

Vatican Warns Against Increasingly Healthy Attitudes Toward Sex

AMERICAN ATHEIST

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Remembering
BILL MOORE
AND THE FREEDOM WALKERS

T U R N
T O W A R D
P E A C E

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Remembering Bill Moore and the Freedom Walkers

Ellen Johnson

In this issue we remember Atheist Bill Moore. You have probably never heard of him. I had never heard of him until a few years ago when I was doing some research on Madalyn O'Hair for a speech I was writing about her. I was watching a videotaped talk she gave at her old law school in which she spoke about her social activism prior to the Murray v. Curlett Supreme Court case and she mentioned a man named Bill Moore. She said he was shot in the back of the head during a walk from Chattanooga, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi to deliver a letter to Ross Barnett, the segregationist governor of Mississippi. The letter appealed to the governor to reconsider his segregationist position. Governor Barnett was a staunch opponent of the integration of the University of Mississippi.

In this issue, Mary Stanton, the author of "Freedom Walk, Mississippi or Bust" recalls Bill Moore's life, his Freedom Walk to Mississippi to deliver his letter, and the story surrounding his murder.

I remember reading Mary's beautifully written book and about the five attempts, involving hundreds of people, that were made to deliver Bill Moore's letter to the Mississippi Governor. The segregationists defeated all their attempts. The Freedom Walkers were beaten and arrested time after time.

As I read "Freedom Walk" I waited for the happy ending where Bill Moore's letter was finally delivered; but it wasn't there. What? I thought. Oh that can't be the end of the story. The letter must have been delivered at some point. The bigots can't win. But no; it was never delivered.

Until that letter is delivered, the bigots will have won that one. That just irritates me more than anything. That letter has to be delivered. That letter has to be delivered if I have to deliver it myself. Bill Moore did not die in vain and the efforts and sacrifice of the hundreds of people who came after him must not be forgotten.

And so, to honor and pay tribute to all of them, I will go to Attalla, Alabama where Bill Moore was shot dead forty-five years ago. I will leave there April 23, 2008, carrying one of Bill Moore's original letters that he carried with him. He had hundreds of copies with him and he handed them out to people along the way. I will pick up from where he left off and carry his letter 300 miles to the governor of Mississippi. I too, will hand out copies of his letter and share the story of Bill Moore to the people who I meet along the way.

The history books will have to be rewritten to reflect that the letter was finally delivered. It may have taken 45 years but the books will show that it was delivered because when it comes to civil rights, and the fight for justice, there will always be someone to pick up where someone else has left off.

Bill Moore wore a sandwich-board sign with a text on the front and on the back. I am putting that text on the front and back of

a t-shirt as my sandwich-board sign. Those t-shirts will be available for sale at cafepress.com for anyone who would like to participate in the walk or just wear one in honor of Bill Moore and the Freedom Walkers.

You too can help see that the letter is delivered. We need money to pay for lodging and food for the trip and round-trip airfare to Alabama from Mississippi. Our Alabama State Director, Blair Scott's wife Yvonne, will be my traveling companion. She will drive the route as I walk it so that I have help in case I need it. Your donations will help pay for the gas in her car and lodging.

I will stay in touch daily on our blog <http://www.atheists.org/nogodblog/> so you can see how well I'm doing and where I am. We will also post my route on the website and maybe some of you can come out and say hello to me on the way. If you are in the area and can join me on the walk that would be great but I won't be slowing down because I have too many miles to walk in one day. My goal is to walk twenty miles a day for fifteen days or so. I invite you to be at the Governor's Mansion when I arrive with the letter. I will announce the exact arrival date, as I get closer to the destination.

So I hope you will come out and look for me, support me, and never, never forget Bill Moore and the Freedom Walkers. *



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TIME: 12:00 noon to.....

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Essence the Brave!



My name is Be-Asia McKerracher and I teach ninth- and eleventh-grade English in Kansas City, Missouri. Before Kansas City, my husband, and daughters ages six and seven lived in a small town in northeastern Missouri. It was in this town of 17,000 residents that my husband and I made a transition from Agnosticism to Atheism. It was also in this small, overwhelmingly Christian, town that my oldest daughter, Essence, had her first experience with bigotry and intolerance. It was through this that our family learned to share our Atheism with family and friends. Here is Essie's story.

Essence is a pretty quiet girl. Of normal height for her age, her light brown skin and charming smile had awarded her with many friends at her school and in our community. Her kindergarten year was met with brilliant success: she worked well with the special needs students in her class and her teacher had nothing but kind words to say about her. But Essence had a secret that no one at the school knew: Essence was an Atheist.

After the death of a loved one during her kindergarten year, we took the time to discuss with Essence and her little sister, Asase, what it meant to be a Christian. Why? My husband and I feel that as secular parents, we have an obligation to make our children religiously literate. They need to know and understand what religion is, the role it plays in the lives of those who believe (and those who don't), and the potential affect it could have on how a person views the world.

And so our children learned of Jesus, the Bible, heaven and hell. They also learned of their parents' refusal to believe in such things and our reasons why. We ended our conversation with a truism: it was not appropriate for young children to decide the legitimacy of such things. We told the girls that they were free to believe what they wanted and that we would love them no matter what decision they made—and we meant that.

The incident began halfway through Essence's first-grade year. She came home and was in her usual happy, silly mood. When I asked her how her day was (a typical question), she talked about a project they were doing in science. Then out of nowhere she said, "Oh yeah, at lunch, most of the kids in my class said that I was going to hell because I don't believe in Jesus."

I should back up a moment here and note that from the time we first began discussing religion up until now, she has remained a staunch Atheist. We have tried to remain objective and allow her the freedom to explore her thoughts about a master creator because we believe that children should not be given the label of anything: Christian, Muslim or Atheist. We believe that it is our job as parents to create a productive and freethinking member of society—not a mini version of us—and that is what we have tried to do. Essence has always had the freedom to be who she wants to be and she wants to be an Atheist.

Now, when Essence tossed her day into our lap we were completely speechless. A sense of panic and fear overtook me like I had never had happen before. I was afraid for her—she would have to go to school from now until she was an adult. Could she handle the hard-core criticisms of herself and her family at the tender age of six? My husband and I stood totally paralyzed as she took off her backpack and went into the kitchen for a snack. She, however, seemed completely unfazed by the situation.

I wanted to get a feel for how much the conversation affected her at the time, so while she ate her snack, I asked her to tell me what had happened. She said that somehow at lunch the subject of church and god came up. She said aloud—without fear!—that she did not attend church and that right now she didn't believe in god. What followed next was a series of accusations and taunts by her classmates. She was told by most of the children within earshot that she was going to hell; that Jesus hated her for not believing in him; the devil would "poke" her; and that people who don't go to church are bad.

I asked Essence how those statements made her feel. Her response was that at first she was mad. She was most upset at her friend, Brianna, for treating her so badly. She told the children that she did not have to believe in god to be a good person and that she never gets in trouble at school. The conversation continued and finally ended with everyone deciding that they needed to go outside and play, and with Brianna apologizing—children forgive much more easily than adults!

Now, Essence is very sensitive. I was quite certain that in a situation like that, she would have broken down in tears. I asked her if she was sad enough to cry at what they had said to her and she replied, "No. I didn't cry. I just told them that I think Jesus was probably a nice person but that people can't die for other people."

These were six- and seven-year-olds condemning another child over things they have been indoctrinated with. To be fair, these were not bad children, or children of Christian fundamentalists. Having volunteered in my daughter's class and worked with all of the children there, I can tell you they were average, American kids—and they thought my daughter was evil because she did not believe in their god. They did not consider her kindness, her lack of bad behavior or the fact that they spent every weekday for the past year with her. She was evil because their parents and their church told them so.

As a family, we talked about what parents teach children, the rules in religion that can be used the wrong way, and how because

children are so little, religious scripture is just difficult to understand until their brains have developed and they have learned more.

As the days went on, two of the boys in her class refused to stop teasing her about the god issue. Every day they told her that she was going to hell. When she came home the first day and told me, I asked her if she could handle it on her own—I need my children to have the strength to stand up for themselves, and they cannot learn that if I don't give them the opportunity to try. She said that she could handle it and that she didn't want me to talk to anyone about it.

A few days later however, she said that she needed me to talk to her teacher because what she was doing—ignoring them and asking them to stop—just wasn't working. Much to my surprise, my daughter's teacher was so shocked at this boy's insensitivity that she had the school counselor intervene, parents were called, and from that day forward Essence was never told she would burn in hell.

My daughter's refusal to hide her feelings and thoughts in front of others changed our family. The first night she told me, I sat in my room and tried to recreate the situation with me in her place. How would I have responded if everyone at work made condescending and hurtful remarks to me? Would I have had the courage to say how I felt, or change the subject and forgive them? To this day, I am so amazed at her courage because before that day, I would not have been able to do what she did.

Another way our family has grown is in how we talk to other family members about our Atheism. From that experience on, we decided as a family that we would not be ashamed of our views. We played "scenario" games where I pretended to be an adult that challenged their beliefs and my girls would figure out how to tell adults (respectfully) that they disagreed or that they didn't want to talk about religion or god with them. Essie's courage, the courage of a six-year old, gave our family the courage to be proud of our convictions and taught me that you're never too old to learn something from an open-minded, freethinking child of humanity. *



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AMERICAN ATHEISTS Welcomes New Life Members

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

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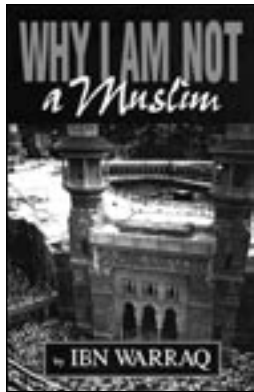
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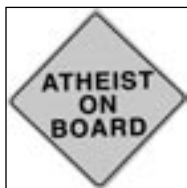
Why I Am Not A Muslim

by Ibn Warraq



Ibn Warraq examines Islam and the Koran from the point of view of an ex-Muslim. Warraq shows that the Koran evolved over a long period of time and is filled with absurdities and contradictions, just like the Christian Bible. Warraq shows how intolerance and violence have been and continue to be part and parcel of Islam, and these cannot be ascribed to isolated Fundamentalists.

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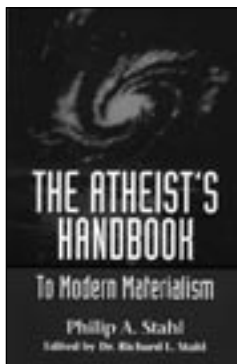


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The Atheist's Handbook to Modern Materialism

By Philip A. Stahl



Philip A. Stahl has written numerous general astronomy articles including for The Barbados Advocate a series called "Discovering the Stars" from 1975 through 1990. He has also authored or co-authored specialist papers in journals such as Solar Physics, and The Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada as well as in the Meudon (France) Proceedings on Solar Flares (1984) while serving as the Editor of The Journal of the Barbados Astronomical Society (1977-1991).

Mr. Stahl taught and lectured in Physics, Mathematics and Astronomy in Barbados before returning to the U.S. in January, 1992. While in Barbados, he participated in debates on evolution with priests, ministers, scripture teachers, and religious colleagues. In addition he's had many letters and articles on Atheism and humanism published in the Barbados press, as well as in The Baltimore Sun.

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Vatican Warns Against Increasingly Healthy Attitudes Toward Sex

by the onion—www.theonion.com
(Humor)

VATICAN CITY—Alarmed by rising rates of pleasurable, mutually fulfilling acts of physical love among Catholics, the Vatican issued a statement Monday warning against healthy attitudes toward sex.

"The practice of so-called 'healthy sexuality,' with its emphasis on the spiritual and physical nourishment of consenting partners in a relationship built on mutual respect, has no place in the Holy Roman Catholic Church," the 200-page document read. "Those who have derived pleasure from such non-shame-based practices are not living according to God's law."

The Vatican statement cited 183 different "wholly sinful" sexual acts, including the discrete, occasional manipulation of one's own genitals for pleasure; intercourse positions designed to heighten sensations of ecstasy; and intimate, post-coital cuddling and conversation with a loved one outside the bounds of the marital bed.

The statement also listed 244 phrases which are regarded as blasphemous when uttered in a non-procreative context. Among them: "God, your breasts are beautiful," "I feel so complete when you're inside me," and "I love to watch your belly rise and fall after we make love."

Church officials were quick to praise the Vatican's denouncement of "the brutal transgression against God that is the enjoyment of sex for its own sake."

"In recent years, Catholics the world over have been exposed to a multitude of sexual practices that, if not resisted, could enrich their lives and deepen their enjoyment of their partners," said Cardinal Joaquin Navarro Valls, speaking on behalf of the pope. "As Catholics, we must remain vigilant, doing everything in our powers to resist such urges. Only the Lord's divine redemption can transform sex into a force for goodness by limiting it to the joyless context of married couples who wish to procreate."

"The position of the Church is absolute: If two people who are not a married couple endeavoring to have children engage in tension-relieving, life-affirming sex, they are committing a grave sin," Archbishop Edward Egan of New York said. "There is nothing holy about people feeling good about their bodies and themselves."

Catholics are taking the condemnation of modern sexual mores to heart.

"In the seven years we've been married, my wife and I have probably had sex about 1,500 times," said Lowell, MA, resident Bill Metz, 36. "We're extremely attracted to each other, and satisfying each other physically is something we've always enjoyed. Until now, that is. I finally see that what we thought was a fun way to celebrate our love was really an expression of hostility and disrespect toward Jesus."

Metz added that he and his wife plan to have at least 15 children as penance for their physical indulgences.

"This is a major step forward for the church," said Father Thomas Mallory, Deacon of Boston's Our Lady Queen of Peace. "We've seen too much healthy sexuality among Catholics in recent years, which inevitably led to an unholy sense of well-being and contentment. Hopefully, this papal condemnation will put a stop to that." *

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Mississippi or Bust

Bill Moore's 1963 Freedom Walk

by Mary Stanton

"I have never known a racist who was an atheist."

—Dr. Henlee H. Barnette, Professor of Ethics
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Lexington, Kentucky, 1961

In the spring of 1963, Bill Moore, a 35-year-old white Baltimore mailman, scheduled two weeks of his vacation time to walk from Chattanooga, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi. He set out on April 23 determined to deliver a letter to Mississippi governor Ross Barnett to remind the governor about his pledge to uphold and defend the United States Constitution.

"The end of Mississippi colonialism is fast approaching," the letter read. "The only question is whether you will help it to end... or try to hold on to what is already lost.... Make certain that when the Negro gets his rights and his vote that he does not in the process learn to treat the white man with the same contempt and disdain that, unfortunately, some of us now treat him."

Two days later Moore was ambushed and murdered in Keener, Alabama after completing just 95 miles of his 350-mile journey. Ironically, his murder attracted the publicity that had eluded him during his lifetime. Moore had hoped to focus the nation's attention on segregation as a moral, legal, and political injustice. Walking through the Deep South to reinforce this message was risky, but the mailman lost his life not because he believed in integration, but because he did not believe in God. As this significant detail was not immediately released, the national Northern media initially characterized Moore as a twentieth century abolitionist. Although countless blacks had been killed during the civil rights struggle and many whites and blacks had been beaten and injured, Moore was the first white nonviolent activist to die for the cause. An editorial in the Chicago Daily News referred to him as a "latter day [martyred] St. Stephen." Phyllis Garland, correspondent for the black Pittsburgh Courier, called him "a sacrifice on the altar of hatred." Even Murray Kempton of the very liberal New Republic was moved to religious imagery. "Moore's condition seems to have been paranoid not in the delusion of being persecuted, but in the conviction of being specially blessed," he wrote. (This) "was the paranoia of evangelical times and

with which George Fox, for one, may have built a church." (Fox founded the religious order of Quakers in 1647.)

Journalists increasingly cast Moore as the hero of a kind of passion play—an itinerant mailman crucified by those who misunderstood and feared his message. Even after his Atheism was revealed, clergyman, activists, and politicians continued to use his murder as a platform from which to articulate their own convictions and fears. This would abruptly change, however, when sympathetic activists began to announce their intentions to finish Moore's walk. Within four months of his murder five unsuccessful attempts were made to complete it, and the notion of "sacrificial death" was replaced by questions concerning Moore's sanity. As a lone crusader Moore had cut a noble figure, but as more and more whites rallied to his cause, traditionalists insisted that he'd willed his own death in an insane attempt to achieve martyrdom. His Atheism was used to undercut his value as a role model for religious-oriented northern activists, and to feed a rabid fundamentalist-segregationist notion that executing an Atheist, an integrationist, or a communist—consorters with the devil—was technically not murder at all.

If Moore's death provoked so much national controversy, why is his name so unfamiliar? The simple answer is that two weeks after his murder the city of Birmingham imploded. The Children's Crusade and the March on Washington were the compelling events of that spring and summer and reporters dropped all other stories to cover them. Children threatened by snarling police dogs, demonstrators scattered by fire hoses, an integrated crowd of thousands gathered peacefully at the Lincoln Memorial—those images stole the spotlight and pushed a mailman, an assassin, and hundreds of Freedom Walkers into the shadows. Today, when religion has once again taken center stage in American political life, when Senator Joseph Lieberman declares that freedom of religion does not mean freedom from religion, when Governor Mitt Romney's Mormonism has the potential to derail his presidential campaign, and when former Senator Gary Hart expresses Deep concern about declarations of faith becoming conditions for seeking public office, its time to lift Bill Moore out of those shadows dust him off, and explore who he was, what he did, and why he did it.

Jerry Handte of the Binghamton Press described Bill Moore's life as "full of paradox." "Although he was a vigorous crusader, he was a gentle one," Handte said. "He adopted such causes as civil rights, world peace, and bettering the lot of mental patients without the bitter invective and seeming hatred of opposition often characteristic of reformers...."

If you'd been inside the crowded Chattanooga Greyhound Bus station on April 21, 1963 you might have noticed this tall, heavyset, sandy haired man passing through. Shabbily but neatly dressed, he dragged a shopping cart filled with his belongings behind him, and wore a set of sandwich board signs around his neck. The front panel read "End Segregation in America, Eat At Joe's—Both Black and White." On the back he'd printed "Equal Rights For All (Mississippi or Bust)." Moore's quirkiness would catch your attention, but the excitement dancing in his eyes and the trembling anticipation in his demeanor would hold it. He was a man embarking on what he believed was the most important journey of his life.

Watching Moore begin his walk 45 years ago, it might be impossible for you to accept that he had a steady job, a wife and three teenagers who loved him, and that he'd earned a college degree in economics, served in the Marine corps, studied languages in London and Paris, attended graduate school at Johns Hopkins University, and published a book. But he had done all those things.

Born on April 28, 1927 in Binghamton, New York, Moore was sent to live with his paternal grandparents in Russell, Mississippi when his mother died two years later. After his father remarried in 1937, Moore returned to Binghamton where he initially had a difficult time adjusting to the harsh northern winters. He was Deeply homesick for Mississippi, but eventually settled down, became a good student, and hoped to go to college. Neither his father nor his stepmother, however, saw any value in higher education and when they insisted that Bill find a job after high school he enlisted in the Marines. After his discharge in 1949, he graduated from Binghamton's Harpur College, courtesy of the GI bill, and pursued graduate study to prepare for a career in the foreign service. Although his relationship with his parents never improved, Moore formed several close friendships with teachers and colleagues and they became a kind of surrogate family for him. In 1952, after his best friend, Gus Youngstrom, died Moore suffered a nervous breakdown. He refused to acknowledge Youngstrom's death, and his father had him committed to the Binghamton State Hospital where he was diagnosed a schizophrenic and prescribed shock treatments. When Moore's therapist assured him that accepting reality was the key to recovery he countered that Mamie Eisenhower routinely had her fortune told with a crystal ball. "Should the First Lady be put in a State Hospital because she believes what she wants to believe?" he asked. Moore considered himself a prisoner rather than a patient, arguing that involuntary commitment violated his rights of free speech and free association. During his two-year recuperation he read the works of Gandhi, Thoreau, and A. J. Muste, founder of the War Resisters League. When he was released in 1954 he joined the League and later established Mental Health Anonymous (MHA), a self-help organization modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous. Moore hosted MHA meetings in his apartment, and the program was so successful that he was eventually offered a job as a caseworker with the City Welfare Department.

In 1956, Moore met Mary Weyant, the neighbor of a blind graduate student whom he read to three times a week. She was raising three children, separated from an abusive husband, and considered a pillar of the Park Terrace Heights Gospel Chapel. Moore

explained to Mary that while he appreciated the comfort Christianity brought her, he could never become a believer. In spite of their differences they fell in love and were married on November 1, 1956. For the next six years Moore provided for his ready-made family, ran Mental Health Anonymous, volunteered with the War Resister's League, and wrote letters to the editor of the Binghamton Evening Press addressing issues running the gamut from recognition of Red China, to disarmament, fluoridation of the city water system, and the need for four-way stop-signs at local intersections. In the spring of 1962 he gained wide notoriety for his advocacy of First Amendment religious freedom and his support for Madalyn Murray's suit against the federal government to end enforced prayer and Bible reading in the public schools. He also advocated removing "In God We Trust" from U.S. currency.

Few issues could have upset his wife more. On August 27, 1962 Mary wrote an open letter to the editor of the Binghamton Sun Bulletin:

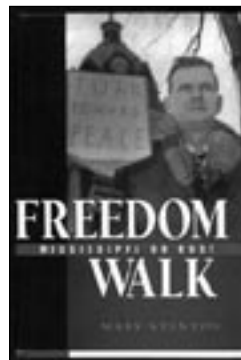
I would like it publicly known that I am not at all in agreement with my husband, Mr. William L. Moore in his political or religious stand which has recently roused the public ire.... My three children and I are born-again Christians and would be very happy if prayer and Bible reading were observed in the public schools. We believe that this nation was founded on Christian principles and we deplore the atheistic trend that is making such headway today. Our Constitution was framed to guarantee us freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.

A year earlier Moore had met James Peck, who had introduced him to civil rights activism. Peck, a radical pacifist, applied the principles of conscientious objection to the fight for racial justice. In 1958, he was arrested for sailing into an H-bomb testing area on the peace ship Golden Rule, and in 1961 he'd nearly been killed on a Freedom Ride in Anniston, Alabama. It took fifty-seven stitches to sew Peck's head back together after a white mob finished beating him.

Peck's message was similar to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, but without the Christian foundation, and that made it compelling to Moore. Like Moore, Peck was an Atheist. In 1961 Moore was serving on a local War Resisters League committee to honor Peck, editor of the WRL News. After Peck returned from the Freedom Ride he was asked to deliver the keynote address at their annual meeting. Moore was so excited about Peck's visit that he insisted on personally picking him up at the airport. On the way to the event they spoke at length about the peace movement, labor organizing, and civil disobedience.

Freedom Walk. Mississippi or Bust

by Mary Stanton



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Peck maintained that the fight for human rights was a single struggle and that America's political and economic systems needed to be challenged by a united activist front. For him, nonviolent protest, economic reform, and racial justice were inseparable. "Why are you wasting your time here in Binghamton?" Peck asked, and that question literally changed Moore's life overnight.

On Peck's advice he'd joined the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an interracial civil rights organization whose strategy of "creating crises," like the Freedom Rides and the sit ins, appealed to him. Moore participated in non-violent demonstrations in New York City and in Maryland where he picketed Jim Crow practices at the Gwyn Oak Amusement Park, the Northwood Theatre, and in Howard Johnson restaurants and Holiday Inns all along Maryland's Route 40. Mary was both opposed to racial justice activism and fearful of its consequences and the marriage steadily deteriorated. In January 1963 Moore secured a transfer from the post office and moved to Baltimore. There he volunteered with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, CORE, the American Civil Liberties Union, the NAACP, and Madalyn Murray's new organization, American Atheists, which was suing the city of Baltimore for exempting churches from paying taxes.

Although a New York Times editorial reduced Moore's walk to "a pitifully naive pilgrimage," his trek across the Deep South is best understood within the radical pacifist tradition that he'd studied and come to admire through his relationship with Jim Peck. Moore was not naive. He never expected to single handedly redeem the South nor did he imagine himself as any kind of savior. His walk was an act of conscience, planned in the spirit of retired navy captain Albert Bigelow's 1958 Peace Sail, in which Peck had participated, to advocate disarmament. "I am going," Bigelow wrote at that time, "because however mistaken, unrighteous, and unrepentant governments may seem, I still believe all men are really good at heart, and that my act will speak to them."

Moore was walking to petition Governor Ross Barnett to change the racial climate that was oppressing the Magnolia State. Barnett had refused to allow James Meredith, a black veteran, to register as a student at the tax-supported University of Mississippi. Elected in 1960 on a pledge to defend segregation, Barnett had vowed in his inaugural address to maintain the Southern way of life at all costs. On September 26, 1962 he'd personally traveled to the Ole Miss campus in Oxford to inform Meredith that "I do hereby deny you admission to the University and I do so politely." When Meredith was finally enrolled by a federal court order enforced by federal troops, Barnett directed state officials to go to jail rather than obey that order. His defiance culminated in a campus riot that left

two people dead and many others injured. In the letter that Moore carried addressed to Governor Barnett he'd written "I have always had a warm place in my heart for Mississippi, the land of my childhood and my ancestors. I dislike the reputation this state has acquired as being the most backward and most bigoted in the land. Those who truly love Mississippi must work to change this image."

Moore actively sought publicity for his walk and petitioned the organizations he supported—CORE, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the NAACP—to sponsor him. But their officers refused, insisting that his signs were too provocative and that a one-man walk was just too dangerous. Their fears were based on his anti-segregation message. No one appears to have been aware of the danger that Moore's religious skepticism posed. On the second day of his journey Moore attached a poster he'd ordered from New Masses magazine to his shopping cart. It was a line-drawn portrait of Jesus Christ on a wanted poster with the words, Wanted: Agitator, Carpenter by Trade, Revolutionary, Consorter with Criminals and Prostitutes written beneath it. Moore appreciated Young's irony and wrongly assumed that others would do likewise. He hoped the poster would provoke discussion about how Jesus, who had turned the status quo on its head with his defense of the poor, the captive, and the outsider, would feel about segregation. Moore remembered that in Mississippi no one had ever been shy about religion.

That morning Moore met a group of men outside a grocery in Collbran, Alabama who took immediate offense to his poster. One caught up with him later that afternoon and brought a friend who warned Moore that he'd never make it past Birmingham. That evening Moore was murdered.

When the Collbran grocer, Floyd Simpson, was arrested he admitted that he'd spoken with Moore twice that day, but emphatically denied that he'd killed him. Simpson recalled that Moore had been evasive. "He wouldn't give exact answers to our questions concerning God and about the segregation issue," he said. When asked about the poster Simpson replied, "To the best of my recollection it said Jesus Christ, son of a carpenter. I don't remember the rest of the writing but the thing appeared to be low-rating Christ."

Floyd Simpson was a knight of the local Ku Klux Klan. In 1963 the Invisible Empire operated so openly in Alabama that KKK welcome signs were posted outside the city limits of Gadsden, Montgomery, and Birmingham right alongside the shields of the Rotary, Kiwanis, and Chamber of Commerce. At Klan meetings an American flag, a cross, an open Bible, and a sword were displayed on an altar to remind the knights that they were soldiers in the war against the enemies of their Christian nation.

Episcopal bishop John Shelby Spong, who was raised in the Bible Belt, has observed that "when a fundamentalist Christian sees the Anti-Christ in someone who is disturbing his or her religious security it becomes not merely justifiable but downright righteous to utter words of condemnation and prayers for the early demise of that enemy....Indeed," Spong notes, "you can even believe that you are God's anointed one chosen to rid the world of this demonic figure."

Floyd Simpson's response to Bill Moore's assertion that he could not believe in a God who would condemn everybody because Adam ate an apple, was complex. Simpson believed that Atheists were communists, the same enemy he'd fought in Korea in 1950. In the army he'd learned that the goal of communism was the destruction of democracy, Christianity, and American culture. Communists were godless men, mostly Jewish agitators who were provoking Blacks to insurrection in the United States.

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Simpson recognized in Bill Moore a walking, breathing threat to the Southern way of life. Moore was a smart-mouthed blasphemer who not only broke God's laws but denied his existence. Christians had a duty to protect themselves and their families from people like him. Simpson believed that Moore's repudiation of Christianity led directly to his heretical beliefs in communism and integration. The enemies of racial separation were the enemies of white culture and the enemies of God.

On September 12, 1963, an Etowah County grand jury convened to review Alabama's case against Floyd Simpson. Circuit Solicitor William Rayburn presented the people's case that on April 24, 1963 Moore's route took him past Simpson's grocery; that Simpson admitted speaking with Moore twice on that day; that the FBI traced the bullets which killed Moore to Simpson's rifle, and that several witnesses placed Simpson's black Buick near the murder site less than one hour before Moore's death. Still, this was not enough to convince the panel of seventeen whites and one black man to indict Simpson.

There were five subsequent attempts to complete Bill Moore's walk to Jackson, Mississippi. On April 30, 1963 Robert Gore a black CORE activist spoke to reporters in Chattanooga on behalf of the first twelve volunteer Freedom Walkers from CORE and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). "The way America responds to our march will indicate how America feels about what happened to William Moore," he said. Two days later as they stepped across the border from Georgia into Alabama they were beaten and jailed. No one ever reached the Governor's mansion at 400 High Street to deliver Moore's letter.

Early in April 1963 Bill Moore had written to President John F. Kennedy to explain why he planned to walk across the Deep South alone. "I will be engaged in interstate travel, and theoretically, under the protection of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens," he declared. "I am not making this walk to demonstrate either federal rights or state's rights, but individual rights. I am doing it for the South, to illustrate that the most basic freedom of peaceful protest is not altogether extinguished down there. I do not believe that such a walk has ever been undertaken before. I want to show that it can be done."

Sincerely,
William L. Moore *

Mary Stanton is a historian whose primary research interest is white civil rights activism. She has written four books on the subject. Journey Toward Justice: Juliette Hampton Morgan and The Montgomery Bus Boycott, The Hand Of Esau: Montgomery's Jewish Community and the Bus Boycott, From Selma To Sorrow: The Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo, Freedom Walk. Stanton has taught at the University of Idaho, the College of St. Elizabeth, and Rutgers University. Her articles have appeared in Government Executive, Southern Exposure, Gulf South Historical Review, Alabama Heritage, and Southern Jewish History. She lives in New York City and works as an administrator for the Town of Mamaroneck in Westchester County, New York. She can be reached at mstanton@townofmamaroneck.org



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- 01/04/08** — Ellen Johnson gave an interview to the Dallas Morning News on a Texas State Law requiring a moment of silence in the public schools.
- 01/11/08** — Ellen Johnson gave an interview to New York Magazine about the rise of Atheism in America.
- 01/10/08** — David Silverman was a guest on the "Around The World With Bob Woodward" program on The Catholic Channel on Sirius Radio to talk about our Utah Cross case.
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God and Atheism

by Henry F. Tonn

There is now enough evidence for most scientists to conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that God does not exist. At least that is the conclusion reached by the elite of our scientific community through their studies of astronomy, physics, mathematics and other related disciplines. These conclusions are not new, of course, but they have received wider publicity since the appearance of Edward Wilson and James Watson, one a Nobel laureate, on the Charlie Rose show, December 14, 2005—a program that has been re-broadcast at least once. Their point is this: if you understand the workings of the universe, explanations involving a supreme being are not required.

The implications here are obviously profound. The majority of the world's population believes in a supreme being and the idea of a godless existence would be anathema to most. The conflict is not new: science and religion have struggled with each other over the centuries because the former is constantly searching and changing while the latter remains essentially the same. In the past the Church was such a powerful entity that it could maintain control over wayward scientists. Galileo was put under house arrest in the 1600's because his findings regarding the universe contradicted the established teachings of the Catholic Church.

The comfort of religious belief is consistency and predictability. The words found in religious texts such as the Bible, Koran and Vedic scriptures do not change; only the interpretation of their meaning does from sect to sect. But this inherent inflexibility makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the religious institutions to handle the new discoveries and demands of an ever-modernizing world. An example of this is the present battle in America between the evolutionists and creationists. The Bible's message regarding the creation of man is explicit; it would require a long and illogical stretch for creationists to incorporate the ideas of evolution.

Sigmund Freud was an Atheist who agreed with the philosopher-writer Voltaire that people will invent a god even if one does not exist. Carl Jung, Freud's brilliant psychoanalytic adversary, disagreed with Freud's Atheism. He once answered a question by asserting, "I don't believe in God, I know God." The great Einstein used to discuss the existence of God with his colleagues at Princeton. He believed in a God who does not involve Himself in the personal lives of people but, nevertheless, *is* responsible for order to a chaotic universe. "God does not play dice with the universe," he once stated, and this line

was often used to support the claim that Einstein was religious. (If he was, it was not in the traditional sense, but more in keeping with the Spinozan view of "god" and "nature" being two different terms for the same concept.) His friends, however, argued that Einstein's own work proved that the universe was a random creation with no divine guidance, although a few believed Einstein was in stubborn denial and refused to recognize the implications of his own research.

Today, it is probable that Einstein would agree with his colleagues. But where does that leave the great and small organized religions of the world, plus the millions of people with independent spiritual beliefs? Can a Buddhist become "enlightened" without God? Can the Catholic Church, with its brilliant theological heritage, simply admit its mistake and close down? What about reincarnation in Hinduism? Each of these questions can be answered individually, but the broader challenge of science versus faith still remains.

I decided to conduct an informal survey to determine the potential impact of science's continual evolution on the religious institutions and people's personal beliefs. My question was, "How can you reconcile your religious convictions with the growing scientific evidence that God does not exist?" I deliberately chose people from varying backgrounds.

The first person I approached was a devout and lifelong member of a southern fundamentalist Christian church. His interpretation of the Bible was black and white, with no room for grays. Initially he had difficulty even understanding the question, but gradually warmed to the experience. His response finally was that he had no response. The idea of a world without God was beyond his comprehension and consequently irrelevant. My conversation with him had little impact, and he was probably more amused than anything else.

The next person was a member of a charismatic Christian organization that tended to focus more on feelings than theology. He had attained more formal education than his predecessor, having briefly attended college in his youth. He originally rejected the idea that science could disprove the existence of God, but I asked him to suspend his skepticism long enough to view the subject from a theoretical perspective. I requested that he imagine himself a scientist capable of understanding the astrophysical proofs of God's non-existence. How would he reconcile his religious beliefs with this very clear scientific evidence? He thought a while and then said, "My understanding of the world is through my feelings and spirituality. That's reality to me.

I would ignore the scientific conclusions.”

My third subject was a retired teacher who had been a devoted Catholic her entire life. She was able to deal with the question in a much more intellectual manner, and found it quite upsetting. In the end she stated, “The afterlife is what’s important. If I thought there were no afterlife, I would be horrified. Life would be meaningless!”

My fourth subject was a well-educated Episcopal priest. He enjoyed the intellectual challenge and gave me a ten-minute lecture on the universe, mathematics and spirituality. He finally asserted that science cannot account for everything in the universe and that reality is a matter of perspective. “It doesn’t really matter anyway,” he concluded. “People need religion.”

I finished my informal survey by asking the following question of a mathematician friend who had little interest in things of a spiritual nature. “Science has now proven beyond a reasonable doubt that God does not exist. What is your reaction to this idea?” He shrugged his shoulders and replied, “I knew that 25 years ago.”

Of course, this issue has been debated through the centuries in various guises. The most interesting period was probably eighteenth century Europe where the constricting grip of Christianity on intellectual thought was in its final throes, allowing great thinkers like Voltaire and Rousseau to express themselves without restraint. Continuing revelations were pouring forth from mathematics, physics, chemistry and astronomy, and the stultifying darkness of the middle ages was becoming a distant memory. Voltaire, who wrote ninety-nine volumes of literature during his long lifetime, reveled in the new discoveries. He believed that reason superceded everything else and predicted that many of society’s ills would be ameliorated by the discoveries of science. He was not an

Atheist, but despised the “cruel dogmas” of all religions, and particularly the superstition and fanaticism that had led to the repressive measures of the Inquisition.

Rousseau, on the other hand, reacted vociferously against the growing rationalism of this period which we now call the Enlightenment. While not rejecting reason, he considered it dangerous because it did not teach moral value. He was offended by traditional Christian orthodoxy and believed the existence of God could be verified through the order and unity of the universe, which reflected the wisdom and intelligence of its Creator. He popularized the term “divine instinct,” which involved knowing God through nature, and believed that this nature gave one the “conscience to love the good, reason to know it and freedom to choose it.” On a more practical level, Rousseau preached that rejecting the spiritual aspects of human existence would have disastrous consequences on the future of society.

It is not surprising, then, that historians Will and Ariel Durant concluded that all philosophy since the beginning of the nineteenth century has been a contest between Rousseau and Voltaire. The two men are practically forgotten today, being seldom read, but the essence of their arguments remains. In these modern times, science races along at a breathtaking pace while religion steadfastly holds its position. The two are as adversarial as ever. Charles Darwin published his monumental work, “On the Origin of Species,” in 1859, but the debate between evolution and creation continues. A recent survey found that 50% of the American public continues to believe in some version of biblical creation. The idea of evolution is so outrageous to many parents that they fight valiantly against having it taught to their children in the school systems.

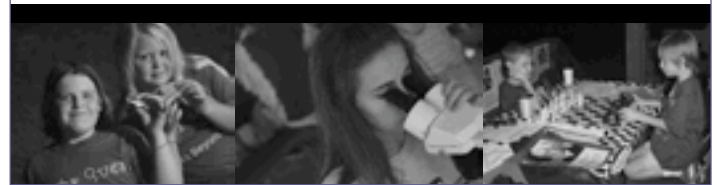
One cannot help but regard this as peculiar. Evolution is no longer a theory, it is a fact. It has been systematically developed through years of painstaking research and the conclusions are now



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can read and comprehend the evidence of evolution for themselves. This cannot be said, however, for evidence refuting the existence of a supreme being. Here we enter the domain of a privileged few. One is reminded of Albert Einstein during his heyday being asked to explain relativity so that the general reader could understand it. He laughed. Relativity was a mathematical construct that was not really accessible to the lay person. He could only present a vague facsimile.

The question today confronting us is whether mounting scientific evidence dispelling the existence of God will have a substantial influence on the world of religious belief. The answer is probably no. The status quo will remain. If history is any guide, the two will co-exist even while remaining adversaries. It is likely the Episcopal priest is right: people need religion. As Rousseau once remarked, “If faith and fact contradict, then so much the worse for fact!” *

Henry F. Tonn is a psychologist has been writing for more than 30 years and has published book reviews, short stories, poems and professional articles in newspapers and literary and professional journals. A short list of publications would include the British Journal of Social Psychiatry, Charlotte Observer, Tugboat Review, and the Panhandler. Essays of his have recently appeared in The Gettysburg Review, the Foliage Oak, and Quay. Dr. Tonn can be reached at shrink65@bellsouth.net.



No Better than Charles Manson

by Rich Hite

Westfield, Massachusetts, 1679

... coming to Northampton, I heard Mr. Mather the first time that, that in the world ye shall have trouble, but in Christ ye may have & shall have peace, which encouraged me for a while. But afterwards his preaching did not please me but I thot I would keep my hopes. And the Lord visiting me with sickness that I was neer death, yet I thot I was well enough prepared for death & was not willing to hear to the Contrary: But the Lord in great mercy was pleased not to take me away in that Condition. But remaining still Confident of my good Estat, I, as I was on atime into the meadow to work, thot nothing should dash my hopes thereof. But presently the thought of [blank] who murdered himselfe Coming into my mind, I for a while much wondered at it. But my thots soon running thus, What if God should leave me? Then I should do so. & the temptation came so hard upon me that God would leave me, & I should certainly dy such a death; be guilty of mine own Blood, & be damned irreconcilably, that I was not able to go on to my business; but returning home, the temptation prevaile more, & more upon me, & I was filled with horrour of Conscience, the Lord did so manifest his wrath & displeasure against me: & my Sins were like mountains ready to sink me down into Hell every moment. & not being able to sleep, was forced to rise up at midnight & Call up my Father in law, who hearing how it was with me, & that I feared I had sinned the unpardonable Sin; & that there were no Hopes of mercy, gave me good Counsell, & prayed with me. & after having some abatement I returned home, & remain'd in that Condition: But the Lord after awile was pleased to abate the temptaion, & his wrath a little. & I fell to reading & praying in Secret; being encouraged to look to Jesus Christ for mercy. But Mr. Mathers Ministry was like daggers in my heart. For when I was labouring to lay hold on Christ, as I thot, by Faith, it did so rip up my State in such a way as dashed my hopes ... ^[1]

The preceding excerpt is from a statement made in 1679 by John Ingersoll (1626-1684), by then a resident of Westfield, Massachusetts, and one of the founders of Westfield's Puritan church. Ingersoll's public recitation of a religious experience, concluding with his eventual belief in his own salvation, fulfilled the Puritan requirement for church membership. By the time he delivered it, Ingersoll had resided in New England for nearly thirty years and had achieved respectability in his community. Considering the context in which it was delivered, Ingersoll's formal religious deposition appears remarkable for the emotional turmoil and spiritual struggles it reveals—or was it so remarkable? Perhaps Ingersoll was unique in his willingness to go public with his private spiritual upheavals, even well into his middle age, although some of his contemporaries may have privately shared many of his apprehensions.

The “Mr. Mather” referenced in the text is not Increase Mather or his son, Cotton, but Eleazer Mather (1637-1669), a brother of Increase. Eleazer Mather's pastorate of the Northampton, Massachusetts church overlapped John Ingersoll's residence there, and this fact contributed significantly to the latter's emotional anguish over his spiritual predicament. It is Ingersoll's tormented uncertainty over salvation that allows me to view him over three hundred years later as a kindred spirit, because there was a time in my own life when I experienced a similar spiritual struggle. For me, this crisis came much earlier in life than it did for him. Ingersoll was probably in his thirties when he contemplated suicide. My own most intense period of religious anxiety occurred when I was going through puberty—and like John Ingersoll, I had my own “Eleazer Mather.”

John Ingersoll came through his spiritual crisis with his beliefs intact, convinced of his soul's salvation; at least, that is what he publicly proclaimed. I took a far different path. More than thirty years after my own struggle, I am an Atheist. Notions about the soul and salvation went the way of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny long ago for me. Nonetheless, my youthful period as a “true believer” remains vivid in my memory. Strange as it may sound, during much of that period I was convinced that, in the eyes of god, I was no better than Charles Manson.^[2]

One might ask why an eleven-year-old child would view himself in the same moral category as Charles Manson. The answer to that bizarre juxtaposition lies in the teachings of the Eleazer Mather

from my youth a widow who taught the Sunday school classes for Grades 4-6 in the Presbyterian Church that my family attended. I feel confident in saying that most adults who knew me at that time regarded me as a well-behaved child; I had no reason to believe that I was anything other than a good kid for the most part. But this teacher completely transmogrified my self-perception. I was small for my age, and like all boys in that situation, I was frequently bullied. I never took revenge on any of the bullies, other than in my mind. In my fantasy world, which may or may not be common for bullied children (I have never asked others), I often wrought terrible vengeance on my tormentors—even to the point of murdering them. I felt that as long as I did not act on these impulses (read “did not give in to temptation”) I was all right. But my Sunday school teacher taught us that in the eyes of God, an evil idea is just as sinful as, and is in fact no different than, an evil act. Suddenly, in my childish mind, I was a serial killer—ne damned as thoroughly as Charles Manson.

One may wonder why I did not discuss my fears with my parents. As fate would have it, their final separation occurred the same year I came under the tutelage of this teacher, a separation I knew would eventually lead to divorce. My parents had broken the sacred vow “till death do us part” and thus, they too were irrevocably damned. In terms of their offering succor to my soul’s salvation, they had no credibility. Furthermore, I could do nothing to save them. The only thing left for me was to attempt to save myself. But I had no concept of how to control my impure thoughts, and as I entered puberty, the fear of eternal damnation continued to rage unabated. I was outgrowing the murder fantasies by that time, but having already committed them in thought, my soul remained tainted. Those fantasies, in any event, were being replaced by other sins. My growing attraction to girls was an abomination—one I would surely suffer hellfire for. Sex within marriage was not a sin, but I was not married, so to think of sex with a girl who was not my wife was just as evil as actually having sex out of wedlock. As much as possible, I suppressed these urges, even to the point of covering my eyes if other boys showed me photos from magazines such as *Playboy* or *Penthouse*. This round of repression did not lessen until doubts about my faith began forming during my freshman year of high school. At first, the doubts left me terror-stricken—they were, after all, new sins. For additional brownie points with god, I joined the church, but in the final analysis, I was sure that the almighty knew my heart, and thus condemned me despite my outward expressions of piety. My powers of reason were strong for my age and they tugged me in two vastly different directions. On one hand, they led me to question the idea that a virgin had given birth to a child and that a corpse had risen from its grave. At the same time, they instilled in me a fear that if an all-powerful god could read the doubts in my mind, I was irrevocably damned despite the fact that I had never actually committed murder or slept with a girl. In the distorted logic of my youthful mind, I had killed more people and had more sexual experiences than Charles Manson ever dreamed of. I was just as guilty as Manson.

Gradually, the skeptical side of my analytical mind took control, particularly when I enrolled in college and was exposed to a far more cosmopolitan environment than I had ever experienced before. The fear of divine reprisal slowly faded away. What also faded was the memory of irrevocable loss, a chance for spiritual salvation that my Sunday school teacher had offered me just as I was entering puberty, that is, until I read a news story about a child who actually did what I had contemplated, though for a far different reason.

The article was not long—just a small item buried on the third or fourth page of *USA Today* sometime late in 1992 or early in

1993. To this day, I am not sure why it caught my attention. But once it did, it awakened a memory that had slept in my subconscious for nearly twenty years.

The story was, indeed, a tragic one. A six-year-old girl had committed suicide by throwing herself in front of a train. Still, I am sure that this strange event did not leave a lasting impression on many of its readers. After all, suicides occur every day. Young children die tragically every day. I, like most Americans, have grown numb to such stories. But this particular one stayed with me because this little girl took her own life for a very specific reason.

The child’s mother was dying of cancer. That too, is a tragedy, but like the others, it is an everyday occurrence. Well-meaning relatives had taken it upon themselves to comfort the grieving child any way they could. Over and over again, she was told that her mother was going to go to heaven and become an angel. After a time, she began saying that she wanted to be an angel like her mother. Apparently, no one took her seriously, until it was too late. The last person to see her alive heard her say that she wanted to be in heaven waiting for her mother when she got there. The next day, the child was dead.

I was thirty-one years old when I read this article. The memory it awakened dated back to when I was eleven—a time when I contemplated a similar act of self-destruction. The previous two years had been difficult for me: my parents separated when I was nine and my grandfather died when I was ten. But despite all this, I really had no desire to die. There was certainly enough happiness in my life to make it worth living. But something my Sunday school teacher taught me made me feel that there was an urgent need for me to go ahead and end my life.

This same teacher who had convinced me that I was as depraved as a serial killer had offered me what seemed a certain method for avoiding the flames of hell. One of the things she mentioned in class was that twelve was the age of accountability for one’s sins. God did not hold children under twelve responsible for their sins, she said. It was only when children reached the age of twelve that they would suffer consequences for their sins.

I was a naive but thoughtful child, and I doubt that any of the other children in the class thought enough about what the teacher had told us to reach the particular conclusion I did. It was obvious—the only way one could be assured of avoiding hell was to die before the age of twelve. I had less than a year to elude that terrible fate.

Obviously, I did not follow through with this idea, but at the time, I gave considerable attention to this ironclad proposition. I read through various entries in my beloved *World Book* encyclopedias to figure out the most painless way to commit suicide. I never went as far as teetering on the precipice of a bridge, or holding a gun to my head, but I definitely puzzled through the entire matter. In the end,

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I suppose, I lacked the tender hopes or the blind ambition necessary to take my own life; this, it seems to me, is what drove the six-year old girl to kill herself. In matters such as this, hesitation might be a virtue. Yet, there were times after my twelfth birthday when I quietly bemoaned the fact that I had forsaken the only sure method to escape eternity in hell.

Today, I am a humanist as well as an Atheist. Religion is not a factor in my life. I can honestly say, however, that my lack of belief does not stem from the incident I just described. In fact, after my early teens, I completely forgot this dilemma—that is, until I read that *USA Today* article in the early 1990s. By the time I read it, I had not taken religion seriously for more than a decade. But until that memory resurfaced, I was non-committal on the issue of whether I would acquiesce in raising my children as Christians, if I ever had any children. I now know that I would not do so under any circumstances.

I know that many people who are non-believers or who are merely lukewarm about religion feel that religious training is essential to give children a solid grounding in ethics and morality. Others think it is necessary to avoid conflict with extended family members or the community they live in. I must appeal to these people to reexamine their views of this matter. It is true that most religious faiths share many of the values that humanists hold. I have never met an Atheist, a humanist, or a Christian who would say that murder is right. But many mainstream religions also teach that homosexuals are evil, a position no committed humanist I know would ever espouse. This is just one example. It is impossible for parents to know exactly what their children are being taught in Sunday school. I certainly never told my parents about my eleven-year old religious rationale for contemplating suicide. Even in sermons, when parents are with their children and hear everything their children hear, they cannot know exactly how their children are interpreting what the minister is saying. It is, in my opinion, the responsibility of all humanist parents to provide their children with a solid grounding in ethics. It is far too easy to dump that responsibility off on a church—and in some cases, that route might lead innocence into calamity.

I do not assume that all churches have Sunday school teachers like the one I knew. I am sure, however, that I am not the only child who was exposed to such a destructive “Fountain of Wisdom.”

The voice of this Presbyterian matriarch is silent now. Her teachings will not disturb any more young minds. She died in 1998, aged 95, after spending several years in a nursing home. Others had already assumed her duties of expounding the word of god to elementary school students. I have no doubt that some of her successors learned from her and I can only hope that they are not repeating the messages she conveyed. I have removed myself from that community now so I no longer know its inner workings.

Another voice, silent much longer, is that of John Ingersoll. Yet more than three centuries after his death, his words touched me in a way that I never imagined possible. Reading them for the first time was a chilling experience, for two reasons: I recognized a mind akin to my own in some ways, despite the fact that I resolved my spiritual dilemma far differently than he did; and, I realized how much his religious turmoil and resolution directly impacted my own life. John Ingersoll fathered fifteen children and undoubtedly has tens of thousands of living descendants today. One of his sons, Thomas Ingersoll, was born in Westfield in 1668, after his “Northampton crisis.” Through Thomas, I am a ninth generation descendant of John Ingersoll. Had he “murdered himself,” as he contemplated, I never would have existed.

Voices from the past like John Ingersoll’s have taught me that emotional turmoil over religion is not a new phenomenon. It is not possible to know if he and others like him would have lived happier lives without religion. My own memories do make it possible for me to know that my life is better without it. I do not mean to imply that feelings of guilt and shame cannot play a positive role in society. People wrong each other every day. If they felt no guilt, there would be no reason for them to try to improve their behavior in the future. It is, however, impossible for me to believe that a well-ordered society based on ethical training and respect for the rights of others is unattainable without fear of supernatural reprisals. It is also impossible for me to believe that adolescents going through the normal urges of puberty should fear the same punishment as a serial killer. A moral or religious code that places such people on the same level does not create the kind of culture I wish to live in. Yet, as an adolescent, I believed firmly that I was destined for the same afterlife that awaited Charles Manson. I cannot think of any way that this experience helped me develop into a responsible adult and a productive member of society. I feel that I have developed in that way and there are numerous experiences I can cite that helped me along that path. However, the Sunday school teacher I learned from during puberty was not one of them.

Rest in peace, John Ingersoll. *

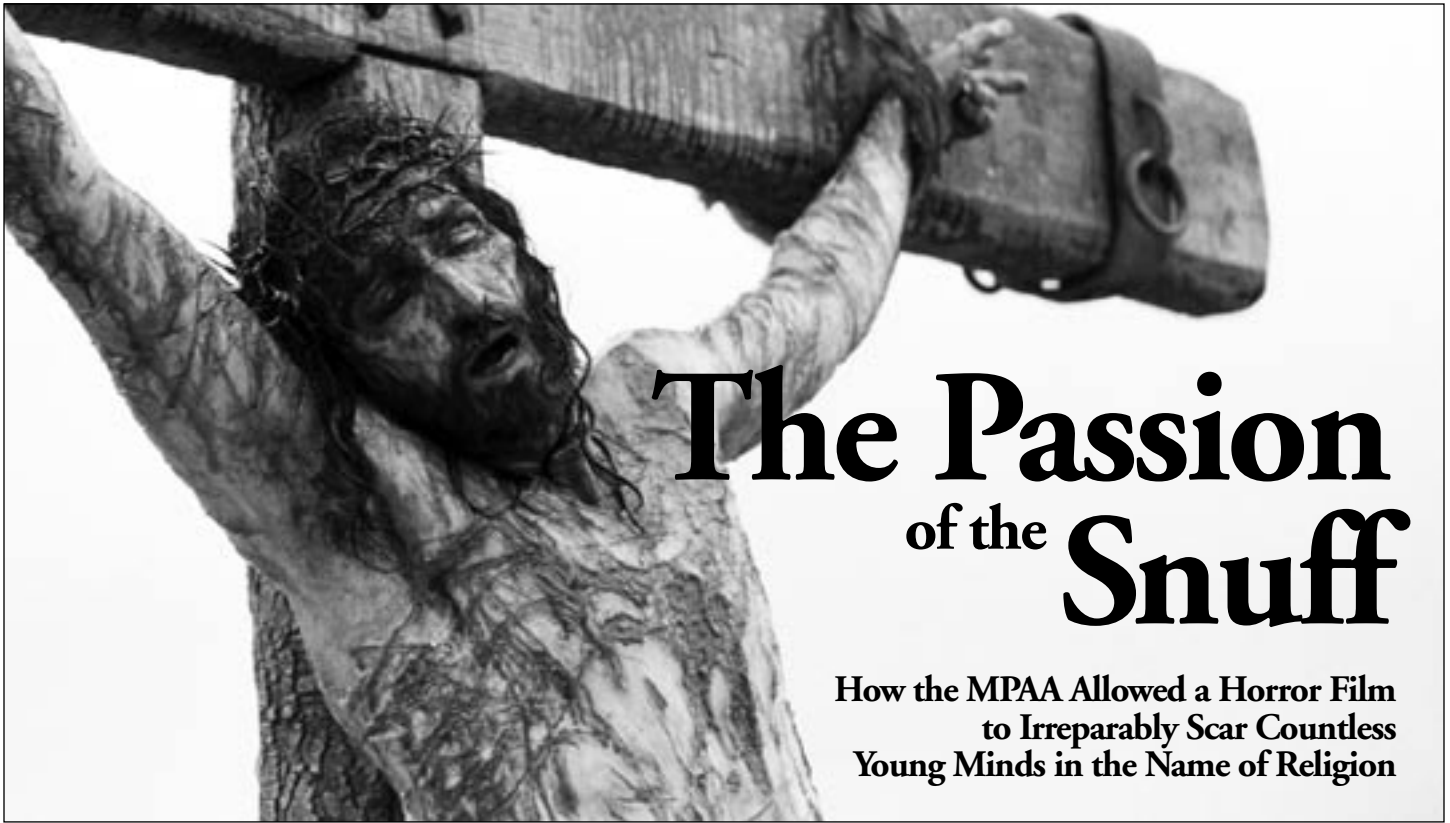
Notes

[1] John Ingersoll’s complete statement is transcribed in David L. Greene, “The English Origin (and Spiritual Turmoil) of John Ingersoll of Westfield, Massachusetts” *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (Boston, MA: New England Historic Genealogical Society), Vol. 151 (April 1997), 154-156. Cited there as having been reprinted with the permission of Twayne Publishers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Macmillan from *Edward Taylor’s Church records and Related Sermons, Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor*, Vol. 1: “Church Records and Related Sermons, edited by Thomas L. Davis and Virginia L. Davis, G.K. Hall and Company, 1981, 115-117. Edward Taylor was the pastor of the church in Westfield at the time John Ingersoll made this statement.

[2] Charles Manson was a cult leader who ordered the murders of seven people in Los Angeles in August 1969. Some of the members of the cult committed the murders. The most famous of the victims was actress Sharon Tate.

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The Passion of the Snuff

**How the MPAA Allowed a Horror Film
to Irreparably Scar Countless
Young Minds in the Name of Religion**

by Michael Gurnow

Mel Gibson's 2004 blockbuster, *The Passion of the Christ*, became the most widely viewed horror film in the history of the genre shortly after its release as droves upon hordes upon crowds pummeled out of church busses in hopes of meeting their guilt-ridden obligation to do cinematic penance. And that is exactly what they did for, little did they know with the aide of the Motion Picture Association of America the only thing to be had during the feature which contains no aesthetic value aside from its cinematography is the director's theological fascism, innocuously veiled behind its vastly understated R rating, which availed the work's traumatizing imagery to countless young minds in the hopes of psychologically scarring/scaring them into belief.

For anyone objecting to the proclamation that *The Passion of the Christ* is a horror film, the irrefutable fact remains: Gibson's film depicts, in *Newsweek* columnist David Ansen's terms, "flayed, severed, swollen, scarred flesh and rivulets of spilled blood, the crack of bashed bones and the groans of someone enduring the ultimate physical agony." A production such as this is what is referred to as a snuff film, a work wherein the audience stares voyeuristically on as it safely watches someone's premeditated execution. With consideration of the act being depicted, a snuff feature is a work of horror. As such, the question should not be whose death the audience is witnessing: Death in this manner should be viewed as reprehensible regardless of who the persecuted may be. Instead, the principal concern becomes why a person would voluntarily (to say nothing of paying to) witness another's prolonged and, at that, excruciating demise.

The Passion of the Christ was intentionally mislabeled so as to, not only dodge the essence of the film's events (which, one would think, would serve the filmmaker's purposes all the more readily), but to assure apprehensive audiences who would not ordinarily patronize such a showing that the "drama" which they are about to watch,

by implication given genre categorization, is of the same ilk as many of their loved dramatic classics, such as Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*, Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*, or Robert Mulligan's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What becomes ironic is that, in so doing, such provides an alibi for persons who would normally object to such violent subject matter (Roger Ebert, who has viewed over 10,000 films in his career, states that *The Passion of the Christ* is "the most violent film I have ever seen"). For comparative purposes, Eli Roth's thematically similar *Hostel*, a film in which people are fatally flayed, is a work which--if shown to church groups--would undoubtedly prompt its audience to depart midway through the feature as it announces the filmmaker's moral depravity. Yet Ebert makes the very astute point that Gibson's film succeeds in the matter it does for one reason and one reason only: It is *Jesus* who is being beaten to death. As such, if anyone else were to have been placed on the Cross, be it historical or no, it would not be brusque to assume that the film would not have generated over 99.9 percent of its viewers.

If one were to be brutally honest (and how could a person not permit such given the circumstance surrounding the matter?), the agenda of *The Passion of the Christ* is not to entertain, educate, or enlighten. Aside from its misconstrued genre labeling, the work was erroneously granted the highly inappropriate rating of R when it should have given its visceral depiction of a man being sadistically beaten for almost 80 percent of the film's 127-minute running time received the notorious NC-17 branding. Of course, the cards were stacked in this regard for the film's distributor, 20th Century Fox, was aware of the potential audience which the film possessed and, as such, unhesitatingly cast its ballot for a Restricted rating as its representative 1/6 vote on the board of the Motion Picture Association of America (where only a majority is needed to pass). Indubitably, the other consenting votes were rooted, if not in dirty money, in the constituency's theo-political persuasions. And why wouldn't they be? If the film were to have been given a rating which would prohibit

persons under the age of seventeen admittance, as opposed to entry with a parent or guardian, Gibson and Co. would not have been afforded the opportunity to indoctrinate formative young minds for, hopefully, life. It wasn't enough that the film was already guaranteed an audience on the basis of social and church-directed duty, those responsible refused to admit that, if this were indeed what had occurred during the final twelve hours of Christ's life, that such might not be suitable for minors. (To add insult to injury, Gibson was still yet to be sated. He later reedited the work, cutting approximately five minutes of footage from the film in hopes of being able to generate a PG-13 rating—thus permitting persons between the ages of 13-18 to attend without the nuisance of having to procure an adult chaperon—which the Rating's Board humbly failed to grant (lest they blow the cover of their theo-political agenda). Instead, the director released his edited version without a rating so as to permit business-conscious theater owners to decide upon their own volition whether or not to admit minors without a guardian.)

The Passion of the Christ's pedantic itinerary of conversion by way of a literal lynching is readily achieved for it forces its viewer to sympathize with its central character (recall the last time that you entered midway through the chastising of a child in public and your innate reactions to such) and, as our inundated Christian nation tells us, he did so for our sake, thus we at least owe him our faith. However, such reasoning overlooks one fact: Just because you elect to do something using the ruse you are doing so on my behalf without my consent, such doesn't obligate me to meet to your previously undisclosed, and thereby non-agreed upon, demands for reciprocation. In the learn'd words of John Cleese in respect to Gibson's production, "If Dick Cheney was scourged and crucified, I'd feel sorry for him, but it wouldn't bring me any closer to his views." Furthermore, in such a brash approach to conversion, the occurs in that subconscious manipulation (images speak unspoken volumes) eliminates free will for the decision to change one's views is no longer a solely conscious matter (as opposed to the less convoluted and sensational non-fiction—feature length films are considered fictive artistic entities—address of the circumstances, i.e. a(nother) documentary upon the life of Christ).

Moreover, when considered as a work of art, *The Passion of the Christ* becomes an oxymoron for, from an aesthetic perspective, no one can argue that it offers nothing outside of artful cinematography but, of course, the basis for entering the theater for this reason alone is akin to purchasing an airplane ticket in order to get free peanuts. The film provides no storyline or plot exposition as it presumptuously assumes that its audience is familiar with the source material and therefore lethargically provides the bare minimum, expecting the audience to fill in the holes (on, natch, blind faith), so as to allot more time to its manipulative agenda. We are never given steadfast evidence of the crimes for which Christ is being charged, which becomes especially problematic considering the polarized, conflicting accusations brought upon him by opposing camps. The film houses no character development. We are never told why Christ—who has twelve people that are, at least in word, willing to die for his ideas as well as their

architect—only has one devotee remaining beside him when such time arrives. For that matter, the apostles are presented as expendable characters for we are never given insight into who they are personally anymore than we are issued the larger-than-life theories upon which they base their allegiance. Lastly, and at first seemingly incongruently, the devout filmmaker makes his philosophically astute titular idol appear to be mentally challenged for, when Christ does speak, it is in barely audible broken phrases. However, Gibson's decision to portray Jesus in such a manner is unapologetically Machiavellian: We are more willing to sympathize with someone who is, or seems to be, unable to contend with matters at hand whereas we are less likely to commiserate with a character who exhibits power and control.

Even from a "historical" perspective, the film still has problems. Those responsible adamantly cite the work's veracity despite the fact that Gibson takes the blasphemous liberty of placing actual dialogue in the mouth of Herod during his meeting with Jesus in lieu of the fact that Luke 23: 9 simply, unequivocally states, "Then he [Herod] questioned with him [Christ] in many words; but he answered him nothing." Gibson could easily have pulled the camera back, thus placing the two figures in the background and out of earshot, in order for the audience to be able to assess that a one-sided exchange was taking place but not hear what was being voiced. Instead, Gibson takes the initiative to have Herod say "Are you the one whose birth was foretold?" and "Answer me! Are you a king? How about me? Will you work a little magic for me?" Furthermore, there is the inherent contradiction with such a forthright statement in respect to the work's representative authenticity in that the mere act of translating a text from page to screen is, by definition, a fabrication (strictly defined, a fabrication itself is, in theological terms, a lie) for one is taking the original source material and changing it so as to make it conform and fit another medium.

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is not a film. Rather, it is a vehicle by which to fashion a plane to prompt a permanent sense of guilty obligation in its viewer. After procuring an audience-admitting rating of R instead of its merited NC-17, the 30 million dollar snuff production didactically, without so much as a semblance of artistic integrity, presents a wrathful, seditious reading of the forgiving New Testament Gospels with the unabashed intent of scaring its audience—to the point of trauma if necessary—into conversion. However, in so doing, Gibson does accomplish something of a miracle: After *The Passion of the Christ*, Charlton Heston is no longer seen as a burden but rather a welcome relief. *

Trivia tidbit: *Irony of all ironies, after spending weeks seated at Number One at the Box Office, The Passion of the Christ was finally dethroned by Zack Snyder's resurrected dead, Dawn of the Dead.*

Michael Gurnow's work has appeared domestically as well as abroad, in translation, and in anthologized form. His writing may be found in Herbivore, Plain Brown Wrapper, Word Riot, The Modern Word, Clockwise Cat, Dissident Voice, Maelstrom, among others. He can be reached at mgurnow@semo.edu.



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The Decline of Psychological Research

by Gil Gaudia, Ph.D.

The confounding of science and religion has sunk to new lows with the publication of an article “God Is Watching You” by Azim Shariff and Ara Norenzayan, in the September issue of the journal *Psychological Science*.

Here, “evidence” is presented, the authors claim, that “religion increases prosocial behavior.” The interpretation of this “psychologese” is that if you casually mention words that have a religious connotation to people, they will go out into society and behave altruistically. Specifically, the researchers say “implicit priming of God concepts did increase prosocial behavior,” where “priming” refers to the surreptitious presentation of words that make the subject more likely to manifest certain behaviors, and “prosocial behavior” means giving a stranger \$2.38, on average, in a cutesy game originally designed for economists, called “The Dictator.”

This significant breakthrough or “groundbreaking discovery,” as the editor describes the criteria for publication, has about the same amount of scientific validity as the children’s game of “Ouija Board.”

Hearing casually the so-called God concepts, “spirit,” “divine,” “god,” “sacred,” and “prophet,” and then sharing a trivial amount of money with someone in a game, no more makes that individual “prosocial” than does a murderer sharing his cellmate’s TV guide at one moment, prevent the inmate from stabbing him to death a few minutes later.

The authors then announce that their findings have “implications for theories positing religion as a facilitator of the emergence of early large-scale societies of cooperators,” a somewhat grandiose expectation, given the data. What these experts are expecting the intelligent reader to swallow is that when people hear words like those mentioned earlier (they call them “God concepts”) they become more prosocial, or to use their words, “religion increases prosocial behavior.”

Which would be the more convincing evidence of the “link between ... religious beliefs and cooperative behavior among unrelated strangers?”:

1. Sharing several coins with someone in a few minutes of a contrived situation set up by a graduate student, or;
2. Climbing aboard a bus with dynamite strapped around your waist so that you can blow to pieces thirty people, including children, who are “unrelated strangers” but have a different religious belief than you do.

Which is more convincing evidence of the “link between ... religious beliefs and cooperative behavior among unrelated strangers?”

1. Playing a childish game designed for economists who are perennially searching for a way to beat the stock market, or;
2. Flying four commercial aircraft loaded with people and fuel into buildings because the “unrelated strangers” you will thereupon incinerate have a different religious belief than you do.

Going further, the paper shows a lack of understanding of statistical inference. The claim that “Those who were primed with God concepts left more money for the recipient at a “significance level of .001” is embarrassing for its inaccuracy, implausibility, and its complete misuse of significance testing. They say that there is only one chance in a thousand that this finding is incorrect or is a result of chance. Even a physicist predicting the speed of a falling billiard ball under windy conditions would be reluctant to make that claim, using centuries-old and well-tested laws of gravity.

Claiming a .001 level of significance is saying that if one drew a sample like this, *a thousand times*, only one of the samples would erroneously give the results that were obtained here by chance, all the other 999 being “real” differences. . . . and this sample was far from random, having been solicited “through posters displayed at the University of British Columbia, Canada.”

If you begin with two groups that are essentially equivalent on some measure and then remeasure them after a period of time, (where no intervening treatment was involved), there would still be differences in the mean scores—some very small and others quite large—*based only on chance fluctuations*. The trick for the researcher, after a treatment, would be to be able to say, “As a result of our treatment, our score was not one of these chance fluctuations, but rather one that is much more likely to occur when something had interfered with chance.” This is called rejecting the null hypothesis. In the example, the researcher’s claim that they would be correct more than 99.9% of the time! And is stated as; “the test results were significant at the .001 level;” quite unusual in psychological research.

It is not clear how the subjects were grouped, and to what extent the assumption of “no difference” in the independent variable was met. Since many of the subjects were “religious” at the outset, what measures were taken to see that the religious subjects were not all in one group? What justification was there for the 19 subjects being “categorized as Atheists?”

Which variable was the independent variable, the “priming” of the subjects or the category of Atheist/Theist? It appears as if there is a serious confounding of at least two variables: Comparing “Religious Primed” subjects with “Neutral Primed” subjects, and comparing Atheists with Theists. What are the authors seeking? Is it the effect of the priming, or the already-present condition of of Atheism/Theism? Atheists amount to less than five percent of the North American population—perhaps even less—and yet the authors managed to select thirty-eight percent in their sample. This alone would be enough to cast doubt upon the validity of this study, since having Atheists represented eight times over their expectation in the population, is a suspicious event.

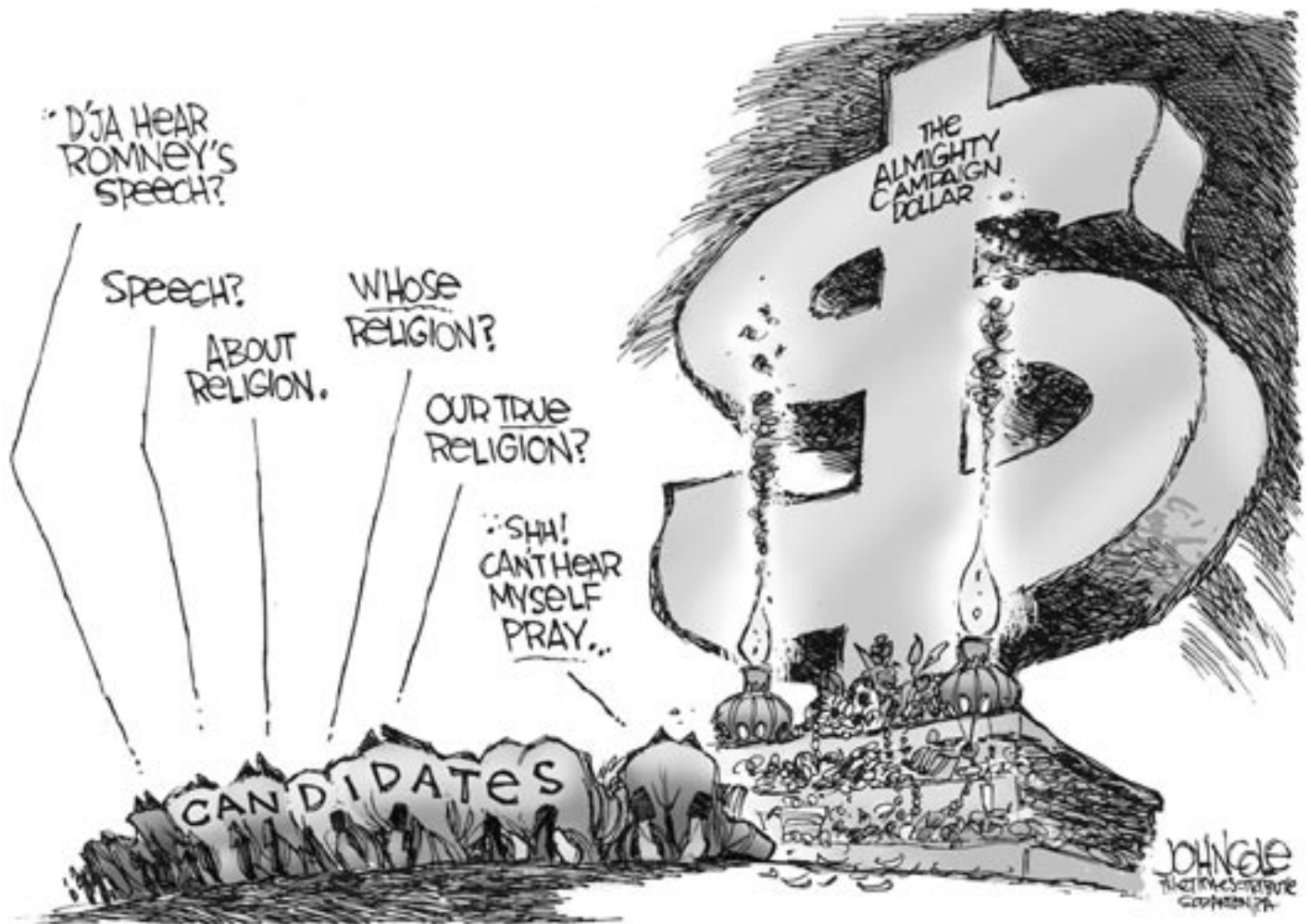
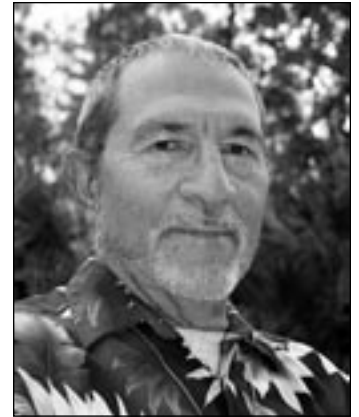
How certain may we be that in the “Dictator Game” leaving some money for the receiver demonstrates altruism or prosocial behavior on the part of the giver? It is entirely plausible that sophisticated participants are looking for “the catch” and may be trying to leave money thinking it was to their advantage. Hardly anyone who responds to a solicitation to engage in an experiment is unaware that something is “going on.” Most are guessing at what it is from the outset, and if they haven’t immediately guessed right, they will be much closer by the time the game is over.

One wonders why a study like this is attempted. What ultimately is to be gained? On the microlevel, this seems like an innocu-

ous doctoral thesis, but when one examines the list of references, it is difficult to see it as other than an effort to inject religion into science; into politics; and into education and secular culture. There seems to be a hidden agenda akin to the studies carried out by proponents of Intelligent Design.

This “experiment” represents an extremely low level of scientific investigation, a complete misunderstanding of statistical techniques, and a transparent attempt to marry religion and science that exceeds Stephen Jay Gould’s Non Overlapping Magisteria (NOMA). It defies credulity that a professional magazine would publish it. *

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Responding to Lenni Brenner

Israel's Right to Exist

by Eddie Tabash

In the May/June 2007 issue of *American Atheist Magazine*, an article written by Lenni Brenner was published, in which he expressed sympathy with the Palestinians in their struggle against Israel. It is important to understand that Atheists can take either side in this dispute. Rejecting all supernatural beliefs does not forecast how one must view the conflicts in the Middle East. Members of American Atheists can disagree with each other on this issue and still not disagree on anything that is directly relevant to this organization's core reasons for existence. These I understand to be the promotion of an officially secular United States, the general dissemination of the reasons why we maintain that no god exists, and the securing of equal rights for all nonbelievers in the United States.

If the Brenner article had not been published in this magazine, I would have never written this response, because, again, I see this issue as one on which members of American Atheists can disagree. However, because his article was published, I believe that the opposing side of this dispute must now also be given equal time here. Hopefully, upon the publication of this article, arguing against the Brenner position, both sides will have been heard in these pages, and we will not bog down in debating the Middle East but focus on making sure that a fifth religious right wing justice is not placed on the United States Supreme Court.

Brenner apparently sees Israel as wrong in its treatment of the Palestinians and says its government is "criminal." To be fair to him, he also says this of the government of Saudi Arabia, though he does not appear to question the right of Saudi Arabia to exist. I maintain that Israel has a right to exist among the nations of the world and that the plight of those Arabs who identify themselves as Palestinians results from the conduct of the Arab nations and terrorist groups who have made war on Israel.

There are at least twenty sovereign Arab nations and only one Israel. There is no reason to question the legality of the takeover of the territory in dispute by the League of Nations, right after World War One, which had, for about four hundred years, been part of the now dismantled Ottoman Empire. The League of Nations then transferred responsibility for most of the geographic area to the British government in what was known as the British Mandate. The charge to England was to establish Israel and to establish a bordering Arab state, which turned out to be Jordan. In 1917, England had declared its intention to ultimately bring about a nation of Israel by the

issuance of a formal decree, known as the Balfour Declaration. Yet, in the early 1920s, Britain simply severed 80% of what was to be Israel and designated it for the impending new Arab state. In 1947, when the United Nations voted to partition the territory of the Mandate into two nations, the partition resolution provided that an additional portion be shaved off from the total territory that the League of Nations charged Britain with securing for Israel.

The upshot was that when Israel declared its independence in 1948, it was no more than 15% of what it was originally designed to be by the League of Nations and the British Mandate. The majority of the territory that was to become Israel eventually became part of Jordan.

Arabs had always considered themselves to be Arabs, with no distinct subdivision of themselves into a special subgroup known as Palestinian Arabs. In fact, when Arab delegates met in order to choose representatives to the post-World War One Paris Peace Conference, they adopted a resolution to the effect that Palestine was part of Syria. When Israel declared its independence in 1948, seven Arab armies attacked. This caused the displacement of many Arabs living within what was now Israel. Had these Arab armies not attacked and accepted the new, small state of Israel in their midst, there would have been none of the violent conflicts that have raged in the area since 1948.

The carving up of Arab borders and the creation of new Arab nations, in between the two world wars, were arbitrary acts, based upon tribal affiliations, not upon some longstanding historical precedents. For instance, Iraq, as a nation with its current borders did not exist prior to WW I. What is known as Iraq today, came into being when, upon the urging of King Faisal, Britain granted the new nation independence in 1932. There were no greater precedents for taking amorphous lands and giving them the borders that now differentiate the various Arab countries than there is for what is currently the nation of Israel, today.

The surrounding Arab nations could have easily absorbed their Arab brothers and sisters who were displaced by the Arab invasions of Israel in 1948. Yet, they chose to keep them in miserable refugee camps, just so that they could have some kind of propaganda tool to use against Israel. Moreover, even if the establishment of two separate states, had been the source of displacing some indigenous populations, this is not unusual when territory is carved up in order to create

new nations as part of a partition plan. For instance, millions were displaced when India and Pakistan divided into two nations in 1947. Yet, the desirability of a two-nation solution made such a relocation necessary. Further, if one is concerned about forced dislocations, it is estimated that around 856,000 Jews have had to flee their homes in Arab countries since 1948, leaving behind more than 300 billion dollars worth of assets.

For those of us concerned about a more secular world, the Middle East is still more secular with an existing Israel than it would be without one. Lenni Brenner is known to point out how women are disadvantaged in Israel because of religious divorce laws. He is, of course, right in this regard. However, with a shift of just one more vote on the United States Supreme Court, women would be disadvantaged here in this country by a loss of reproductive freedoms and in other ways. Further, one would still rather be a woman in Israel than a woman in any of the Arab nations. There is no officially Muslim country in which women enjoy the level of equality they have in Israel, even if the Israeli legal system is still hobbled by orthodox influence to a degree that we Atheists find unacceptable. Also, we have never refused to recognize the legitimacy of a nation's right to exist just because that country does not separate religion from government as we would want it to. We would not withdraw our support of England's right to exist just because it has an official church and an enforceable blasphemy law that protects Christian dogma from offensive commentary. We also would not withdraw our support of Argentina's right to exist, just because Catholicism is still its official state religion.

The actual efforts by nations, and by other elements in the Middle East, to destroy Israel, is religion-based. Hamas, the organization most involved in the actual killing of individual Israelis, is a fundamentalist Islamic organization. The rhetoric of the president of Iran, calling for Israel's extermination, is clearly grounded in Islamic fundamentalism. While the ultra orthodox in Israel may use religion as a basis for territorial claims, they are not a majority of the Israeli population. Even these Jewish religious fanatics never call for the wholesale extermination of any group or subgroup of Arab people, in contrast to Israel's enemies who agitate for annihilation.

The charge that Israel is guilty of apartheid in a manner corresponding to the treatment of Black Africans by previous South African regimes is ultimately false. Prior South African governments applied a policy of official racism to millions of people properly within their borders. Israel was forced to take the territories in question in a war of self defense in 1967, when it was subjected to an act-of-war blockade by Egypt and initial attacks from Jordan and Syria. Administering territories taken in self defense, that have strategic military consequences, is different from a nation's singling out vast numbers of its own population for some form of official segregation. I personally saw the security fence in Jerusalem in 2004. It's designed to prevent suicide bombers and others, who would harm Israelis, from entering Israeli territory and perpetrating acts of violence. It is thus a legitimate tool of self defense. If it has a by product of unfortunately impeding people living in the Palestinian Authority regions from entering Israel for lawful purposes, this is a logistically necessary consequence of keeping out terrorists.

A powerful example of Israel's willingness to give up control of territories, even if doing so might increase the likelihood that anti-Israel terrorism will fester, is the pullout from Gaza in 2005. Notwithstanding the threat to neighboring areas, like the Israeli city of Sderot—on the receiving end of numerous rocket attacks launched from inside Gaza—and the fact that Gaza is a veritable hotbed of

Hamas activity against Israel, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon did order the pullout and ordered Israeli soldiers to forcibly remove religious Israeli settlers who would not leave voluntarily. Gaza was also occupied by Egypt until the June, 1967 war. If, indeed, there had been a distinct subgroup of Arabs, self identifying as Palestinians, it is curious that there was no massive effort on the part of these Arabs to take Gaza away from Egypt and make it part of a new nation of Palestine, during the time that Egypt had occupied this area.

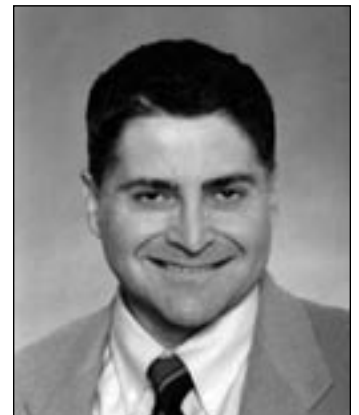
The same holds true for the West Bank. All of the disputed West Bank areas were part of Jordan before the 1967 war. During the time that Jordan held these territories there was no mass movement on the part of Arabs, calling themselves Palestinians, to wrest control of the West Bank away from Jordan. If, indeed, Arabs deeming themselves to be a distinct Palestinian subgroup within the Arab world felt entitled to their own additional and separate nation, it is curious that they did not engage in suicide bombings and other extreme actions when the territories that they believed should have properly been part of their own state were occupied by Egypt and Jordan.

The Brenner article appears to suggest a common cause between the current peace/anti-Iraq-war movement and opposition to Israel. However, in 2007, it came to light that Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, had advised President Bush not to start the 2003 Iraq war. Sharon understood that a Shi'ite government in Iraq, or an Iraq riven with a virtual religious war, would be more dangerous for everyone than even Saddam Hussein. Prime Minister Sharon also informed Bush that he thought the goal of democratizing Iraq was unattainable. Thus, right before the United States invaded Iraq, the prime minister of Israel informed the president of the United States that he thought the invasion was a bad idea. This, alone, should be sufficient to silence the claim that somehow the war in Iraq was initially commenced on behalf of Israel. It is also untrue that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, severely criticized in the Brenner article, lobbied in favor of starting the Iraq war.

Again, my purpose in writing this article is not to make it appear that American Atheists sides with Israel. My purpose, because of the publication of the Brenner article in this magazine, is to offer the pro-Israel position so that now that both sides have been allowed to publish in this magazine, American Atheists will appear neutral, as it should be. Reasonable people who share a common rejection of supernatural beliefs can disagree with each other on subjects like the Arab/Israeli conflict and on numerous other political controversies, such as, for instance, immigration.

Now, let us get back to the primary business of Atheists in the United States. Let's keep the religious right from getting the one more vote they need on the Supreme Court that would allow them to turn our country into a theocracy. *

Eddie Tabash is a life member of American Atheists. He is a constitutional lawyer in Beverly Hills, California. He is known for his work in keeping government and religion separate. He has also debated some of the world's foremost Christian philosophers on the question of the existence of god. He is a two-time runner up for a seat in the California State Legislature. His website is: <http://tabash.com>



Darwin's Greatest Challenge Tackled

The Mystery Of Eye Evolution



The "living fossil," *Platynereis dumerilii*.

SCIENCE DAILY (Nov. 1, 2004) — October 28, 2004 — When Darwin's skeptics attack his theory of evolution, they often focus on the eye. Darwin himself confessed that it was "absurd" to propose that the human eye evolved through spontaneous mutation and natural selection. Scientists at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) have now tackled Darwin's major challenge in an evolutionary study published this week in the journal *Science*. They have elucidated the

evolutionary origin of the human eye.

Researchers in the laboratories of Detlev Arendt and Jochen Wittbrodt have discovered that the light-sensitive cells of our eyes, the rods and cones, are of unexpected evolutionary origin — they come from an ancient population of light-sensitive cells that were initially located in the brain.

"It is not surprising that cells of human eyes come from the brain. We still have light-sensitive cells in our brains today which

detect light and influence our daily rhythms of activity," explains Wittbrodt. "Quite possibly, the human eye has originated from light-sensitive cells in the brain. Only later in evolution would such brain cells have relocated into an eye and gained the potential to confer vision."

The scientists discovered that two types of light-sensitive cells existed in our early animal ancestors: rhabdomeric and ciliary. In most animals, rhabdomeric cells became part of the eyes, and ciliary cells remained embedded in the brain. But the evolution of the human eye is peculiar — it is the ciliary cells that were recruited for vision which eventually gave rise to the rods and cones of the retina.

So how did EMBL researchers finally trace the evolution of the eye?

By studying a "living fossil," *Platynereis dumerilii*, a marine worm that still resembles early ancestors that lived up to 600 million years ago. Arendt had seen pictures of this worm's brain taken by researcher Adriaan Dorresteijn (University of Mainz, Germany). "When I saw these pictures, I noticed that the shape of the cells in the worm's brain resembled the rods and cones in the human eye. I was immediately intrigued by the idea that both of these light-sensitive cells may have the same evolutionary origin."

To test this hypothesis, Arendt and Wittbrodt used a new tool for today's evolutionary biologists — "molecular fingerprints". Such a fingerprint is a unique combination of molecules that is found in a specific cell. He explains that if cells between species have matching molecular fingerprints, then the cells are very likely to share a common ancestor cell.

Scientist Kristin Tessmar-Raible provided the crucial evidence to support Arendt's hypothesis. With the help of EMBL researcher Heidi Snyman, she determined the molecular fingerprint of the cells in the worm's brain. She found an opsin, a light-sensitive molecule, in the worm that strikingly resembled the opsin in the vertebrate rods and cones. "When I saw this vertebrate-type molecule active in the cells of the *Platynereis* brain — it was clear that these cells and the vertebrate rods and cones shared a molecular fingerprint. This was concrete evidence of common evolutionary origin. We had finally solved one of the big mysteries in human eye evolution." *

Adapted from materials provided by European Molecular Biology Laboratory. (www.sciencedaily.com)

Who Would Jesus Bomb?

by Robert H. Miller

I first came across this rhetorical question on a placard at an anti-war rally on the courthouse square of my home town. “The Women in Black,” a group that includes men and children, periodically parade around the plaza dressed from head-to-toe in funeral garb except for pumps and tennies. At each of the four corners of the block, they pause for the benefit of traffic and mime indignation. Since then, I’ve seen it a number of times on bumper stickers.

Though both ludicrous and sanctimonious, the question finally got to me: Who would Jesus bomb, I wondered?

Now, I’m no Bible scholar, and Palestine circa 30 CE had no explosives, but I seem to recall from Catholic catechism class that the only time Jesus lost his temper and “bombed” anyone was when he went on a rampage and chased the money changers from the temple. But I could never quite figure out just exactly why he threw such a conniption.

At the time, sacrifice was a central component of Judaism’s rituals. From animals to money to whatever was of value, the how, where and why of sacrifices had many guidelines and requirements. Most were very detailed and specific for individual animals; e. g., species, health, age, domestic versus feral, etc. Additionally, since sacrifices could only be offered in the temple—and there was only one temple—some folks had to travel a long way to get there. These complexities cried out for the fungibility of currency.

The money changers, a broad term that included bankers, livestock brokers and a variety of other related service providers, were there to facilitate worshippers’ compliance with all the liturgical do’s and don’ts. Were banking services—lending, liquidity, arbitrage, foreign exchange, etc.—evil? To make a living, and as a logical extension of their trade, the money changers tried to make a profit from their services. Was it profit itself that Jesus condemned?

Nowadays many churches host in-house or contiguous religious knick-knack shops. Some, like Westminster Abbey—seat of Anglicanism—even have ATM’s for the convenience of visitors; not

unlike ATM’s or bank branches in supermarkets, shopping malls or anywhere else commerce is transacted. None of these operate for free. Was it the location of these services inside the temple that was wrong?

If the objection was their presence inside the temple, what real difference does it make if they’re in the basement—like Westminster’s—or outside the walls but still on, or beneath, temple grounds? Assuming that banking services aren’t evil, perhaps the objection was that they’re not technically a temple function? But then, technically, neither are bathrooms, utilities, priests’ living accommodations, etc. temple functions. All are merely appurtenant supporting services that facilitate the temple’s basic function.

So why did Jesus bomb the bankers? It just wasn’t adding up. Like most lost souls facing life’s imponderables, I turned to religion to shed light on my conundrum. I asked my sister, a practicing Catholic, who teaches a Bible-studies class to explain just why Jesus went on such a rampage. She was caught a bit off guard but, after some research, responded. In a word, she said Jesus was the first trust buster.

She explained that the Sanhedrin, the ancient Jewish council of priests who established religious policy, had granted monopoly charters to favored merchants to run their enterprises on temple grounds. In return, the priests charged the money changers a fee. These “kickbacks” (or “commissions”) and “price fixing” (or “regulation”) arrangements (depending on your point of view) artificially inflated the prices consumers had to pay for the services and, furthermore, reduced their choice. In conclusion, she said that it was the anti-competitive practices of the whole shebang that sent Jesus into a rage.

I began to glimpse the logic. But still, a big part of the equation just wasn’t adding up. Out of all of ancient Palestine’s shortcomings and outrages—Roman domination, autocracy, slavery, poverty, hunger, cruel capital punishment, etc—Jesus saved his holy wrath for—amazingly—graft and corruption.

Even if the original intent of accommodating tradesmen on

temple grounds to facilitate sacrifice had gotten out of hand and was becoming scandalous, was he nuking a gnat? And just how did Jesus' intemperate response fit in with his broader message of peace, love and forbearance?

Considering the nature of the offenses, why didn't Jesus register a formal complaint through proper Sanhedrin channels? Why didn't he take a more Ghandi-esque approach and stage a non-violent demonstration? And if he was bound and determined to kick some ass, why single out the money traders? Perhaps he should have gotten in touch with his "inner Nietzsche" and lashed a few priests as well while he was at it, since they were, arguably, as much to blame as the money traders. But I suppose the lord works in mysterious ways.

Some Christians consider this incident the dividing line between the Old and New Testaments. Some, like my sister, see Jesus as the vanguard of Austrian economics. Others see his actions as a broad indictment of trade, profit, money handling—in sum, all of capitalism's machinations. It is this interpretation that has floated to prominence: "filthy lucre," "money is the root of all evil," the bit about the rich man's entry into heaven being more difficult than threading a camel through the eye of a needle, and many more explicit and implicit condemnations of finance.

For hundreds of years afterward Christians were forbidden to provide many banking services, functions strictly relegated only to Jews. The repercussions of the incident probably proved to be the Jews' salvation in a Christian world that saw them as Christ killers. Blessed with a banking monopoly, they profited from this arrangement as it allowed them—and, by extension, society at large—to reap the benefits of incipient market economies. Nevertheless, today, Muslims still condemn the paying or charging of interest.

Thankfully, Jesus' "bombing" of the money changers produced only scandal, bruises and a temporary disruption of temple functions. As for himself, the incident incurred the everlasting wrath of the Sanhedrin and probably, ultimately, cost Jesus his life (though perhaps that was part of his plan—but that's another story). Jesus' overwrought response to an imperfect market solution that got somewhat out of hand and offended pious sensibilities was dreadful behavior—disorderly at best, criminal at worst.

His handling of what some see as nothing more than a serious difference of opinion, set a terrible precedent for future generations of believers. Unfortunately, its rationale and method share just a few too many parallels to a recent real bombing incident, perpetrated by another religious zealot, whose message in no way includes peace, love or forbearance.

The bombing of the World Trade Center was, among other things, an attack on Western capitalist banking (the firm of Cantor Fitzgerald—Jewish to boot—comes to mind); unrestrained global commerce; and, last but probably paramount, the perceived desecration of a holy place, Saudi Arabia, by the presence of infidels. *

Robert H. Miller is a writer and retired teacher. He is the author of Kayaking the Inside Passage: A Paddler's Guide from Olympia, Washington to Muir Glacier, Alaska, 2005, W.W. Norton. He can be reached at mrh10@quest.net.



Malaysian Church Sues Government For Banning Use of Word 'Allah'

Dec 27, 2007

By Eileen NG

Associated Press Writer

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP)—A Malaysian church has sued the government for banning the import of Christian books containing the word "Allah," alleging it was unconstitutional and against freedom of religion, a lawyer said Thursday.

The Sabah Evangelical Church of Borneo is also challenging the government for declaring that the word "Allah"—which means God in the Malay language—can only be used exclusively by Muslims, said the church's lawyer Lim Heng Seng.

"The decision to declare 'Allah' as only for Muslims, categorizing this as a security issue, and banning books with the word 'Allah' is unlawful," Lim told The Associated Press.

Religion issues are extremely sensitive in Malaysia, where about 60 percent of the 27 million people are Malay Muslims. Ethnic Chinese, who follow Christianity and Buddhism, account for 25 percent of the population, while mostly Hindu Indians are 10 percent.

Minorities often complain they don't have full freedom of religion even though the constitution guarantees everybody the right to worship.

In an affidavit made available to The AP, pastor Jerry Dusing said customs officials in August confiscated three boxes of education material for children from a church member who was transiting at the Kuala Lumpur airport.

He said he was informed later the publications were banned because they contained the word "Allah," which could raise confusion and controversy among Muslims. The Internal Security Ministry also told him the issue was sensitive and has been classified as a security issue, he said in the affidavit.

But Dusing said Christians in Sabah on Borneo island have used the word "Allah" for generations when they worship in the Malay language, and the word appears in their Malay Bible.

"The Christian usage of Allah predates Islam. Allah is the name of God in the old Arabic Bible as well as in the modern Arabic Bible," he said, adding Allah was widely used by Christians in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Indonesia and other parts of the world without problem.

Dusing also said the confiscated material was for use only within the church.

The church is asking the court to declare their constitutional right to use the word "Allah" and for the right to import publications with the word in it, he said in the affidavit.

Dusing and internal security officials couldn't be reached immediately for comment.

Earlier this month, a Catholic weekly newspaper was told to drop "Allah" in its Malay-language section if it wants to renew its publishing permit.

Allah refers only to the Muslim God and can be used only by Muslims, government officials have said. *

Atheist Singles

04-01-08 - DWF, 45, 5'4", brown/brown, no kids, graphic artist; in Baltimore, MD. Seeking SWM or DWM for dating and possible committed relationship. I enjoy cooking, reading, museums, traveling, my Mac, New York City, wine, home improvement, my cats, and laughing until my sides ache. Live in the city but grew up on a farm. Politically left-leaning. I am well-read and articulate and I'm seeking the same in a man who is 40+. You are kind, even tempered, positive, and emotionally fluent. No smokers. Write me and tell me what you hope to accomplish in the next ten years.

04-02-08 - Pastor Gone Bad - Former pastor turned Atheist. 42 year old white male (6ft - 210 lbs.) seeks like minded optimistic female (age: early thirties to late forties - any race). I work full time in the Graphic Arts Printing Industry. I have one child at home (age 16) plus three more children who are grown. Favorite movies: Sci-Fi Action Thrillers. Favorite Food: Italian first - Mexican second. Favorite Band: Buckcherry. Favorite Books: Natural Sciences and Archeology. Favorite form of exercise: Running. I live in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area. Hope to hear from you.

04-03-08 - Selfish Englishman, unsociable, without need for wit or humour, therefore complete utilitarian (although with liking for Renaissance art, and a scattering of music) requires resolute, risk-taking, robust woman (25-50) for extreme exploitation, with some travel, including to Belarus. Your inter-

ests (apart from Atheism) are probably quite soporific and stultifying, so I suggest you set yourself a strenuous stretch with me.

04-04-08 - 25-year-old, 5'10", 170 lbs., male, Caucasian with black hair and brown eyes. I am very passionate about creative writing and philosophy and I am striving hard to become a successful author of both fiction and non-fiction. Unfortunately, I am currently incarcerated at an Oregon prison, though I can assure you I am completely harmless. I am looking for companionship to brighten my somber surroundings and engage in intellectual conversations with. I have no age or race preference, so my door is open to everyone. I will respond to all letters.

04-05-08 - Indiana. I'm a 40's, single male. NR/NS/ND. 5'8", slim, childless, blue-collar worker, financially secure and easy-going. I try to be social and make friends but I keep picking the wrong ones, are either "religious" or "play games." We humans are mere fragments of time and heartbeat, but our deeds will remain for centuries stamped on generation after generation. We will people the earth with light and happiness. My interests include travel, open to new activities and your suggestions. If you are a single woman, childless, under 35, healthy, slender/medium build and serious about starting a LTR leading to marriage, then please write to me. Non-smoker or light smoker preferred.

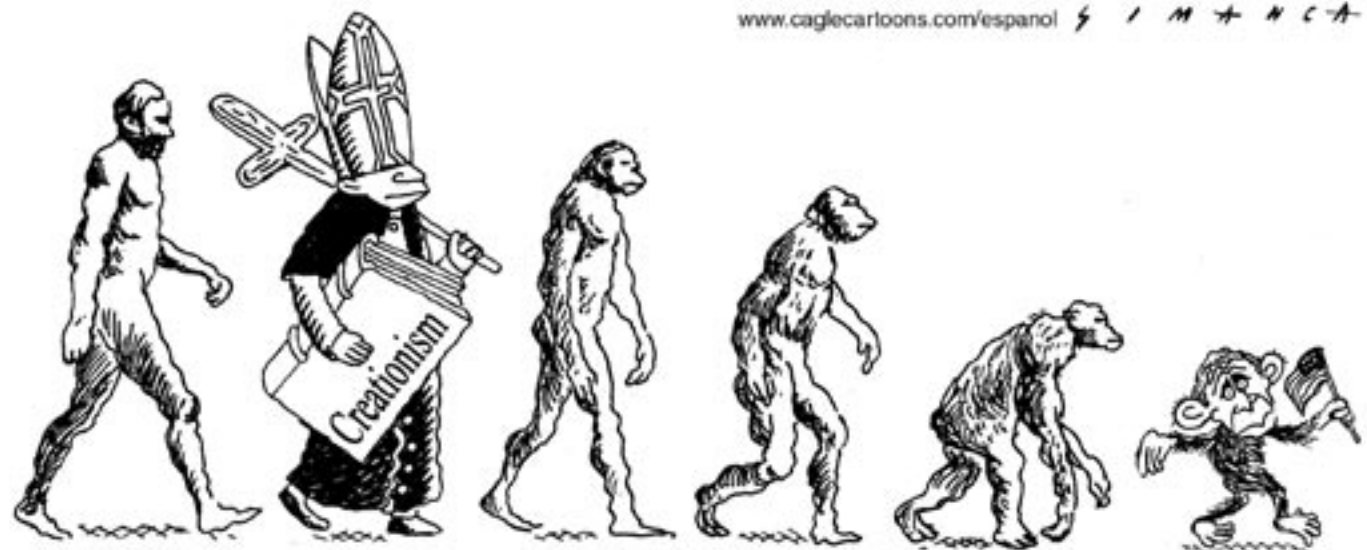
The "Atheist Singles" service is a benefit of membership in American Atheists. It is intended to help members find that special someone. If you are a member and wish to participate in this service, please limit your "Atheist Singles" ad to 100 words or less. Please include your name and postal address so we will know where to forward your replies when they come in. Entries should be mailed to:

Atheist Singles

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

Members of American Atheists who wish to communicate with any of the Atheist singles who placed ads should do the following: Write your response and place it in a stamped, self-addressed, sealed envelope. On

the back of the envelope, place the notation, "A.S." and the reference number (for example A.S. 00-05-03) of the entry to which you are responding. Place the envelope inside another envelope, seal it, and mail it after addressing it to the Atheist Singles address in Parsippany listed above. When your letter arrives at the American Atheist Center, the outer envelope will be removed, the inner envelope extracted, and the address corresponding to the reference number you wrote on it will be written on the front of the envelope. The envelope will then be mailed forthwith. Please include your phone number or e-mail address in case we have questions with your ad. American Atheists reserves the right to reject any singles ad.



Shipping & Handling (Order multiple items and save on shipping & handling!)

For orders containing:	The shipping & handling for the first item is:	The shipping & handling for each additional item is:
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Light-weight items: Jewelry, keychains, buttons, lanyards, cookie cutters, bumperstickers - Every 5 (or fewer) bumperstickers can be counted as a single item.	\$2.00*	\$0.20

*For orders containing items from more than one of the above categories, **please calculate your shipping and handling by using the heaviest item in your order as the "first item"**. For the rest of the items in your order, please use the "additional item" rate that applies to that type of item.

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Canada & Mexico: 25% of the cost of your order

All other countries: 65% of the cost of your order

If you are ordering **jewelry**, the shipping cost will probably be less. Before writing your check, we recommend that you do one of the following:

- Email a list of your items to sales@atheists.org. We'll calculate your shipping charges for you.
- OR simply place your order with a credit card and we will adjust the shipping charges.

AIMS & PURPOSES

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

American Atheists is organized:

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

DEFINITIONS

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

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT TAX DEDUCTIONS

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

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

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

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Our directors are NOT provided with contact information for members in their area. If you're interested in working with your director on activism, please use the listing on this page to contact them.

They would love to hear from you!

If you live in a state or area where there is no director, you have been a member for one year or more, and you're interested in a director position, please contact Bart Meltzer, Director of State and Regional Operations at bm@atheists.org or visit <http://www.atheists.org/states/>

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