destinies.

I fully understand that many abortion procedures would be considered disturbing by members of the public. Having worked in abortion care for more than 30 years, I have been honored to witness, and aid in the provision, of safe and compassionate abortions for many thousands of women. Dilation and evacuation is the real term for the late -- trimester abortion procedure (of which there are various techniques) that is safe for women. No medical procedure, abortion or otherwise, should be banned because it is gruesome or disturbing. Of course, many aspects of medical care/operations/procedures are upsetting to the untrained eye. Do we then ban them for this reason?

The answer, naturally, is no. Only in the arena of abortion care and women's lives is this even entertained. And now the Court has made it so -- enshrined it into law -- agreeing and accepting false, unscientific anti-choice rhetoric that abortion hurts women by stating that our doctors can never provide a

specific procedure for us. (It is illegal and clandestine abortion that harms and humiliates women, not legal, safe, and compassionate abortion care.) We will soon see further attempts to restrict safe abortion care and reproductive health services on a state level. Older women who may experience high-risk pregnancies are especially vulnerable because prenatal tests such as amniocentesis are often not available until mid-pregnancy. The law also puts younger, and also poorer, women and girls at even higher risk because they are may be unaware that they are pregnant,

and/or have inadequate funds to have abortion procedures earlier in the first trimester, which is when the vast majority (more than 93%) of safe abortions occur in the U.S.

Our right to safe abortion is being chipped away by this Bush-stacked Court. The ongoing disrespect and disdain for women's lives and reproductive justice we have seen under the Bush administration continues to move forward. Not being recognized as capable to guide our own pregnancy choices is pure discrimination and is humiliating enough. It is now the law of the land.

How tragic and ironic. I now work for a reproductive rights organization in Mexico City, where abortion has just been legalized. Colombia, Togo, Ethiopia, and Portugal have liberalized abortion in the last year as well. But here in the U.S., our judges have barged into our exam rooms and knocked down our physicians. We have lost so much already in this country when it comes to freedom, truth, and justice. Now women and their families will lose even more.

The world moves forward, but the U.S. goes backwards for women.



*"SINCE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT APOLOGIES, GEORGE W. BUSH OWES MORE THAN A FEW. IN A JUST WORLD, HE WOULD BE MADE TO PERSONALLY APPEAR BEFORE THE FAMILIES OF ALL THE DEAD, AND ALL THE WOUNDED, IN ORDER TO BEG FOR THEIR FORGIVENESS."*  
 WILLIAM RIVERS PITT

### Quotes from the Freedom From Religion Foundation Contributed by Joan Lawson

"Atheism rises above creeds and puts Humanity upon one plane.

There can be no 'chosen people' in the Atheist philosophy.

There are no bended knees in Atheism;

No supplications, no prayers;

No sacrificial redemptions;

No 'divine' revelations;

No washing in the blood of the lamb;

No crusades, no massacres, no holy wars;

No heaven, no hell, no purgatory;

No silly rewards and no vindictive punishments;

No christs, and no saviors;

No devils, no ghosts and no gods."

-- Joseph Lewis, "Atheist Rises Above Creeds," part of an address on atheism delivered at a symposium at Community Church, New York City, April 20, 1930. Atheism and Other Addresses by Joseph Lewis (1941)

*"RELIGION IS BASED . . . MAINLY ON FEAR . . . FEAR OF THE MYSTERIOUS, FEAR OF DEFEAT, FEAR OF DEATH. FEAR IS THE PARENT OF CRUELTY, AND THEREFORE IT IS NO WONDER IF CRUELTY AND RELIGION HAVE GONE HAND IN HAND. . . . MY OWN VIEW ON RELIGION IS THAT OF LUCRETIVS. I REGARD IT AS A DISEASE BORN OF FEAR AND AS A SOURCE OF UNTOLD MISERY TO THE HUMAN RACE."* BERTRAND RUSSELL

### GUNS DON'T KILL PEOPLE, BULLETS KILL PEOPLE by Dr. Adrian Liston

The tragic recent events highlight the cost of guns to society. Sadly, the events were not isolated incidents -- in 2004 in the United States 29 569 people were killed by guns and 64 389 were injured, an average of nearly 260 people a day. Of the fatalities, 6% were accidents, 56% were suicides and 38% were murders -- giving thirty one gun-inflicted murders every day.

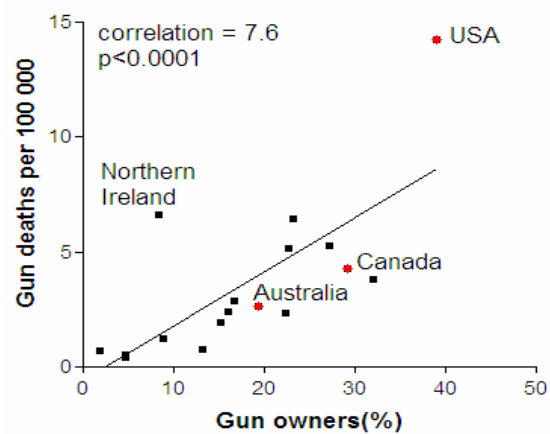
As an Australian who moved to the United States over a year ago, I have learnt how close Australia and the US are culturally (especially the West coast). Essentially, I have only had five surprises where the US is dramatically different to Australia -- how prominent religion is, how vitriolic and corporate politics can be, how frequently high fructose corn-syrup is added to food, how expensive health care is, and how wedded America is to its guns.

Unfortunately, the United States is not the only country with horrific mass shootings. One of the biggest occurred at Port Arthur in Australia in 1996. Australia already had relatively strict gun laws and a low murder rate, so the murder of thirty five people by a mentally ill man with a semi-automatic rifle came as an enormous shock. The horror of the public solidified in a very real political outcome -- the tight gun laws were made even tighter, with stringent conditions required to purchase guns of limited capacity and the compulsory

purchase and destruction of high capacity weapons.

What was the effect of the Australia experiment? The murder rate dropped 17% between 1996 and 2003, going from 1.81 to 1.26 murders per 100 000 people. We can also divide the murder rate into gun-related murders and non-gun murders. In 1996 these rates were 0.59 and 1.21 per 100 000 people, respectively. In 2002 the rates were 0.24 and 1.26 per 100 000 respectively. Therefore the 17% drop in the overall homicide rate was achieved with a 59% decrease in gun-related murders and a 4% increase in non-gun murders. This is an interesting statistic for two reasons: firstly because it shows that removing guns correlated with a decrease in the murder rate; secondly because it disproves the common argument that "if you take guns away, murderers will use something else".

### Does the United States have a gun problem?

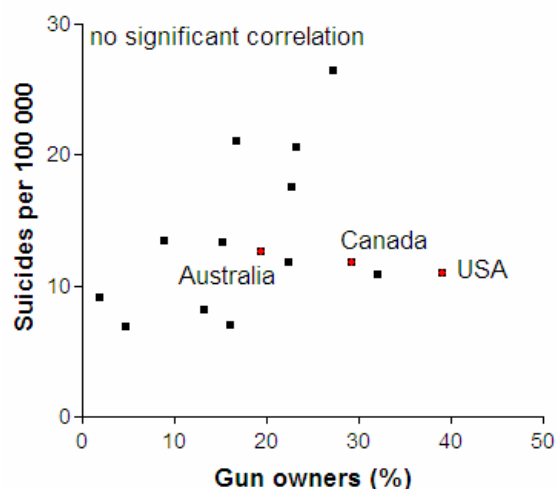


So how does Australia, with tight gun control, compare to the United States, with little gun control? Well the overall homicide rate is four times higher (4.95 per 100 000 people in the US in 2005 compared to 1.26 in Australia in 2002). There are two reasonable explanations for this. The first is that the availability of guns in the United States keeps the homicide rate higher. The second is that American culture is intrinsically more violent than Australian culture, and that gun availability is not associated with the murder rate. Both explanations are plausible, and, fortunately, they can be tested through scientific analysis.

The "gun availability" hypothesis would predict that gun ownership from country to country would correlate with the gun death rate. An analysis of seventeen developed countries (North America, Europe and Australia) shows a statistically significant correlation with increasing gun ownership being associated with increased gun deaths (interestingly, no such correlation is observed with degree of urbanization or income inequality).

Alternatively, the "intrinsic violence" hypothesis would predict that the homicide rate without guns would be higher in the United States. If we compare the murder rates of the United States, Australia and Canada (4.95, 1.26 and 1.83 per 100 000 people, respectively) we can break down the homicides into gun-associated and non-gun murders. As already mentioned, the gun-associated murders are much more prevalent in America (3.37 per 100 000 vs. 0.24 in Australia and 0.5 in Canada). Surprisingly, however, the non-gun murder rate is remarkably consistent between the three countries -- 1.59 per 100 000 in America, 1.26 per 100 000 in Australia and 1.33 per

100 000 in Canada. Americans do not appear to be intrinsically more violent than their cousins.



Besides homicide, the other contributions to gun deaths are accidental and self-inflicted. Logically, restricting the number of guns available will reduce the number of accidental gun deaths (primarily in youths). With regards to suicide, comparisons from country to country show that the number of gun-inflicted suicides correlates with the availability of guns, however the overall suicide rate does not correlate with gun availability in developed countries. This indicates that removing guns from the population would only shift gun-inflicted suicide to alternative methods of suicide and would not change the overall suicide rate.

#### Can the gun problem be fixed?

While the correlation between gun control and homicide is strong between countries it is relatively weak between states within the US. Even districts with stringent gun laws show minor changes in homicide rates. By the majority of measures, it appears that a state-based system of gun regulation has relatively minor effects, as may be predicted with the free flow of people and goods between states. The international data suggests that only federal changes are able to enact major changes in homicide rates.

Here the statistics hit politics. The Second Amendment famously states "a well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." It could be argued that this provision provides unfettered rights to all weapons, or only the right to arm a State Militia. The point is, however, academic. Preceding the Second Amendment was the Declaration of Independence, the historic document that acknowledged "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed . . . It is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness." It is well within the power of Americans to change their constitution to remove guns from their culture for the sake of their safety and happiness.

In practical terms, the United States is unique from Europe, Canada and Australia in one important aspect -- the sheer volume of guns currently in the country. Assuming the political

will was there, could America realistically reduce the number of available guns? The "war on drugs" was not successful in significantly reducing availability of drugs. In several aspects guns are a far simpler target to reduce than drugs. In other aspects the issue is more challenging. On the positive side, drug production is relatively unsophisticated and simple to set up, while gun production requires precision instruments. Economically, the low production costs of drugs create a high profit margin, making losses due to law enforcement acceptable, while the slimmer profit margins for guns would drive the black-market prices beyond the reach of many criminals. In terms of smuggling, drugs are a problem because the neighboring countries have more permissive laws. Guns, on the other hand, would be less of a smuggling problem, due to easier detection and to the tight gun control in both Canada and Mexico (in fact the gun flow is actually out of the United States, with 50% of guns recovered in crime in Canada, and 80% of guns recovered in crime in Mexico, being illegal American firearms). Less encouraging is the nature of the product -- drug stocks are likely to only last weeks or months, while well-maintained guns will last decades. However even this problem is less severe than it appears -- the half-life of guns used in crimes is only around three years due to loss, damage, disposal and recovery. An embargo on gun production would therefore deplete the stock of illegal weapons at a much faster rate than legitimately owned weapons.

#### Ban the bullets

The flip side of the argument is that guns are required for hunting, sport, and self-defense. In the case of hunting and sport, this involves weighing up the right of individuals to pursue hobbies versus of the right of individuals to live in a safe society. Self-defense is a more complicated issue. It is clear that cases do occur where a gun is successfully used for self-defense. However, on average the effect appears to be negative -- guns kept in the home for self-protection are 43 times more likely to kill a family member or friend than they are to kill an intruder. According to the FBI, for every justifiable handgun homicide there are more than fifty handgun murders.

Ideally, of course, America could initiate a federal legislative program which would drop the rate of gun crime without causing undue inconvenience to those who own guns for legitimate purposes. A three-pronged attack may work the best in this regard -- an outright ban on firearms with no legitimate use (assault weapons, silencers, etc); a consistent and stringent system for vetting gun owners; and extremely tight control over the sale of ammunition. A rough scenario for this last could include rifle ammunition being limited to the hunting license (with a limited number of bullets per legal target) and handgun ammunition sale being limited to the firing range (required use on the premises) and the police station (allowing a refill magazine only when a police report of self-defense is filed). Ultimately, however, Americans are going to have to decide if they are prepared to make some cultural changes in order to save the lives of 35 Americans every day.

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Center for Disease Control  
World Health Organisation  
INTERPOL International Crime Statistics

"WE IN NORTH AMERICA ARE NOW CONTROLLED TOTALLY BY THE  
CORRUPTIONS." BILL WITHERUP



## RIGHT-TO-DIE UPDATES

by Midge Levy, Co-President

### Compassion & Choices of Washington State

Following our announcement of a student essay contest on an aid-in-dying topic, we are now pleased to report on the winning essays.

We received many essays that demonstrated considerable thought and understanding of our issue, and in some cases extensive reading. Several of the essayists had witnessed a family member dying a difficult death and reported on their reactions.

We are proud to announce the prize recipients:

- Logan Villareal, 1st Prize \$1,000
- Rebecca Moore, 2nd Prize, \$500

In his essay entitled "Unethical Ethics," 15 year old Logan recognized the "controversy over the rights of medical patients. For years, lawmakers have denied dying patients the right to die painlessly, assisted by a doctor . . .

"... meanwhile a small group continues to press for the rights of individuals to request a peaceful end to their pain-ridden lives. This cannot be done legally in most of the United States."

He discussed end-of-life care with reference to specific cases and stated, "Most often, the technology we use to save lives is really only prolonging the anguish of the afflicted. . . The only relief dying patients can receive comes from painkillers and anesthetics. Meanwhile, lawmakers have denied

their right to die with dignity." He questioned: "Why should someone die a dilatory agonizing death when there are means available to ease this inevitability?"

Logan referred to opposition arguments claiming similarities with Nazi practice, which he refuted: "Of course this is a very silly argument . . . these people did not want to be killed . . . Under the laws of Oregon, it is not the doctors' right to kill dying patients, but rather a dying patient's right to receive the professional aid of a doctor."

He described the Oregon law and attempts by other states to enact similar laws, arguing that "Voter opposition against a patient's right to receive aid in dying comes from those ignorant of what aid in dying really is"

In his conclusion Logan stated, "If other states would use the Oregon Act as a model, many could be spared so much suffering. It isn't rational that what is ethical in Oregon is not considered to be ethical in Washington or in any other state."

Rebecca Moore, 18, titled her essay "Right To Die." She wrote a touching account of her grandfather's terminal illness, describing his deterioration and loss of independence as "almost unbearable." She observed that "The quality of life confined to a hospital bed is hardly an existence . . . He didn't want to live such a pathetic existence anymore."

She quoted Dr. Kevorkian: "In America doctor-assisted suicide should be legal. Our bodies are our own. . . If American doctors can allow a person to starve and dehydrate until death by removing feeding tubes, and slowly suffocate by removing breathing machines, why can't these same doctors give their patients the means to safely and painlessly end their own lives?"

Rebecca claimed, "The right to doctor-assisted suicide should be protected by the government because it is a human and religious right." She referred to the Bill of Rights and pointed out that "By allowing states to deny citizens who feel it is appropriate to end their own lives that opportunity, they are denying the person's religion and going against the Bill of Rights." She reviewed the Dutch and Oregonian laws, pointing out that "many regulations are in place to protect individuals." She asked, "Why aren't current voters passing a law allowing the practice of doctor-assisted suicide? The only answer seems to be religious views, and in our country that is not the right answer, nor is it acceptable."

Our Essay Prize Committee members were impressed with these essays and would like to congratulate the above authors on the quality of their work. Our movement generally attracts the support of elderly people. It is unusual for teenagers to think about our issues, much less to write about them and identify ethical and human rights principles. Due to space limitations we are unable to print the winning essays in their entirety but they are available on our web site at [www.candcofwa.org](http://www.candcofwa.org).

"YOU SHOULD BE EXTREMELY PROUD THAT YOUR MENTAL PROCESSES ALLOW YOU TO THINK WITHOUT THE IMPEDIMENT OF SUPERSTITION, WHICH IS WHAT RELIGION IS. SPEAK UP WHENEVER YOU GET A CHANCE! CHALLENGE IGNORANCE! THE REASON RELIGIOUS PEOPLE INVENTED THE RULE THAT IT IS IMPOLITE TO ARGUE RELIGION IS THAT THEY ALWAYS LOSE THE ARGUMENT!"  
CHARLES CHEVES

**IS GOD AMERICAN?****by John W. Sammon**

German soldiers in World War II wore belt buckles that said, "Gott Mitt Uns," God is With Us. It's hard to envision God wearing a Nazi uniform.

It makes me wonder, seeing all the cars with bumper stickers that read, "God bless America," or "God Bless Our Troops."

Is this God?

I don't want to seem anti-patriotic or blasphemous.

But I'm really curious.

Why should God, in his universality, the giver of all things, the creator of the universe, bless a mere politically-run entity, an army, or a boundary, all of them highly transitional and imperfect creations of men? Many of these men the history book tell us were unscrupulous or immoral. Many are that way today.

Is God American?

Why would God bless troops carrying on a war? War represents a breakdown in the very basic humanity that is supposed to separate us from the animals. It seems to me that if God blesses troops, then one side must be right (our side), the other side evil and wrong. I can go with that to a point.

But what about the innocent victims caught in the middle who are killed for no other reason than they were standing in the wrong place? I never see a bumper sticker saying God Bless Them.

Is this God?

What about those of our troops plainly doing wrong (a squad of Marines were let off after committing murder)? Wouldn't it be better to say, "God Bless our Troops, Those Who Don't Commit Murder and Rape?"

Did God bless our troops when we annihilated the American Indian?

Why would God bless America? Most of it is a boundary created when we purchased thousands of square miles from a France eager to raise funds for a European war, and stole thousands more after a victorious war of our own with Mexico.

Most of us who are Americans are the children of immigrants from other countries.

Is this God?

Why would He (I'm assuming God is a man) bless this country? I never see a bumper sticker that says, "God Bless Senegal."

The inference here is clear. God places his blessings and grace on thee based on national considerations. If he blesses us, that means he doesn't bless some selected others. The stickers don't read, "God Bless Everybody . . . Who Is Worthy."

God is therefore a nationalist.

Why would God bless just America and no other? Or only America and England, or a few more, like a select club?

Is this God?

America is only two hundred and some years old. It was called that by early-day Europeans who came here (named after

Spaniard Amerigo Vispucchi).

We've had our problems. During my own short life, blacks had to sit on the back of a bus. Did God bless this too?

Does God when he blesses America also bless the corporate cheats, the tax cheats, the child molesters, the rapists, murderers and gang members? They're Americans too. The stickers don't read, "God Bless Only Righteous Americans."

Am I to assume it is because we have an enlightened form of government, and prosperity?

Then God judges us all not by the individuals we are, but as a distinct grouping based on national boundaries or shared aspirations or customs.

I'm not knocking religion.

But let's take a bad one. A country. North Korea. If I had a bumper sticker that read, "God Bless North Korea," you'd think I was a nut. Or disloyal. But there are good people in North Korea whose only crime is they have to live under a repressive regime over which they have no control.

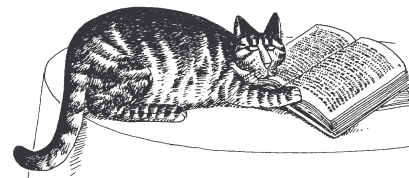
If God is God, doesn't He bless them too? We're talking about the creator of the universe here.

Is this God?

I don't know. I have to believe that God is the God of all people and blesses as many of them as he can.

I'm sorry, but the blanket phrase God Bless America is too exclusionary of everybody else to suit me. I think it's us trying to say we're better than others in God's eyes to justify our government and foreign policy. Maybe that's a tiny bit of hubris we share with the Nazis.

*[John Sammon is the author of two books and writes a weekly humor column you may access at [Sammonsays.com](http://Sammonsays.com).]*

**A FEW GOOD BOOKS****LETTER TO A CHRISTIAN NATION****by Sam Harris****A Review by Bill Root**

In recent years, there has been a spate of books challenging religious belief. Sam Harris kicked things off in 2004 with *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. Harris's first book was met with a firestorm of Christian protest. In 2006, two more notable intellects joined the fray: Daniel Dennett released *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* and Richard Dawkins published *The God Delusion*. Both books came out in 2006. Late in 2006, Harris responded to his *End of Faith* critics with *Letter to a Christian Nation*. More recently, Christopher Hitchens released *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (May 1, 2007).

All of these books have garnered a great deal of attention from both religious and secular critics. While Christianity is a

prime target, Islam, Judaism, and other religions are not exempt from often withering critical attacks. Harris, Dennett, Dawkins, and Hitchens each present compelling cases. Their legions of contrarian critics find the books' conclusions to be wrong-headed and execrable. Humanists and other secular non-theist types may, at worst, find the tone of these books off-putting, even if they may generally agree with their conclusions.

Harris's *Letter to a Christian Nation* is a response to the many letters and emails he received from Christians objecting to his assertion that religious Fundamentalism is a dangerous drag on human progress and enlightenment. Most of these missives were a direct response to his first book, *The End of Faith*, which sold more than 300,000 copies and received a lot of attention in the U.S. and abroad. Many of the responses to *End of Faith* were exceptionally negative. The tone of some of these letters, is pointed out by Harris in his foreword: "...many who claim to be transformed by Christ's love are deeply, even murderously, intolerant of criticism." In his introduction to *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris states, "The primary purpose of [this] book is to arm secularists in our society." In fact, the book is bursting with arguments most Christians will find daunting.

In his short book (96 pages including introduction and notes), Harris manages to pack a lot of material into a slim volume. A primary target is the extreme element of the Fundamentalist Christian community. He's not likely to change many minds in the Fundamental camp; indeed, the collective heart of Fundamentalist Christianity is fairly hardened against any argument that dares to question the "perfect and irrefutable word of God." Any appeal to reason or careful examination is evidence that Satan, naturally, is always trying to nibble away at their perfect shining faith. Logic is lost on many of these folks; the legacy, perhaps, of Martin Luther, who condemned reason as, "the devil's greatest whore." Freethinking, to Luther -- and for many Christians today -- plays squarely into Satan's hands.

*Letter to a Christian Nation* is literally written as a letter. There are no chapter divisions; Harris simply and calmly states his case for Christian understanding. He makes heavy use of biblical scripture to posit his arguments. This fact alone should be very troubling for Bible-believing Christians. For example, he points out that there is clearly no biblical proscription against slavery. In fact, the Bible appears to sanctify slavery. Ephesians 6:5 says, "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ." This verse was used, no doubt, by American slaveholders to justify their enslavement of millions of African Americans for more than 250 years.

Harris also masterfully deconstructs the Ten Commandments as a linchpin of American democracy and jurisprudence. He points out that only three of the commandments are relevant in our legal system: You will not murder, steal, or lie (although mostly not a criminal act). It is certainly no crime to:

- Worship other gods
- Make sculpture.
- Utter obscenities that include "God" or "Jesus".
- Fail to go to church or be extra respectful of Sunday (or is it Saturday?)

- Dishonor your folks. (Heck, maybe they don't deserve your honor).
- Cheat on your wife (or husband).
- Desire that nice new McMansion your neighbor just bought or lust after his gorgeous wife.

This all begs the question: Why is the Decalogue flogged so emotionally on secular government buildings, city parks, and other public conveyances? Harris neatly quashes the notion that the Ten Commandments have any bearing on the secular underpinnings of our government and system of law.

While Harris might be accused of "preaching to the choir," his effort has gained national attention. Even the Christian press has responded. Douglas Wilson, pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho, recently published *Letter from a Christian Citizen* in response to Harris' book. This reviewer has not read Wilson's book yet but will do so in the near future. Douglas Wilson is the owner of a popular Christian blog: Blog and Mablog <http://www.dougwils.com/>. Another Christian writer, Joel McDurmon, has written a similar retort in *The Return of the Village Atheist*.

Even some secularists find fault with Harris's forthright tone. Krista Tippett, the host of NPR's *Speaking of Faith*, takes issue with Harris, Dawkins, Hitchens, et al, as, "...polemicists -- secular extremists." She uses this assessment of their controversial general condemnation of religious belief as justification for, "...I have resisted interviewing Sam Harris or Richard Dawkins, who have coined best-selling battle cries like "the end of faith" and "the God delusion." They validly critique religious distortions and excesses. But Harris and Dawkins aren't content to simply critique religion. They decry the entire religious enterprise in which most of humanity is engaged in some way, and has been forever." Rather than contend with them in an honest fact-finding interview, Tippett opts out in favor of her trademark feel-good exploration of people of faith. To be fair, her show is all about faith but ecumenism might best be served if those who are free of religious faith were included in the mix. Tippett is correct when she states that most of humanity is engaged in some sort of religious enterprise. But to dismiss Harris as a polemist is to suggest Tippett hasn't read *Letter to a Christian Nation*. The book is hardly a polemic. Christopher Hitchens' *God is Not Great* -- that is certainly a polemic. Harris's approach is more reasonable. His tone is rational. His delivery is downright conversational, if unflinching. He is, however, blunt and doesn't pull punches. Harris may be perceived by Christians as extremist but most secularists will not see him that way at all.

*Letter to a Christian Nation* contains little information a well-educated Humanist doesn't already know. Those of you who come from a Christian tradition -- and many Secular Humanists do -- will recognize Harris's skillful table-turning of scripture to underscore his many potent arguments. The book is a quick read; 1 to 2 hours is all the time needed to read it. Harris's arguments are powerful, compelling, and very much to the point. Even if the reader learns little new information, simply reading Harris's cogent prose makes it time well spent.



"WHILE HUMANISTS FIRMLY BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF THE HUMAN 'SPIRIT,' THEY ARE WARY OF THE 'SPIRITUAL.' THIS WORD HAS A SPECIFIC MEANING IN THE WESTERN WORLD. IT IS CONNECTED WITH THE SUPERNATURAL, DIVINE INTELLIGENCE, AND 'SUPERIOR' WORLD THAT SUPPOSEDLY TRANSCEND THE 'INFERIOR' OFFERINGS OF MATERIAL EXISTENCE. IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE FORGONE THE PLEASURES OF THE MATERIAL WORLD IN ORDER TO SERVE THE CAUSE OF A 'TRANSCENDENT POWER.' THESE PEOPLE PREFER PASSIVE 'WAITING' TO ACTION, ASCETICISM TO JOY, AND SURRENDER TO CONFLICT." RABBI SHERWIN WINE

## **INTERTWINED LIVES: MARGARET MEAD, RUTH BENEDICT, AND THEIR CIRCLE**

by Lois W. Banner

A Review by Richard Bozarth

Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict were famous anthropologists and wrote famous books. I had read, enjoyed, and learned a lot from two of their books (Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* and Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*). But that would not have moved me to read this biography. I have too many unread books to add another lightly.

I bought this book because the back-cover blurb told me this: "The first biography to use hundreds of recently released letters, *Intertwined Lives* gives us the most illuminating portrait yet of two women who have had an enduring influence on anthropology and on our understanding of society . . . Though both married, Mead and Benedict were sexual partners, as well as fellow pioneers in anthropology who championed racial and sexual equality and cultural relativity ahead of their time . . . *Intertwined Lives* tells the story of their devotion to anthropology and to each other, and untwines the roles of religion, ethnicity, intellectualism, homosexuality, maternity, and success in the braid of their two lives." The letters had been recently released because a lock had been put on them that could not be opened until all the people who might have been embarrassed by their sexual behavior being publicly exposed had died. In other words, this was my kind of book.

This is an excellent book for many reasons, not the least is that it could serve as a textbook example of how to write biography, especially a dual biography. It is excellent because any person who has been persuaded by what the hypothesisists of evolutionary psychology have written about human sexuality will learn that EP's hypotheses cannot explain Mead's and Benedict's sexualities. Women and sexually liberated people who today might be thinking there's no hope of eliminating sexism and sexual bigotry in Western culture will be recharged by this book, which shows how much change has happened in merely 60 years. Any Freethinker who has not yet finished her thinking about what kind of sexual morality a Freethought culture should have needs this book as part of her education about human sexuality.

Benedict was an Atheist who was not out about it because there was no day during her life that was a good day to be a public Atheist in the U.S. It would have made the academic career she wanted a lot harder to achieve at a time when being a brilliant woman clearly superior to so many of her male peers was a tough obstacle to overcome. If she had drawn close attention to herself by being out about Atheism, it would have increased the odds for her unorthodox sexual behavior being discovered by the kind of people who would have condemned

her as a pervert and destroyed her academic career.

Mead identified herself as an Episcopalian and believed she was a devout one. Her girlhood conversion horrified her family the way apostasy always horrifies religious families, and that might have been part of the initial charm of the sect. However, no matter what she thought she was as a religionist, she lived her life as if Christianity's three-part deity did not exist -- and as though being Episcopalian meant having no moral code other than the one she created for herself to obey. Of course, the liberal branch of today's Episcopal Church would probably find nothing immoral about Mead's sexual behavior, but that was not true of the sect during her lifetime.

Mead obviously used an Episcopalian persona as camouflage for her sexually liberated personality, and just as obviously convinced herself she was a devout Episcopalian. I see the hypocrisy she was mired in, and probably almost every person who reads this book will see it, but I also know it is easy for any individual (even an unquestionably brilliant one) to become that blind about herself. Teaching that lesson to any reader who doesn't know it is another excellent thing this book does.

"Both Ruth and Margaret espoused free-love doctrines that called for sexual experimentation and prohibited jealousy, but both also believed in marriage and feared compromising their careers." Mead was much more experimental than Benedict. Interestingly, both ended their lives in lesbian relationships.

Benedict finally became a lesbian in the mid-1930s, but not because she realized that lesbianism was her true sexuality. The book makes it clear that she finally became tired of men because of the penalty their sexism and dominance of Western culture inflicted on brilliant women like her. She did not get the academic promotions she deserved. She had to endure criticisms that none of her male peers would have used against her if she had been a man. Finally, she reached a point in her life when she wanted and needed a man-free refuge, and she chose her sexual relationships to be that refuge.

Mead finished her life in a lesbian relationship. Banner does not have much content about Mead beyond 1948, when Benedict died, but what there is of it makes me believe she had not given up on men. When Benedict told her she had decided to be exclusively lesbian, "Margaret didn't like it; she wanted Ruth to remain both homosexual and heterosexual, a 'mixed type.'" Mead never gave up her free-love lifestyle, even though it made it hard to establish and maintain stable relationships. (The reader has to always remember that Mead, Benedict, and their lovers were living sexually liberated lifestyles decades before the sexual revolution started in the 1960s, and during a time when probably 99.9% of U.S. citizens would have condemned what Mead called "mixed-type" sexuality as a horrifying perversion.) Mead's toughness is something to be admired. I am persuaded that Mead finished her life in a lesbian relationship simply because she found a female partner who fit her just right before she found a male partner who could have done that. It probably would have been the other way if she had found a suitable man first, because she was one of those people who truly did have a choice.

This book is also excellent because Mead had a lot of interesting anthropological experiences while studying primitive cultures, and this book shares them. Benedict's nature was more academic than adventurous, so there's not a lot about her field work, which probably was just enough to satisfy her

profession's requirement. The university was her natural niche. Mead's niche was not the university. She liked professional adventures just like she liked sexual adventures. It is amazing these two essentially different women remained as deeply intertwined as they did. Any reader who does not have in her life such a glorious friendship will finish this book aching with envy.

Biographies do not often have so much to offer as this biography does. It's an excellent book. I highly recommend it.

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"REASON IS THE HUMAN FACULTY THAT HELPS US DECIDE WHICH EMOTIONS TO INDULGE AND WHICH DESIRES TO INDULGE AND WHICH DESIRES TO RESTRAIN. ALL OF US, MUCH OF THE TIME, HAVE FEELINGS OF HATE, JEALOUSY, ANGER, AND FEAR. WE CANNOT ORDER THESE FEELINGS OUT OF OUR MINDS. THE TEST OF OUR CHARACTER IS NOT WHETHER WE HAVE THESE EMOTIONS; IT IS WHAT WE DO WITH THEM. BEHAVIOR, NOT FEELINGS, DETERMINES HUMAN CHARACTER." RABBI SHERWIN WINE

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### CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS IS NOT GREAT . . . OR IS HE?

[Michael Kinsley wrote a very positive review of the new Christopher Hitchens book, *God is Not Great*, in the *New York Times Book Review*. Jeffrey Robbins wrote a rebuttal in the *Huffington Post* titled "Hitchens is not Great." Following are some of the blog responses to Robbins' view.]

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A make believe being like a god or the tooth fairy can't be dead when they never existed. Sounds like simple common sense, and it is.

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Robert Green Ingersoll wrote in "Why I am an Agnostic" published in 1896: "All of these comforting and reasonable things were taught by the ministers in their pulpits -- by teachers in Sunday schools and by parents at home. The children were victims. They were assaulted in the cradle -- in their mother's arms. . . The poor children were helpless. The atmosphere they breathed was filled with lies . . .

"The ministers, who preached at these revivals, were in earnest. They were zealous and sincere. They were not philosophers. To them science was the name of a vague dread -- a dangerous enemy. They did not know much, but they believed a great deal. To them hell was a burning reality -- they could see the smoke and flames. The Devil was no myth. He was an actual person. . . They really believed the Bible to be the actual word of God -- a book without mistake or contradiction. They called its cruelties, justice -- its absurdities, mysteries -- its miracles, facts, and the idiotic passages were regarded as profoundly spiritual.

"It seems to me impossible for a civilized man to love or worship, or respect the God of the Old Testament. A really civilized man, a really civilized woman, must hold such a God in abhorrence and contempt.

"In every way the clergy sought to evade the facts, to dodge the truth, to preserve the creed. At first they flatly denied the facts -- then they belittled them -- then they harmonized them -- then they denied that they had denied them. Then they changed the meaning of the "inspired" book to fit the facts. At first they said that if the facts, as claimed, were true, the Bible was false and Christianity itself a superstition. Afterward they said the facts,

as claimed, were true and that they established beyond all doubt the inspiration of the Bible and the divine origin of orthodox religion. Anything they could not dodge, they swallowed and anything they could not swallow, they dodged."

Jeffrey, Ingersoll exposed these religious dupes long ago . . . and Hitchens is right to revisit the delusional hypocrisy since pew-lemmings in WalMart, mega-church America, have learned not a thing.

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Hmmm, it's not original enough for you. Perhaps he should come up with "2+2=5" to make it more interesting. The God theory just doesn't add up and the more people that say it the better -- especially a sometime hero of the right like Hitchens.

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All the Atheists I know don't want to ban religion, we just want to stop giving it a free pass from the logic we apply elsewhere in our lives. We hope to convince, not coerce. And clearly Simpsons kicks Family Guys ass but I am unlikely to kill anyone over something so obvious.

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The great cork at the bottom of the ass of religion is the way spirituality and the godhead are depicted through monotheism. One male god, separate from nature and humans, distinct and impossible to become. Once this monotheistic god is "a given," no real dialogue can ensue but that which is delimited by the initial construct -- the floor of the vast church, as it were.

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When self-proclaimed Atheists speak out against the nonsense of religion they are ceding the field because they are taking the monotheistic construct as a given. Now, if everything is god, there really isn't a whole lot of need to go blathering on about miracles and oblations and goodness-knows-what-else.

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You'd rather read Freud. Fair enough. But most Americans do not and will not read Freud. They will, however, read a book written by a prominent author, and written in compelling, modern language. Perhaps it's true that the ideas contained in Hitchens' book are not entirely original, but it's quite apparent that the general public -- particularly in America -- haven't gotten the memo. There is no God. Keep repeating that as many times and in as many ways as it takes until we save the world from the delusional fanatics whose delusions imprison us all.



I have read Hitchens' book. From your review, I don't believe you read it or if you did read it, you didn't understand it. The work is far from lazy. It shows scholarship and a wide knowledge of literature history, and science. One of Hitchens' major points is that the religious make no use of logic and that their reasoning cannot be falsified. I agree with Dawkins that priests and, by implication, professors of religion ought to be given the same degree of respect afforded to alchemists and astrologers.

If the Bible accounts are literally true and correct, particularly Genesis, and Adam and Eve were the first humans (who, incidentally are reported to have had only sons), then the entire human race has proceeded to the present point in history through incest since we all are the product of one couple. I leave it to better minds than mine to explain how the five separate races came about in the process, an explanation I hope would be scientific and not based on further biblical guesswork.

Have you imagined what life might be like without religion's unabashed support of in-group out-group hatred; its dogmatic suppression of science and free inquiry; its damaging of children with fear and descriptions of hell; its indoctrination of young adults just when they need to be learning critical thinking? The list can go on and on, and you're bitching at Hitchens!

Your criticism might be valid were you reviewing a history book written in some future time when religion's transgressions have long since been halted and healed. But they have not.

I greatly enjoyed the book. And as with the writings of Dawkins, Harris, Dennet, etc., I find new ideas in each, as I'll bet a whole generation of readers does. Further, considering the ground covered by the three most recent books on the subject, I think Hitchens did damn well. Bravo! Our wits are all the sharper for it, and the book brings us closer to the tipping point when rational discourse becomes accepted in American public life.

Finally, I think your review would be more fitting if you were to turn around 180 degrees and give it instead to the religious community. Now there's a group in dire need of originality -- still looking for meaning in a bronze age myth, unable to turn to their neighbor and say instead, "I have faith in you!"

It's hilarious what lengths believers will go to ascertain their own smug ignorance. Indeed I own and am reading the book. This review is little more than piffle from a god-squader squirming away from his own dissolution from reality. Nothing beats a clerics' ability to rationalize away reality. Bravo.

*"DON'T HIDE THE FACT THAT YOU ARE AN ATHEIST. IT COMES AS A GREAT BUT HEALTHY SURPRISE TO MANY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE THAT ATHEISTS DO NOT HAVE HORNS OR CARRY BOMBS. IT IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE THAT ATHEISTS REGULARLY CHALLENGE THE ABSURD FALLACY THAT INTEGRITY AND MORALITY ARE A RELIGIOUS MONOPOLY." CHARLES CHEVES*



## TRIBUTES TO FUNDAMENTALIST FLATULENCE, EVANGELICAL EFFLUENCE, AND IMPLACABLE IGNORANCE

Fundamentalism (n) derives from two English words: fund (= give cash) + amentalism (= without brains)

### Christians Demand Bush be Impeached for Worshipping Satan

*[From www.roguegovernment.com, April 30, 2007]*

A Christian-based group known as the Christians' Liberation Movement has concluded that George W. Bush is a fake Christian and worships Satan. The group is demanding his impeachment not only for his crimes against humanity but for lying to the American people about his worship of Satan. It is highly doubtful that George W. Bush would have been elected President two times had the American people known about his secretive worship of Satan. Although this claim might seem difficult to believe, when one looks at the secret societies that George W. Bush has been involved with it becomes clear that George W. Bush is anything but a good Christian man.

"There is no question that George W. Bush worships Satan," proclaims Lee Rogers, spokesman for the group.

"George W. Bush and any other member of the administration that secretly worships Satan should be removed from office immediately. It is one thing if Bush openly announced that he worshiped Satan and was elected, but the fact that Bush poses as a Christian and secretly worships Satan is deeply offensive to the moral values of Christians," Rogers continues.

Evidence of George W. Bush's worship of Satan is clear when one considers the secret societies that he is affiliated with. These include Skull and Bones as well as the Bohemian Club. Both organizations are confirmed to be heavily involved with Satan worship.

George W. Bush, his father George H.W. Bush and his grandfather Prescott Bush all became members of Skull and Bones a secret fraternal society located at Yale University. Founded in 1832, the official legal name of the society is the Russell Trust Association, named after one of the founding members of the society. Skull and Bones at one point was actually known as The Brotherhood of Death if that gives any sort of indication as to what this group is all about. Each year, 15 new members are recruited into Skull and Bones and meet in a building known as "The Tomb". The group's symbol is a skull and crossbones with the number "322" located underneath the crossbones.

Here is the American Heritage Dictionary's definition of the word crossbones: "A representation of two bones placed crosswise, usually under a skull, symbolizing danger or death."

Obviously, from the description alone, Skull and Bones is no Christian group. It becomes even more disturbing when one learns of the rituals members of Skull and Bones must



participate in so they can be reborn into this Satanic order of death. Newly tapped members of Skull and Bones participate in a ritual where they are reborn into the order by laying naked in a coffin. Members must also recount their entire sexual history, pretend to slit a nude woman's throat, and participate in other bizarre Satanic rituals.

As if this wasn't bad enough, George W. Bush's grandfather Prescott Bush, along with other Skull and Bones members, actually robbed the grave of Apache warrior Geronimo and stole Geronimo's skull in 1918. A group of Native Americans have actually petitioned Congress to investigate the Skull and Bones group as part of an effort to return the remains of Geronimo for reburial. Geronimo's grandson, Harlan Geronimo, has even asked George W. Bush to return his grandfather's skull and has volunteered to undergo DNA testing to prove ownership.

It is ridiculous to believe that a good Christian man as Bush claims he is would have anything to do with a group that participates in these things. At the very least Bush should help facilitate the return of Geronimo's skull and apologize to Harlan Geronimo for the actions of his grandfather.

George W. Bush and his father are also both members of a group called the Bohemian Club. The all-male Bohemian Club's membership, which consists of America's wealthy and political elite, meets every summer in a place known as the Bohemian Grove. The Bohemian Grove is located in the town of Monte Rio in the middle of the redwood forests of northern California. Each year, they conduct a satanic ritual called the "Cremation of Care" where they burn an effigy of a child to Molech a large demon owl. The ceremony could best be described as a mock human sacrifice and is hardly anything a Christian man would take part in.

This is especially true considering that Molech is actually referenced in the Old Testament. In the book of Leviticus, God denounces the sacrifice of children to Molech as shown here.

Leviticus 18:21

"And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord."

Leviticus 20:2

"Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech: he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones."

Security at the Bohemian Grove is taken seriously, as members of the press are not allowed to film inside the encampment. Members value their privacy and apparently do not want people to know that they participate in a Satanic ritual and engage in other bizarre behavior. That all changed in the



year 2000 when radio host and documentary film maker Alex Jones, along with cameraman Mike Hanson, snuck into the Bohemian Grove and filmed the entire "Cremation of Care" ritual via a hidden video camera. Jones released the video footage of the ritual in his documentary film *Dark Secrets: Inside the Bohemian Grove*. It is clear from the video footage contained in the film that the "Cremation of Care" ceremony is in fact a Satanic ritual.

There have also been reports of rampant homosexual prostitution in the Bohemian Grove. The *NY Post* reported that a gay porn star with the screen name Chad Savage was brought into the Bohemian Grove to service the moguls there. Members of the Bohemian Club are also said to run around naked, dress in drag, engage in drug use and urinate openly within the encampment. There are even allegations of snuff films being filmed within the Bohemian Grove during the 1980's. Details of these allegations can be found in former state senator John Decamp's book *The Franklin Cover-up*.

Richard Nixon was even recorded on audio tape referring to the Bohemian Grove as "the most faggy godd\*\*ned thing you could ever imagine."

Why would a Christian man be associated with an organization that has members who secretly engage in homosexual acts, satanic rituals, and other bizarre behavior?

The evidence is overwhelming. George W. Bush's association with these secret societies, coupled with his actions that have caused an untold amount of death and destruction, is clear proof that he worships Satan. We are demanding that Bush and any other member of his administration that poses as a fake Christian and worships Satan in secret be removed from office immediately.

[Editors' note: The Christians' Liberation Movement is a Christian-based news organization and "liberation movement dedicated to exposing government corruption and the New World Order."]

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"REGRET FOR THE THINGS WE DID CAN BE TEMPERED BY TIME; IT IS  
REGRET FOR THE THINGS WE DID NOT DO THAT IS INCONSOLABLE."  
SYDNEY J. HARRIS

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## FOND FAREWELLS

*Olympian, 4/24/07*

### Humanist Vonnegut tried to live a decent life

I remember when Kurt Vonnegut received the highest annual award of the American Humanist Association in 1992 at a conference in Portland. At that meeting he also agreed to serve as the association's honorary president, which he did for the next 15 years, never failing to mention his honorary presidency in his many lectures, book signings and travels.

When he appeared on the Jon Stewart Daily Show, he commented on the idea of bringing American democracy to Iraq. He agreed it might be a good idea, but that it was very important for the Iraqis to understand that in about 88 years, they'll have to free all the slaves, and in about 144 years they'll have to give women the vote.

He wrote in his next to last book about belief or lack of belief in an afterlife: "Some of you may know that I am neither Christian nor Jewish nor Buddhist, nor a conventionally religious person of any sort. I am a humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to live decently without any expectation of rewards or punishments after I'm dead." He added, "My epitaph in any case? 'Everything was beautiful, Nothing hurt.' ... humanists are content to serve as well as they can, the only abstraction with which they have any familiarity: their communities."

Lou Dobbs called him his second favorite 20th century author. Both Dobbs and Vonnegut regarded Mark Twain as their first. As with both, their works remain readily accessible and in print.

**Bette Chambers, president  
emeritus, American Humanist  
Association**

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The American Humanist Association  
[www.americanhumanist.org](http://www.americanhumanist.org)

Corliss Lamont Site  
(includes complete text of *The Philosophy of Humanism*)  
[www.corliss-lamont.org](http://www.corliss-lamont.org)

Ethical Culture Society of Puget Sound  
[www.ethicalculturesociety.org](http://www.ethicalculturesociety.org)

Seattle Atheists  
[www.seattleatheists.org](http://www.seattleatheists.org)

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"FAITH MEANS NOT WANTING TO KNOW WHAT IS TRUE." NIETZSCHE

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Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 7/18/06

# Religion is not a primary need

GUEST COLUMNIST

JOHN F. McBRIDE

*"Facts are the enemy of truth."*  
– Don Quixote de La Mancha

One need look no further than the Middle East and Israel's battle with Islam and Islam's battle with Judaism to be totally baffled by human nature and to cause one to doubt the outcome of humanity's struggle to survive.

Both sides human, neither side "needing" Judaism or Islam to survive, and both sides willing to kill the other and to sacrifice their own to defend the "righteousness" of their position just as Christianity and countless religions and political establishments have before our time, and perhaps will continue to do after us.

Perhaps.

How can such behavior be viewed as an evolved, qualified "tool" for the long-term survival of any species, and in this particular case, ours?

Further, isn't such intellectual or psychological behavior equivalent to an evolved, "physical," environmentally specific tool likely to make us as extinct as any animal that was physically and neurologically very good at being what it was in environment A but couldn't adapt to en-

**Food is primary. Air is really primary. Water. Shelter. Procreation. Sleep. Recreation. Not religion. So, in the pre-Industrial, Industrial and post-Industrial ages we poison the air, pollute the water, work too long hours, don't get enough rest or exercise, and eat questionable diets. But we kill each other over religion. By the millions we kill each other.**

vironment B when environment A ceased to exist or was melded with environment B?

In other words, let's propose that I'm raised Christian, and then encounter Islam, and Islam encounters me. Islam prevails and I refuse to change or Christianity prevails and Islam refuses to change or neither prevails over a third religion and both refuse to change. Neither is necessary since Buddhism works fine, too. And Buddhism isn't necessary either. Nothing is really necessary in place of religion from an evo-

lutionary perspective if it begins to threaten survival since it is a secondary tool for survival, not a primary tool. And even as a secondary tool it evolved in many places in many different forms readily changeable as conversion to any other "philosophy" frequently exhibits.

Food is primary. Air is really primary. Water. Shelter. Procreation. Sleep. Recreation.

Not religion.

So, in the pre-Industrial, Industrial and post-Industrial ages we poison the air, pollute the water, work too long hours, don't get enough rest or exercise, and eat questionable diets.

But we kill each other over religion. By the millions we kill each other.

We plot nuclear war and plan the use of other weapons of mass destruction to assert such "truths." Do we adapt? Not really. We simply negotiate short-term pauses until the next, even more barbarous slaughter. How is it likely that that species long-term prospects for survival are very good?

Is it any wonder so many of us who were religious and have come to doubt religion or who never were involved in religion dismiss it or harbor suspicion toward it?

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**John F. McBride lives in Seattle.**



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