



Willamette Freethinker



Volume 10, Number 5 — May 2003

A publication of Corvallis Secular Society

<http://css.peak.org>

Corvallis Secular Society (CSS) is a Humanist and Freethought society for all nontheists of good will.

CSS is affiliated with the American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH).

From the Editor:

Very few people recognize the name Eric Arthur Blair, but many are familiar with his writings. Born in 1903, he was best known for two satires attacking totalitarianism in the 1940's.

In one of these satires, Blair wrote about a distant future in which the masses are essentially under the complete control of their government. The government filters the news broadcasts, rewriting anything that doesn't suit them. The government casually rewrites history the same way, and the people complacently accept the changes.

In Blair's story, the government has actually altered the language itself to such an extent, that thoughts considered "inappropriate" by the government are almost impossible to express. And if anyone did manage to resist, and attempt to think for himself in even the slightest way, the government had more direct ways of bringing them into line.

This "distant future" Blair wrote of is now almost twenty years behind us. The story was entitled **1984**, and Blair, of course, was the real name of George Orwell.

As recently as four years ago, I would have dismissed most people who saw "1984-like" conspiracies all around them as paranoid. Our government is a democracy (technically, a Democratic Republic); it works in the open. Even if it does collect more personal information than some might prefer, there's nothing sinister about it. It's not like the government could legally spy on American citizens without showing probable cause, and even then, they couldn't just snatch you away like in some banana republic. They'd have to prove their case in a court of law, where you're innocent until proven guilty.

Today, things are looking a good deal more... Orwellian. A suspicious election. A complicit news media which accepts its stories directly from Republican Party Headquarters. A culture that increasingly curtails freedom of thought — if you're not "with us", then you're "with them" and might as well have personally bombed the Trade Center. Ever-diminishing civil liberties, increased government surveillance, and last but not least, American

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CSS Meetings and Events

This month, CSS member Novena Slater-Roth will be discussing her idea for a Freethought Book Club.

Calendar:

Saturday, May 17th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Jun 21st 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck
Saturday, Jul 19th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting

Regular meeting time:

Third Saturday of each month, from 2:00-4:00 pm.

Regular meeting location:

Corl House (3975 NW Witham Hill Dr, Corvallis).



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From the President:

Humanism and Humanist Manifesto III

Humanism as a worldview is difficult to define precisely, as it has no dogmas, articles of faith, creeds, sacred texts, or inerrant authorities. Further, it is widely misunderstood and often viciously misrepresented by the dominant religious culture in which we live. Humanism is distinguished in part by its methods more than by its conclusions or beliefs. Its methods are basically those of science: using evidence, reason and testing to gain all knowledge.

To me, the most concise definition of Humanism is: "Humanism is ethical atheism." I define atheism simply as, "the absence of god-beliefs." In contrast, theism is "the presence (or possession) of god-beliefs." Those who believe that one or more gods exist are theists; those who lack this belief are atheists. Nothing more. Both atheism and theism lack ethical content; neither is a worldview or lifestance.

Religion, at least as defined in the West, is an ethic or worldview incorporating theism. It makes obedience to the will of a god or gods the standard of judging human behavior. The will is supposedly discovered by direct revelation, studying sacred texts, listening to religious leaders, and the like.

Humanism is a worldview incorporating atheism. All Humanists are atheists; not all atheists are Humanists. Humanism bases its ethics on enlightened concern for human welfare or happiness, including concern for our environment. A theist cannot be a Humanist, although many are fine people, because their ethical standards ultimately are not based on human welfare. (Curiously, kind believers tend to have a belief in benevolent gods; mean believers tend to have a belief in cruel, vengeful gods.)

Now either a person has god-beliefs, or is without such beliefs; there is no other possibility. But neither state implies certainty. Someone who believes god(s) exist may admit that they are not certain; other believers may claim they know god(s) exist. Likewise, some atheists may be positive that no gods exist. However, in my experience, most atheists are without god-beliefs simply due to a lack of evidence for the existence of gods (the burden of proof is on those claiming gods exist), due to the incompatibility of a supernatural realm with the known laws of science and our observations of the universe, and due to the logical fallacies of god-definitions. Their "disbelief" in gods is a logical conclusion, like any scientific conclusion: subject to change upon, and only upon, sufficient evidence to the contrary. It is not a dogma.

So, what is the role of the term agnosticism? It is not an alternative to the choice of atheism or theism. If an agnostic is defined as "one who doesn't know (or claim to know) if a god or gods exist," then many atheists and theists are also

agnostics; only those who are certain about the existence or nonexistence of gods are not agnostics. By all these terms, many of us are atheists, agnostics, and Humanists simultaneously. (I capitalize "Humanist" to indicate the worldview or lifestance of Humanism, in contrast to the term humanism, "a devotion to the humanities.")

A fuller definition and description of Humanism has just been released by The American Humanist Association. It is: Humanism and Its Aspirations: Humanist Manifesto III, a successor to the Humanist Manifestos of 1933 and 1973. They report:

In signing this landmark document, 19 Nobel laureates join celebrities such as Oliver Stone, the "Amazing" Randi, and Kurt Vonnegut, as well as influential thinkers including Janet Jeppson Asimov, Bill Baird, Richard Dawkins, Vashti McCollum, Katha Pollitt, and Edward O. Wilson.

"This document marks a distinct evolution of thought. It succinctly details a positive and personal Humanism, one that will more clearly resonate with the general public," said, Tony Hileman, executive director of the American Humanist Association.

Fred Edwards, chair of the Drafting Committee, the voice of Humanism on many radio and television programs, and editor of The Humanist magazine, added, "This new manifesto gives more emphasis to compassion as the motivating force behind the Humanist commitment to reason. It therefore expresses the fullness of what it means to be human."

The document treats the subjects of how we understand the world, how the world works, the source and nature of ethics, finding meaning in life, and working toward social justice.

With this release the American Humanist Association is calling on all likeminded individuals dedicated to a better future to add their signatures. As the document declares, "We aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone."

The public is invited to see it and sign it at:
<http://www.AmericanHumanist.org>

The document itself is on the next page.

I commend this one-page document to the careful consideration of all Humanists and others.

John Dearing
President of CSS

Humanism And Its Aspirations: Humanist Manifesto III

a successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

The lifescape of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.

This document is part of an ongoing effort to manifest in clear and positive terms the conceptual boundaries of Humanism, not what we must believe but a consensus of what we do believe. It is in this sense that we affirm the following:

Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.

Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.

Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.

Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifescape of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain it is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

“Anybody who wants religion is welcome to it, as far as I’m concerned — I support your right to enjoy it. However, I would appreciate it if you exhibited more respect for the rights of those people who do not wish to share your dogma, rapture or necrodestination.”

— Frank Zappa

Of God and Europe

Should religion play a role in the EU constitution?

by Charles C. Haynes, 05/09/2003

Should the Constitution acknowledge God? Affirm Christianity? Mention religion? Those explosive questions — the subject of much debate in the United States since 1787 — are at the center of the most contentious argument among delegates to the European constitutional convention now meeting in Brussels.

Earlier this year, Europeans got their first look at a draft constitution for a “United Europe.” God failed to make the cut. Now more than 80 amendments are on the table proposing a multitude of ways to insert God, Christianity — or at least something about religion — in the article on “European values.”

Facing a June deadline to come up with a final draft, European delegates need to find some way to negotiate the place of God in their constitution. And while an “American solution” is probably the last thing many Europeans want to hear these days, the upstart United States has some wisdom on this issue.

Europe may be the center of Western civilization, but America is home to the world’s oldest — and most successful — living constitution. (Consider that the French have written and rewritten their constitution 15 times since 1789.)

What did the American framers say about God or Christianity in the U.S. Constitution when they deliberated in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787? Nothing at all.

A “Godless Constitution”

In stark contrast to many other documents and state constitutions of the day, the Constitution (written in 1787 by mostly religious men) is completely silent about God and Christianity. Only once is religion even mentioned in the body of the Constitution. Article VI declares that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” With this bold stroke, the framers broke with European tradition and opened public office to people of all faiths or none.

Not surprisingly, this “Godless Constitution” was greeted with a firestorm of protest in 1787 — much like the angry reaction to the proposed European Constitution in the present day. “No religious test” was seen by many as the greatest flaw in the document — a flaw that would open the door to being governed by Jews, Catholics, Quakers and others seen as “undesirable” by many Protestants.

And the absence of any reference to God sparked widespread debate in the United States that lasted well into the 19th century (with echoes in the culture wars of today). Periodic efforts to offer a “Christian Amendment” to the

Constitution — especially during the Civil War and at other times of crisis — gathered widespread support, but ultimately failed.

Of Church And State

The current argument in Europe about religion and the constitution mirrors the early American debate. On one side, some Christian voices, including the Vatican, insist that the European Constitution must acknowledge the Christian roots of “European identity.” As one Orthodox leader argues, without mention of Christianity there’s no guarantee that “integral religious philosophy of life” will be taken into account when social policies are decided (think abortion, sexuality).

The other side warns against the evils of church-state entanglement — a source of conflict and division over the centuries in European history. They also point out that a constitution shouldn’t privilege Christianity and thereby make it difficult to admit predominantly Muslim nations such as Turkey.

Clearly, this debate is about far more than “mentioning” God.

Europeans take note. The American experience is living proof that a so-called “Godless Constitution” doesn’t lead to a “Godless society.” In stark contrast to much of Western Europe, where religious commitment is at an all-time low, the United States has a high level of religious involvement and activity. For those who still think state religion is good for religion, just visit the great churches of Europe on Sunday morning. You’ll see mostly tourists.

Constitutional silence about God is only part of the American solution. The rest of the answer is found in “no religious test” and in the guarantee of full religious liberty found in the first 16 words of the First Amendment. Despite periodic outbreaks of nativism and anti-Semitism, the United States begins the 21st century as one of the few places on Earth where people of all faiths and no faith live together in peace.

Freedom Of Religion

But American-style religious freedom may have trouble taking root in a United Europe — no matter what the new

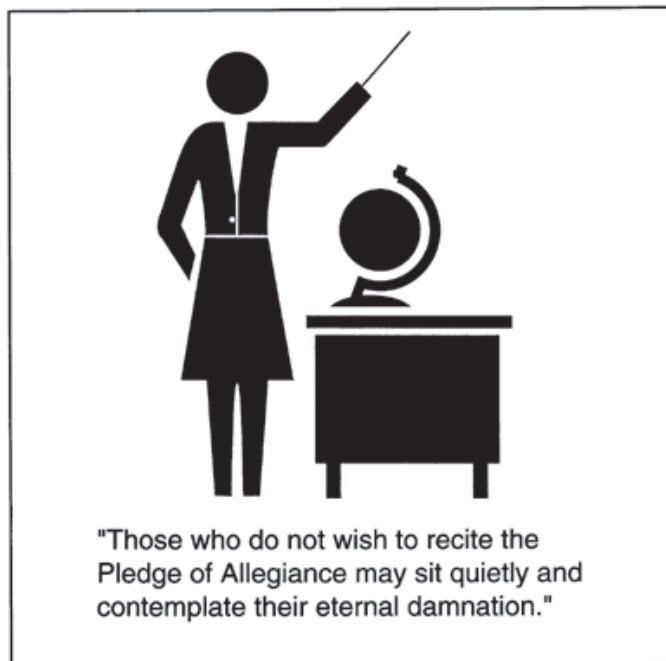
constitution says or doesn't say. After all, France, Belgium and Germany have all recently passed laws restricting the religious liberty of minority faiths. And in some parts of Eastern Europe, church and political leaders are working to re-establish the dominant religion. These aren't hopeful signs for religious freedom in a new Europe.

Despite the barriers, the delegates to the European convention may yet find the courage and wisdom to avoid privileging any religion — while simultaneously guaranteeing full religious liberty for each and every person. Such a break from the precedents of European history would be nothing short of miraculous.

But if it can happen in Philadelphia in 1787, why not Brussels in 2003?

Charles C. Haynes is senior scholar at the First Amendment Center.

CLIPTOONS by John Hartzell



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From the Editor...

(cont. from page 1)

citizens being declared "enemy combatants" and locked away with NO access to lawyers or anyone else, for as long as the government sees fit.

This is not the way it's supposed to be. We're supposed to be the good guys, the shining beacon to the rest of the world. The example for other governments to follow. The model from which someday to build a United Earth.

Orwell was supposed to be fiction...

Reed Byers
Editor, Willamette Freethinker

Voice of an Angel

We hear them and use them every day, often without notice. They creep into our language and writings. What am I talking about? Those common religious phrases.

They come in many forms. From cursing, such as "God Damn", "Good Lord", "Oh my God" to exclamations such as "It's a miracle" and "Heaven only knows". When someone sneezes it's hard not to say "bless you".

I've seen various people try different phrases in place of the religious-based ones. They say "gosh darn it" or "oh my gosh" instead. For me, these phrases don't convey my true feelings. It makes me feel like I'm in an episode of *Leave It To Beaver*. "Golly gee willikers Mrs. Cleaver." It just sounds really lame.

"Good Lord" can be replaced by any number of things. "Good grief" or "Good gravy" are just a couple. But "good grief" strikes me as being a bit of an oxymoron and "good gravy" should be reserved for the dinner table.

I know many Freethinkers encourage us to change our phrases into a more secular form. They say that the use of such phrases only encourages the religious folks into thinking we also believe in such nonsense. I don't necessarily disagree with their conclusion, but I'd like to offer another perspective.

I have tried for a few years to "eliminate" these common phrases from my everyday language, but find it most difficult. Then I got to thinking about the whole issue and wondered what might happen if I didn't. If we use these phrases as if they WERE common, then perhaps they would eventually become meaningless?

I compare it to celebrations such as traditionally religious events as Easter and Christmas. I know many Secularists avoid these types of holidays, but I celebrate them happily. I celebrate the secular aspects of these holidays: decorating the tree, exchanging gifts, coloring eggs, giving chocolate bunnies. I would also encourage others to do the same. Why? Because the more we can make these things "common", the more we can secularize these holidays and the more we can take the religious aspects out of them.

The same thing can perhaps be done with religious phrases. If we use them as the common phrases they are, then that's all they will become — common. When you hear something over and over again it begins to lose it's power and that's what I'd like to see happen to religion — I would like to see it lose it's hypnotic power over people. Besides, I'm probably going to habitually say them anyway, and I'd like to not think of myself as a hypocrite for doing so.

Angela Byers
CSS Treasurer & Webmaster

God's Role In The Republican Assault On The Environment

by Glenn Scherer, Hartford Advocate

Jubilant Republicans may imagine that the most significant harbinger for America's future was the banging of a gavel on Jan. 6, opening the 108th Congress. Finally, GOP partisans may conclude, they call the shots. But it may be that the Earth itself is in charge. In 2002, the second hottest year on record, scientists saw Arctic Ocean ice coverage shrink by more than at any time since satellite measurements were first made a quarter century ago. And, they say, continued melting could leave the Arctic nearly ice-free by summer 2050.

Americans need to pay attention to the winds of change blowing in from the Arctic, then decide just how much Republican environmental policies contradict clear messages relayed by our planet. Our leaders could be viewing the world through a distorted lens, with their corporate worldview and sometimes their fundamentalist Christian faith guiding them to an interpretation of reality, based not on scientific fact, but on dogma.

The federal government — with Republicans in control of the White House, Congress and Judiciary — has launched the largest rollback of environmental laws and regulations ever. The Bush administration seems determined to undo much of the good done since Earth Day 1970, when 20 million Americans defended the planet in the biggest mass demonstration of U.S. history.

Republican Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma is poised to become Bush's lieutenant in the assault. As new chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, he unseated Independent Jim Jeffords — an environmental champion who advanced legislation to curb global warming. Inhofe, by contrast, is a Big Oil backer who once characterized the Environmental Protection Agency as "the Gestapo bureaucracy," and has earned a zero rating from the League of Conservation Voters three years running.

Under Inhofe, hearings to oppose Bush's anti-environmental agenda are improbable, as are subpoenas for administration documents divulging shoddy science or corporate complicity. "Teddy Roosevelt is rolling over in his grave," Alys Campaigne, legislative director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, said in the Bureau of National Affairs "Environmental Report."

Bush and Inhofe will likely move to modify or overturn the National Environmental Policy Act. This Magna Carta of

environmental law demands study, disclosure and public comment on the environmental impacts of federal projects. Bush has already demanded "excessive red tape" be hacked from the law, fast-tracking road and airport construction and cutting the public out of the democratic process.

The president is also attacking the Clean Air Act of 1970, another cornerstone of environmental law. Late last year, Bush proposed rules to weaken the Act's New Source Review, which requires the installation of state-of-the-art pollution control equipment in the modernizing of factories. The new rules allow industrial air pollution to continue at levels that, according to the American Lung Association, now kill 10,000 Americans annually.

Bush's proposed "Clear Skies" Initiative also undermines air quality. "Clear Skies" won't enhance the air at all, but will further pollute it, says the Natural Resources Defense Council. Bush's "Healthy Forests" initiative likewise suffers from Orwellian doublespeak, felling Western forests to save them. Disguised as a measure for curbing wildfires, the plan invites logging companies to cut healthy trees in national forests while reducing public oversight. Ironically, the probable cause of recent catastrophic fires is global warming, a problem that many Republican lawmakers deny.

Paradoxically, Leggett notes, many fundamentalists see dying coral reefs, melting ice caps and other environmental destruction not as an urgent call to action, but as God's will. Within the religious right worldview, the wreck of the Earth can be seen as Good News!

California last year passed the nation's first law to control greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles. But the Bush administration has virtually gone to war against the state's environmental initiatives, seeking to extend oil-drilling rights off the California coast and to overturn regulations requiring automakers to sell zero-emissions vehicles.

This Congress will likely discontinue the requirement that corporate polluters contribute to Superfund, leaving taxpayers to pay for toxic waste cleanup. Both Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. supported Superfund; the younger Bush is the first Republican president not to back reauthorization.

Congressional Republicans blocked many of President Clinton's judicial appointments, leaving over 100 federal judgeships open. With the Senate Judiciary Committee now in GOP hands, the courts could take a hard swing to the right, putting the environment further at risk. The U.S. District Court of Appeals for Washington, D.C., holds

almost exclusive jurisdiction over environmental law, hearing cases concerning federal authority, involving the powers of the EPA, for example. Senate Republicans blocked two Clinton appointments to the court, setting the stage for a bench packed with conservative judges who, appointed now, could shape environmental law for decades.

The reasons behind Republican anti-environmentalism have often been stated but deserve review: George W. Bush and Dick Cheney are former oil men who believe in the efficiency of the marketplace. Market conservatives tend to see environmentalists as either frivolous tree-huggers or dangerous monkey-wrenching eco-terrorists. They dismiss good environmental science as the doom-saying of the loony left. Almost by definition, they lack an understanding of such concepts as sustainability, carrying capacity, biodiversity or webs of interdependence.

And of course, promoting any policies that go against immediate economic goals would put the administration up against strong corporate interests. The American auto industry, for example, remains a powerful economic engine in many states; if SUV sales are keeping domestic automakers afloat, the automakers will resist spending millions to impose tough new fuel efficiency standards on the vehicles.

Hence, the power of corporate campaign contributions. Earthjustice, a nonprofit public interest law group, reports that in the 2000 campaign, Bush-Cheney and the Republican National Committee

received \$44 million in contributions from the fossil fuel, chemical, timber and mining industries — far more than was offered by these interests to all federal Democratic candidates and party committees combined.

Nevertheless, beyond all these more obvious anti-environmental motivations there lies a more deep-seated inspiration. Difficult as it may be to believe, many of the conservatives who have great influence in the Bush administration and now in Congress are governed by a Higher Power.

Bush's presidency "is the most resolutely 'faith-based' in modern times," reports Newsweek. In his book *The Carbon Wars*, Greenpeace activist Jeremy Leggett tells how he stumbled upon this otherworldly agenda. During the Kyoto climate change negotiations, Leggett candidly asked Ford Motor Company executive John Schiller how opponents of the pact could believe there is no problem with "a world of a billion cars intent on burning all the oil and gas available on the planet?" The executive asserted first that scientists get it wrong when they say fossil fuels have been sequestered underground for eons. The Earth, he said, is just 10,000, not 4.5 billion years old, the age widely accepted by scientists. Then Schiller confidently declared, "You know, the more I look, the more it is just as it says in the Bible." The Book of Daniel, he told Leggett, predicts that increased earthly devastation will mark the "End Time"

Fossil fuels and forests are like the loaves and fishes, Reconstructionists say, miraculously multiplying for true believers.

and return of Christ. Paradoxically, Leggett notes, many fundamentalists see dying coral reefs, melting ice caps and other environmental destruction not as an urgent call to action, but as God's will. Within the religious right worldview, the wreck of the Earth can be seen as Good News!

Some true believers, interpreting biblical prophecy, are sure they will be saved from the horrific destruction brought by ecosystem collapse. They'll be raptured: rescued from Earth by God, who will then rain down seven ghastly years of misery on unbelieving humanity. Jesus' return will mark the Millennium, when the Lord restores the Earth to its green pristine condition, and the faithful enjoy a thousand years of peace and prosperity.

American fundamentalists number in the tens of millions, but not all of them believe literally in this apocalyptic vision, cautions Joan Bokaer, an expert on the religious right and formerly of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy at Cornell University. Some, no doubt, don't dwell on environmental issues, but many do hold views antithetical to environmental protection.

One powerful fringe group, the Reconstructionists, doesn't speak of the "End Time" at all, Bokaer notes. They put the onus for the Lord's return on their own political activism. Reconstructionists say Christ will only return when a righteous nation acts to purge unrepentant sinners and applies biblical law to its populace. They want to spread the Gospel in a political

context, making the Bible the foundation of U.S. jurisprudence. That includes an end to environmental regulation.

Reconstructionists believe the Lord will provide, and their view is laid out in America's Providential History, a religious right high school history textbook: "The secular or socialist has a limited resource mentality and views the world as a pie ... that needs to be cut up so everyone can get a piece," write authors Mark Beliles and Stephen McDowell. "In contrast, the Christian knows that the potential in God is unlimited and that there is no shortage of resources in God's Earth. The resources are waiting to be tapped."

In another passage, the writers explain: "While many secularists view the world as overpopulated, Christians know that God has made the Earth sufficiently large with plenty of resources to accommodate all of the people." Fossil fuels and forests are like the loaves and fishes, Reconstructionists say, miraculously multiplying for true believers.

Such misinformed viewpoints would be of little import except that, in the 1980s, they began permeating the Republican Party. That's when Republican strategists — eager to broaden the party's narrow base of wealthy corporate supporters — partnered with religious right leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, who

agreed to politicize their followers and bring them into the GOP, according to Bokaer.

Working through fundamentalist, Pentecostal and charismatic churches, the Christian Coalition has promoted right-wing Republican candidates by mailing voter guides at election time — 30 million in 1994; another 45 million in 1996; and 70 million in 2000 to support candidate Bush, reports the watchdog group People for the American Way.

As it turns out, politicians who ally themselves with the religious right are also rabidly anti-environmental. Those who score high with the Christian Coalition almost invariably score low with League of Conservation Voters (LCV).

According to the Washington, D.C.-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State, 178 House members in the last Congress allied themselves with the religious right, earning barely a 15 percent average approval rating with LCV. Of 44 senators given an 80 to 100 percent approval rating by the Christian Coalition, the average LCV approval rating fell below 10 percent.

In the 108th Congress, Republican leadership hails almost exclusively from the religious right, scoring a perfect 100 percent with the Christian Coalition, but getting barely a 4 percent average approval rating from LCV.

Among the religiously motivated leaders are Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and Assistant Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and Majority Whip Roy Blunt. DeLay has bluntly said that The Almighty is using him to promote “a Biblical worldview” in American politics, says the New York Times.

Also among those holding an extreme fundamentalist perspective is Inhofe, reports Americans United for Separation of Church and State. “When we win this revolution in November, you’ll be doing the Lord’s work, and He will richly bless you for it!” Inhofe declared at the Christian Coalition’s Road to Victory Conference last October.

And George W. Bush? He and Attorney General John Ashcroft are both born again. According to The Nation, Bush’s “walk with Jesus” began in 1985 when Billy Graham visited him in Kennebunkport.

The Republican Party platform in Bush’s home state warns of what to expect from a federal government guided by religious right radicalism. The Texas platform “reaffirms the United States of America as a Christian Nation,” and

seeks to nullify the separation between church and state. It would abolish the EPA, and the Departments of Energy and Education. It dismisses global warming as “myth.” And it promotes public school education “based upon Biblical principles,” not upon secular humanism, which teaches Darwinian evolutionary theory and a scientific worldview.

Texans have paid the price for their leaders’ anti-environmental stance. During George W. Bush’s time as governor, the state gained the honor of having the dirtiest air in America. It also ranks 47th in water quality, and has the seventh-highest rate of release of toxic industrial byproducts.

In the early days of the current administration, the news was full of Bush appointments of foxes to guard the hen house. Gale Norton, a mining industry lobbyist, became secretary of the interior. Steven Griles, a lobbyist for Big Coal, was appointed Norton’s second-in-command. Now, the Washington Post reports an even more disturbing trend: Bush “has begun a broad restructuring of the scientific advisory committees that guide federal policy.” These largely anonymous committees of

scientists, lawyers and academics make recommendations vital to determining health and environmental risk.

Replaced, for example, were 15 members of a 17-person Department of Health and Human Services committee that assesses the impacts of low-level exposure to environmental chemicals on human health. New Bush-imposed panel appointees include chemical industry advocates and a California scientist who helped defend Pacific Gas and Electric Company against the real-life Erin Brockovich.

More troubling is the case of W. David Hager, one of Bush’s nominees to the influential Food and Drug Administration panel on women’s health policy. Hager, says the New York Times, has a resumé “more impressive for theology than gynecology.” Hager emphasizes the restorative power of Jesus Christ in one’s life and recommends specific Scripture readings to treat headaches, eating disorders and premenstrual syndrome.

The administration has repeatedly turned a blind eye toward good science. When the National Academy of Sciences came to Bush in 2001 with a report saying that global warming was real, serious and human-caused, he ignored it. When the EPA sent a 2002 report to the United Nations saying that global warming will result in “rising seas, melting ice caps and glaciers, ecological system disruption, floods, heat waves and more dangerous storms,” Bush rejected it as a document “put out by the bureaucracy.”

“It’s amazing,” Taylor notes, “that cotton growers are having to deal with these pests in the very states whose legislatures are so hostile to the theory of evolution. Because it is evolution itself they are struggling against in their fields every season. These people are trying to ban the teaching of evolution while their own cotton crops are failing because of evolution. How can you be a creationist farmer anymore?”

Marty Jezer, writing for the online Common Dreams News Center, notes that "One has to go back to the Stalinist Era of the Soviet Union to find such a display of political arrogance and ignorance of science." That's when Trofim Lysenko told Josef Stalin that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Gregor Mendel's theory of heredity were wrongheaded "bourgeois science" not suited to a communist state.

Lysenko's theories were practiced on collective farms on a massive scale, displacing traditional agricultural knowledge, and killing millions in the Russian famine of 1931 to 1933. His beliefs were exported to China, says Joseph Becker, author of *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*.

Farmers were told that seeds of the same species act like "comrades," and wouldn't compete with each other. Chinese farmers were ordered to plant up to 15 million seedlings per 2.5 acres, rather than the scientifically proven 1.5 million, helping bring on the 20th century's worst famine. An estimated 30 million people starved to death between 1958 and 1961.

In a move to blunt new U.S. global warming research, Bush has launched a four-year study to ascertain "precisely how much climate change between 1950 and now was human-caused." Prominent climate experts, including Princeton University's Michael Oppenheimer, say the study may merely rehash issues most scientists consider settled. "The danger is that while they're continuing to do the research, the window of opportunity to avoid dangerous global warming is closing," says Oppenheimer.

The anti-science movement has also extended itself into the classroom. Last fall, the Texas Board of Education rejected several environmental science textbooks, including one entitled *Environmental Science: Creating a Sustainable Environment*. Critics forced the book ban primarily on ideological grounds, calling the text "vitriol against Western civilization and its primary belief systems." Another science book was approved only after the publisher agreed to remove entire sections on climate change.

In 2000, the Kansas school board briefly removed Darwinian evolution from the state's science standards and tests, while similar campaigns have been pushed in over 20 states, says People for the American Way. Last spring, two Republican congressmen from Ohio, John Boehner and Steve Chabot, pressured their state's school board unsuccessfully to introduce creationism disguised as "intelligent design" into school curricula.

Should efforts to de-emphasize the teaching of evolutionary theory actually succeed, one wonders how we could hope to confront tough environmental problems. How, for instance, could we train scientists to fight the virulent new strains of bacteria that have evolved resistance to potent antibiotics? Or, another example: In his book *The Beak of the Finch*, science journalist Jonathan Weiner tells how the U.S. cotton industry is threatened with collapse because of

Heliothis virescens, a moth that has evolved total resistance to all pesticides.

Frustrated entomologist Martin Taylor notes the irony of the equivalence between the Southern Cotton Belt and Bible Belt. "It's amazing," Taylor notes, "that cotton growers are having to deal with these pests in the very states whose legislatures are so hostile to the theory of evolution. Because it is evolution itself they are struggling against in their fields every season. These people are trying to ban the teaching of evolution while their own cotton crops are failing because of evolution. How can you be a creationist farmer anymore?"

For those who think the teaching of environmental science is safe in our schools, or that evolution vs. creationism is a dead issue, listen to this comment from Tom DeLay, one of the most powerful men in Congress. He has suggested that the Columbine, Colorado school shootings occurred "because our school systems teach our children that they are nothing but glorified apes who have evolutionized out of some primordial mud."

DeLay agrees with Ford executive Schiller that, despite the fossil evidence, the Earth is only thousands of years old. Such willful ignorance of science informs the religious right approach to the environment, and the embattled Earth will bear the consequences.

Glenn Scherer, former editor of the environmental commentary service Blue Ridge Press, is a freelance writer in Ithaca, NY.

CLIPTOONS

by John Hartzell



Freethought Book Club Starting

[Editor's Note: *CSS member Novena Slater-Roth is interested in starting a freethought book club. Who's in?*]

What's the best thing about being a freethinker? Thinking!

Unfortunately, most if not all of us who were educated in our public education system are handicapped. We have not been taught how to think. We are taught to memorize, how to perform calculations and do experiments that have expected outcomes. Seldom are we trained to discover WHY these skills are important, how they were discovered, what are the alternate methods. So for our first venture into our Freethinker's Book Club, let's choose a book on Critical Thinking. Here are a few suggestions:

(\$\$) Extraordinary Popular Delusions & the Madness of Crowds, by Charles Mackay. Written in 1841, this book is surprisingly contemporary. (See *Skeptic Magazine* Vol 9 No 4, 2002 for review) (I love this book!)

(\$) How to Think Straight, by Anthony Flew. Has been used in college courses in Critical Thinking. (I find it a little dry.)

(\$\$) Little Green Men, Meowing Nuns & Head Hunting Panics: A Study of Mob Psychogenic Illnesses & Social Delusion, by Robert E. Bartholomew. (Just love name of it, not really "Critical Thinking")

(\$) Hoaxes, Myths & Manias: Why We Need Critical Thinking, by Robert E. Bartholomew and Benjamin Radford (Radford is Managing Editor of *Skeptical Inquirer*)

Once we choose our book, we need to decide when, where and how often we will meet, how much material to read between meetings, and how to communicate between meetings. Suggestions are to meet monthly with maybe an email between to help keep our focus. The amount of material to cover will depend largely on the book we choose — some books would allow us to "consume mass quantities" between meetings, other books would require much more detailed reading.

Come to our next CSS meeting armed with ideas on books, meetings, locations and any other "book club" issues. You can contact me at novenar@peak.org

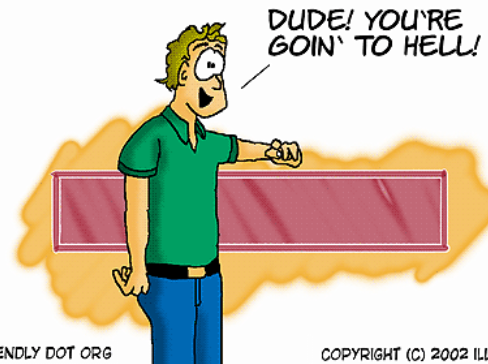
Legend:

\$\$ - over \$25

\$ - \$18-\$22

(both pricing limits are before shipping if required)

'MERGERS WE DON'T WANT TO SEE' #3:
DELL COMPUTERS AND A FUNDAMENTALIST CHURCH.



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