



Willamette Freethinker



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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:

It's been one hell of a summer for movies already, especially for us sci-fi/fantasy geeks. In fact, even with Angela highly drugged and in immense pain, we've managed (with occasional assistance from helpful ushers) to average a movie a week since early May.

So far, we've seen (in order): **Jersey Girl** [fun and sweet, very predictable], **Van Helsing** [neat twist on classic movie monsters], **Shrek 2** [not quite as good as the original], **The Day After Tomorrow** [good effects & take on Cheney, dumb story], **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban** [sadly not as good as first two], **The Chronicles of Riddick** [lots of fun, great action and nothing else], **Stepford Wives** [now I have to see the original], **The Terminal** [EXCELLENT, very sweet], **Fahrenheit 9/11** [read John's column then GO SEE IT RIGHT NOW!], and **Spiderman 2** [even better than the first, especially if you're a fan]. And who knows? I may have forgotten a couple!

Fortunately for us, it looks like we're finally seeing a slow-down in what Angela and I consider must-see movies. Looking ahead to the rest of the year, we have:

July 16: **I Robot** — A Will Smith action movie that shares character names and the idea of positronic robots from the Isaac Asimov story, and NOTHING ELSE.

July 30: **The Village** — Strange supernatural creatures in the forest outside town. Sure, why not?

Oct 8: **The Sound of Thunder** — A two-hour lesson in the dangers of time travel. Maybe slightly more closely related to it's Ray Bradbury source material than **I, Robot** is to it's Asimov source material, but not much.

Nov 5: **The Incredibles** — Pixar. Nuff said!

Nov ?: **Polar Express** — Animated Tom Hanks. Nuff said!

Dec 10: **Blade Trinity** and **Ocean's Twelve** — We liked the previous films, so... we'll probably see these.

Most of these movies are good, escapist material to help us forget about the problems of the real world.

Fahrenheit 9/11, on the other hand, is a concentrated dose of REALITY — a wake up call we all desperately need. If you only see one movie this summer... SEE THIS!

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Jul 17th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Aug 21st 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Sep 18th 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck

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).



Jesus died for your... improved cell phone reception!

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From the President:

Fahrenheit 9/11:

Comments on Michael Moore's Masterpiece

My family just returned from a wonderful vacation in southern California. We visited Disneyland, California Adventure, the San Diego Wild Animal Park, La Brea Tar Pits, Universal Studios, my wife's aunt in Escondido, and three of my cousins. As we don't travel much, we flew down and took the train home so our two boys could experience both modes of travel.

While there, Michael Moore's film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, opened. For political reasons, it was rated R, but PG-13 would have been appropriate. One of my cousins, whom we visited on Saturday, June 26, lives in Claremont; she said she had been to the opening of this film the night before in Pasadena. I wished that I could have gone! But this afternoon (July 3), two days after returning from our vacation, my 16-year-old son and I went to see it right here in Corvallis. (I feared that I would have to go up to Portland to view this film.)

We just got back from the theater, and the emotion and impact of the film is still raw and intense. The rest of the audience was apparently moved, too. At the times when the film was quiet, the theater was utterly silent. There is little in the film that most people don't already know, but Moore brought it all into focus. Early in the film, he reminded us that Bush did not really win the Presidency; rather, it was given to him by crooked politics in Florida (guess who's brother is governor there!), and by the U.S. Supreme Court. (I can find no Constitutional authority for the Court to do this.) Bush is shown as being unscrupulous and self-serving.

It was made plain that Bush, who spent much of the first few months of his Presidency on vacation (42% of his first eight months), could have taken measures to prevent the September 11, 2001, attacks. It was known that al-Qaida operatives were in the U.S., that some were taking passenger jet flying lessons, and that al-Qaida intended more attacks on the U.S. (They had already attacked African embassies and the USS Cole.) Bush's response to the attacks was slow. Our invasion of Afghanistan, where al-Qaida was headquartered, was belated (two months to get started) and weak. Our attack on the terrorist's Saudi financiers never even happened. All this enabled Osama bin Laden and others to escape. The film suggests links between the Bush family, the House of Saud, and corporate interests in Iraq and Afghanistan.

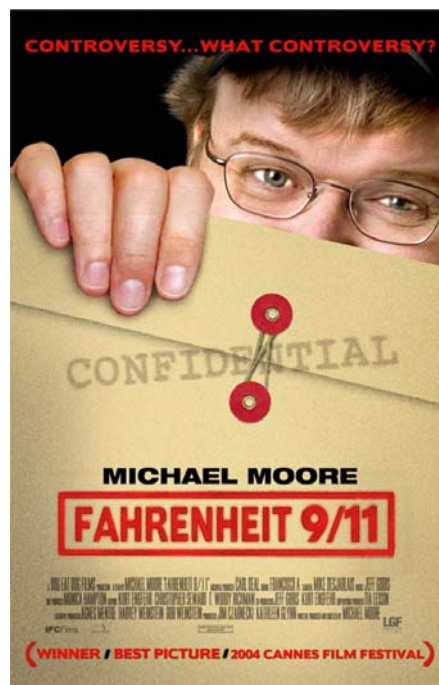
It turned out that Bush, and/or the people who apparently control him, such as Vice-President Cheney and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, wanted to attack Iran since before Bush "won" the election. This was for oil, wealth and power (and probably for revenge against Saddam Hussein, who refused to continue to be "our" dictator). The terrorist attacks presented the Administration with the golden opportunity to attack Iraq. They just went through the motions of pursuing bin Laden (using a small military force), then unleashed the real power of our military against Iraq. (Had they actually invested this effort and expense in tracking down the terrorists, al-Qaida would probably have been put out of business.)

Justifying this invasion and occupation of a sovereign nation that was of no threat to us by lying, the Administration sent America to war against the wrong enemy! The first lie was that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction" sufficient to threaten the U.S. Then they told us there was a Hussein-bin Laden connection; there was none. When this was exposed as false, the Administration told the lie that we were there to "liberate" Iraq. (Never mind that the majority of Iraqis hate us for occupying their country.) Now they tell the lie that we are there to bring democracy to Iraq. This is particularly galling, given that Bush & company don't even believe in democracy: they want to establish an economic, theocratic dictatorship of the wealthy and powerful

in the U.S. (The containment policy toward Iraq was working well; attacking that country was unnecessary.)

Moore is shown spending a day trying to get members of the U.S. House of Representatives who support Bush's War to send their own children to Iraq. He had no success. He did interview a woman, Lila Lipscomb, whose son was killed in Iraq. She describes herself as a patriotic, conservative Democrat who supported the President; many in her family have served in the military. She described and displayed her grief, and now realizes that Bush sent her son to his death for no good reason. If we must send our sons and daughters into harm's way, it should be done only when absolutely necessary.

Witnessing her agony and despair is haunting. Ms. Lipscomb and her son, Michael Pedersen, are from Flint, Michigan, near where Michael Moore was raised. The unemployment in Flint is high with parts of the city looking like a war zone, and the military offers a "job" to many who



have no other prospects. But it is sad to see that those who have so little must go to war so that the wealthy and powerful will become even more wealthy and powerful, and so the children of the wealthy and powerful will not have to fight. Interviews were also shown of once enthusiastic military personnel who were beginning to see the phoniness of their mission in Iraq.

Fahrenheit 9/11 stunned Hollywood with a \$23.9 million take its first weekend; it may become the first "blockbuster documentary." (Moore's earlier *Bowling for Columbine* took in \$21.6 million during its entire run.) On that weekend, it was showing on 868 screens; a week later, it is on more than 1,000 screens. Moore argues that the film will appeal to Republicans as well as to Democrats (perhaps making it a \$100 million film): "People aren't turning out for the movie because they've labeled themselves Democrat or Republican. They're interested in what's going on in their country." One can hope. The Walt Disney company gave the film an untended dose of free publicity when they barred its subsidiary from releasing it. Winning the Cannes Film Festival in May didn't hurt, either.

Roger Ebert reviewed this film for the *Chicago Sun-Times* on June 24. He wrote in part:

Although Moore's narration ranges from outrage to sarcasm, the most devastating passage in the film speaks for itself. That's when Bush, who was reading *My Pet Goat* to a classroom of Florida children, is notified of the second attack on the World Trade Center, and yet lingers with the kids for almost seven minutes before finally leaving the room. His inexplicable paralysis wasn't underlined in news reports at the time, and only Moore thought to contact the teacher in that schoolroom – who, as it turned out, had made her own video of the visit. The expression on Bush's face as he sits there is odd indeed.

Bush, here and elsewhere in the film, is characterized as a man who owes a lot to his friends, including those who helped bail him out of business ventures. Moore places particular emphasis on what he sees as a long-term friendship between the Bush family (including both presidents) and powerful Saudi Arabians. More than \$1.4 billion in Saudi money has flowed into the coffers of Bush family enterprises, he says, and after 9/11 the White House helped expedite flights out of the country carrying, among others, members of the bin Laden family (which disowns its most famous member).

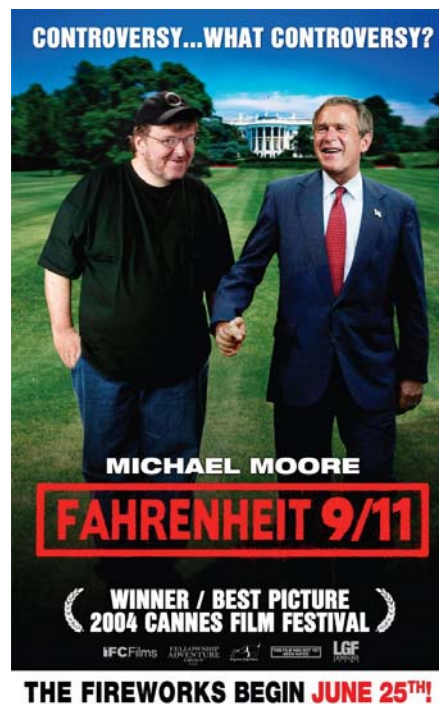
Moore examines the military records released by Bush to explain his disappearance from the Texas Air

National Guard, and finds that the name of another pilot has been blacked out. This pilot, he learns, was Bush's close friend James R. Bath, who became Texas money manager for the billionaire bin Ladens. Another indication of the closeness of the Bushes and the Saudis: The law firm of James Baker, the secretary of State for Bush's father, was hired by the Saudis to defend them against a suit by a group of 9/11 victims and survivors, who charged that the Saudis had financed al-Qaida.

Moore brings a fresh impact to familiar material by the way he marshals his images. We are all familiar with the controversy over the 2000 election, which was settled by the U.S. Supreme Court. What I hadn't seen before was footage of the ratification of Bush's election by the U.S. Congress. An election can be debated at the request of one senator and one representative; 10

representatives rise to challenge it, but not a single senator. As Moore shows the challengers, one after another, we cannot help noting that they are eight black women, one Asian woman and one black man. They are all gavelled into silence by the chairman of the joint congressional session – Vice President Al Gore. The urgency and futility of the scene reawakens old feelings for those who believe Bush is an illegitimate president.

I urge everyone to see *Fahrenheit 9/11*. It is important to understand what Bush is doing to our country. In the next presidential election, we will have the opportunity to put Bush out to pasture and to restore our democracy. If we fail in this, it is frightening to think what may happen in his second term: he will not have to restrain himself in hopes of winning a third term (unconstitutional), and he may finally get the opportunity to move the U.S. Supreme Court, and other courts, further to the right.



Sadly, in my more pessimistic moments, I feel that the majority of American voters are fools. For example: an article on the front page of *USA Today*, Friday, June 25, 2004, reports that "Most see Iraq as a mistake" and that "55% say war has raised terror threat." Nonetheless, that same article reports that "Bush gains" in the presidential polls. Go figure.

It's important to show support for the film itself, and to make it successful. I urge you, after seeing the film in a theater, to buy the DVD, which will be out by September (with additional material not in the theatrical release). As Michael Moore has said, "We want to get it [the DVD version] out before the [presidential] election. We hope the film and DVD will have a significant role in removing Bush" from office. We all better hope this.

John Dearing
President of CSS

Voice of an Angel

Well it seems the saga of my car accident just never ends.

I was trying to justify how this column fits into a Humanist newsletter and I concluded that how the medical profession treats us IS a Humanist issue — from immunizing children to “death with dignity”. So I’d like to share some of my experiences.

In the past few weeks I have seen over a dozen different doctors and I continue to be astonished at how differently they all treat you for the same health problem. (I should say that the reason I have been forced to see so many doctors is that my regular doctor has been booked up, or out of the country teaching doctors in poor Eastern-European countries how to be better doctors. Now if only he could do the same with some of the doctors I have run into here at home!)

Things were going VERY well for me for about a month, but it seems the improvements were only due to the steroids I was taking for an outbreak of TMJ. When on the steroids, I was able to increase my Physical Therapy and decrease my pain pills. After a week off the steroids, I was in as much pain as the day of the accident.

So I called my doctor’s office and had to see the “Doctor on Call”. This was by far the worst experience I have ever had with a doctor in my entire life. He was rude, and just plain mean. He refused to give me any more pain medication and wanted me to stop taking all medications! When I asked him for a referral to a specialist, he brushed me off saying I was just too fat and that’s why I wasn’t healing. After about 10 minutes, he said he was a busy man and had other patients to see who were more important than I was and he’d “try” to get around to talking to my regular doctor about my case — he never did. (I could go on and on about him — and I did in a three page letter of complaint I sent to his supervisor!)

The doctor did nothing to relieve my pain, so Reed took me straight to the immediate care clinic. To give you an idea on how upset I had become, at the doctors’ office before I saw the jerk, my Blood Pressure (BP) was 122/70 and at the clinic it had skyrocketed to 184/110. The clinic doctor was much nicer and took the time to try to help me, but in the end what he gave me did not work and I went to the emergency room the next day.

The ER doctor I saw was GREAT! He wanted to get right on the case and get me out of pain. He was disgusted to hear that I was forced to go to the ER when my regular doctor was in his office (just too busy to see me, but my doctor did consult with the ER doc to formulate a plan). The ER doctor saw how much pain I was in and since the steroids worked before, he put me back on them until I could see some specialists who can find out what the heck is going on. He wasn’t afraid to issue me pain meds to get me through the week — he gave me what I needed and insisted I get an appointment ASAP with a Neurologist.

So with my doctor out of the country we had to call Dr. Jerk and tell him he needed to write up the referral. I won’t go

into the entire story, but in the end he wrote the referral and then ended up cancelling it and our Neurologist appointment for July 19th without even telling us he did this!! So I am now left waiting until the first week in August to see a Neurologist — but with all the errors made, the clinic has put me on the top of the cancellation list, so I might get lucky and see someone sooner!

When my doctor consulted with the ER doc, they both agreed I should see another type of specialist called a Physical Medicine Physician. From what I understand, this is a group of doctors who specialize in different areas of the body. They run all sorts of tests, discuss your case and try to come up with a solution. I’ll be seeing this doctor next week so I am hopeful they can help me!

After putting me back on the steroids, all the doctors tell me I am not to do ANYTHING that might hurt my back in any way. Until they know what’s wrong, they don’t want to take any chances. Well, as some of you might know, steroids cause you to swell up like a balloon if you don’t do physical activity and that’s just what happened to me. So, once again, I was back in the ER on Thursday swollen up and in extreme pain that seemed to be caused by the swelling. But alas, I was stuck with another doctor who was willing to take some Xray’s and give me a Demoral shot, but refused to do anything about the swelling or the fact that it had caused my BP to soar to 186/115. He said it wasn’t an “emergency situation”. I refused the Demoral shot — I already had a bottle full of morphine and Valium and didn’t see the point of putting more chemicals into my system that I knew wouldn’t help.

After leaving the ER, I called my doctor’s office and got the doctor on call. He was useless and said that since I wasn’t his patient he didn’t want to do anything for me and I would just have to “grin and bear it” until next week.

This is when I finally decided that most doctors just don’t care or are so terrified that they will be sued, that they have shut off their compassion. So, after 3 months of this nonsense, I decided to take matters into my own hands.

I have a “water pill” I was taking, and the doctor on call told me I was already at it’s maximum dosage. When I got home, I found out this was NOT the case (thanks to the good old Internet) and it turns out I could safely take 3-5 times the amount I was on. So I began to take a much higher dosage of these pills, and I changed the dosage of my pain pills and muscle relaxer. It’s now 48 hours later and my swelling is down 80% and my pain level has gone down at least 75% I can actually think and function again!

I know there are good doctors out there — I have met some of them. But it seems the vast majority are not able to cope with anything that isn’t simple and easy to fix. An ear infection that takes a few minutes to diagnose and write a prescription for is what they want. Someone who isn’t an easy fix, someone who they can’t give an easy answer to, frustrates them and they don’t want to deal with them.

(continued on page 5)

Finally: A Candidate Who Gets It

by Jeff Lewis, CSS Member, 7/5/2004

In a debate with a Republican several years ago (late 1980's, when I was still a Republican myself) I stated that when a religious person is elected to public office, he or she must leave some of their religious convictions 'at the door' when voting on issues. My reasoning was, and is, that our freedoms generally, and our freedom of/from religion specifically, demand that elected officials respect all religions when voting on laws that affect us all. A few weeks later, I was shown an article in a newspaper where I was 'quoted' as saying that people of faith are not fit for public office.

This was my first real awareness of the viciousness and the distortions of the Republican religious right. They represent the worst of theocratic rule: the concept that because they 'believe' something, that belief should be imposed on the rest of us. It is a concept directly opposed to pluralism, tolerance, freedom of conscience, freedom of choice and diversity of opinion: in short, everything that the United States represents as symbolized so well by the Statue of Liberty, a gift from the French whom the Bush administration now insults because they favored a measured response rather than an illegal pre-emptive war in Iraq. Liberty, it seems, is a concept that's a little beyond the grasp of the Republican religious right. They are not content to live in a country where they are free to come to their own conclusions about religion, abortion, sexual orientation, stem cell research and birth control. They want to make those decisions for the rest of us.

In an article speculating about John Kerry's potential running mate ('Kerry Dodges Question on Running Mate') Kerry said, "I oppose abortion, personally. I don't like abortion. I believe life does begin at conception. But I can't take my Catholic belief, my article of faith, and legislate it on a Protestant or a Jew or an atheist ... who doesn't share it. We have separation of church and state in the United States of America."

This quote is articulate, straightforward and patriotic in the purest sense of the word. Kerry does not boast, disingenuously, that he's a uniter, not a divider, as Bush does, then rail against abortion, atheists, gays and scientific research involving stem cells. Kerry is not advocating giving tax dollars to religious institutions then calling on those institutions to supply him with lists of people from their congregations for use in his political campaign, as Bush has already done.

From Kerry's quote, one can deduce that he does not view the U.S. as a monarchy and the presidency as the position of king, as Bush has done. (And not a very benevolent king when it comes to people Bush considers unworthy. Just ask Joseph Wilson, whose wife was 'outed' by the White House as an undercover CIA operative. [Ambassador Joseph Wilson IV, - A BuzzFlash Interview])

One can also deduce that Kerry would have worked much more closely with the United Nations in solving the Iraq/Saddam Hussein problem rather than alienate that body and our strongest allies. Such an approach would have saved us billions of dollars, thousands of lives and would have been less of a recruitment incentive for terrorists than Bush's policies of pre-emptive war and 'shock and awe' have been.

I'm not going to stoop to the sloganeering — most of it misleading — characteristic of the Republican religious right and the Bush administration and say Kerry is a uniter. Just listen to what he says. And, when Republicans 'slogan' him as a waffler, dig into the reasons for Kerry's change of mind. I think you'll find he's a reasoned thinker who can be swayed by new information and has enough character to change his mind when information warrants it, as opposed to the dogmatism and stifling bigotry of the Republican religious right.

(Thanks to Larry Darby at www.atheistlaw.org for pointing out the article containing Kerry's quote.)

For more & related information, see:
Parallel Politics and Comment
<http://www.parallelpac.org>

Voice of an Angel (cont. from page 4)

I realize some of this is due to all the HMO "streamlining", that is forcing many doctors to convert to an assembly line process. HMO's want to tell doctors you can't spend more than 10 minutes per patient and you have to make a quick and "cost effective" diagnoses. So when patients like me keep coming back, I think they simply have no idea what they are supposed to do. They have stopped being doctors and have turned into robots on the medical assembly line.

My only solace in this is that my regular doctor has told his co-workers and his patients in no uncertain terms, that he refuses to do this "assembly line" work. He will see each patient for as long as they need him, and do whatever is needed for them. This is why I stick with him. To avoid getting stuck with Dr. Jerk again, I have thought ahead and made a weekly appointment with my doctor for the next several weeks.

I only wish more doctors would take such a stand and I hope he continues to have the strength to fight this good fight and put his patients first and not on the bottom line of some HMO tally sheet. Doctors are supposed to help people, but not everyone is an "easy fix". We need more doctors out there who are willing to understand this and treat each patient with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Angela Byers

CSS Treasurer & Webmaster

A Matter of Faith

by David Brooks, *New York Times*, 6/22/2004

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/22/opinion/22BROO.html?8b1>

[Editor's Note: Jeff Lewis has a wonderfully intelligent article on the previous page, describing how refreshing it is to have a presidential candidate who doesn't wear his religion on his sleeve. For a look at how the "other side" sees this same issue, just keep reading. Then, when you've had enough of Brooks' babbling, check out the NEXT page and see how the readers responded!]

When Bill Clinton was 8, he started taking himself to church. When he was 10, he publicly committed himself to Jesus. As a boy, he begged his Sunday school teacher to take him to see Billy Graham. And as anybody watching his book rollout knows, he still exudes religiosity. He gave Dan Rather a tour of his Little Rock church, and talked about praying in good times and bad.

More than any other leading Democrat, Bill Clinton understands the role religion actually plays in modern politics. He knows Americans want to be able to see their leaders' faith. A recent Pew survey showed that for every American who thinks politicians should talk less about religion, there are two Americans who believe politicians should talk more.

And Clinton seems to understand, as many Democrats do not, that a politician's faith isn't just about litmus test issues like abortion or gay marriage. Many people just want to know that their leader, like them, is in the fellowship of believers. Their president doesn't have to be a saint, but he does have to be a pilgrim. He does have to be engaged, as they are, in a personal voyage toward God.

Clinton made this sort of faith-based connection, at least until he sullied himself with the Lewinsky affair. He won the evangelical vote in 1992, and won it again in 1996. He understood that if Democrats are not seen as religious, they will be seen as secular Ivy League liberals, and they will lose.

John Kerry doesn't seem to get this. Many of the people running the Democratic Party don't get it either.

A recent Time magazine survey revealed that only 7 percent of Americans feel that Kerry is a man of strong religious faith. That's a catastrophic number. That number should be the first thing Kerry strategists think about when they wake up in the morning and it should be the last thing on their lips when they go to sleep at night. They should be doing everything they can to change that perception, because unless more people get a sense of Kerry's faith, they will feel no bond with him and they will be loath to trust him with their vote.

A recent Pew survey showed that for every American who thinks politicians should talk less about religion, there are two Americans who believe politicians should talk more.

Yet his campaign does nothing. Kerry talks about jobs one week and the minimum wage the next, going about his wonky way, each day as secular as the last.

It's mind-boggling. Can't the Democratic strategists read the data? Religious involvement is a much, much more powerful predictor of how someone will vote than income, education, gender or any other social and demographic category save race. Can't the Democratic strategists feel it in their bones how important this is? After all, when you go out among the Democratic rank and file, you find millions of Democrats who are just as religious as Republicans. It's mostly in the land of Democratic elites that you are likely to find yourself among religious illiterates.

But of course this is the problem. Forests have been felled so people could publish articles and books on the religious right's influence on the Republican Party. But as the Baruch College political scientists Louis Bolce and Gerald De Maio have suggested, the real political story of the past decade has been the growing size and cohesion of the secular left, and its growing influence on the Democratic Party.

According to the American Religious Identification Survey, the number of Americans with no religious affiliation has more than doubled since 1990. There is now a surging but unself-conscious power bloc within the Democratic Party.

Like the religious right in the Republican Party, the members of the secular left are interested primarily in social issues. What unites them more than anything else is a strong antipathy to pro-lifers and fundamentalists. While 75 percent of Americans feel little or no hostility to fundamentalists, people in this group are far more hostile to them than to other traditional Democratic *bête noires*, the rich or big business. They don't like to see their politicians meddling with religion in any way.

Just as Republicans have to appeal to religious conservatives but move beyond them, Democrats have to appeal to the secular left but also build a bridge to religious moderates. Bill Clinton did this. John Kerry hasn't. If you want to know why Kerry is still roughly even with Bush in the polls, even though Bush has had the worst year of any president since Nixon in 1973 or L.B.J. in 1968, this is one big reason.

Church, State, and the Campaign:

Responses to Mr. Brook's Column

New York Times, 6/24/2004

To the Editor:

In "A Matter of Faith" (column, June 22), David Brooks suggests that John Kerry is out of touch with Americans because he does not wear his religion on his sleeve. In doing so, Mr. Brooks endorses a more theocratic America.

Rather than bow to the Pew survey Mr. Brooks cites showing that more Americans believe that politicians should talk more about religion, John Kerry shows what a leader he is by exhibiting a true understanding of one of America's founding principles: the separation of church and state.

If Mr. Kerry worked harder to prove just what a man of faith he is, no doubt Mr. Brooks would accuse him of pandering to the polls.

BENNETT WINDHEIM New York, June 22, 2004

To the Editor:

American religiosity cannot be overstated. We are a frightened people and we find far greater comfort in the metaphysical than in logic, reason and rational thought.

George W. Bush's perceived connection to God may very well be the major factor granting him another four years.

DAVID L. HAYNES Inkom, Idaho, June 22, 2004

To the Editor:

David Brooks suggests that John Kerry will need to ramp up his spiritual connection with the American electorate in order to solicit votes.

It will be a sad day in American politics when a candidate with the credentials, breadth of experience and long record of service to his country of Mr. Kerry is judged a poor politician because he is not religious enough.

I prefer my elected leaders to make their policy decisions based on facts, logic and, yes, morals, but they need not make them based on the religious teachings of a particular faith, or disclose to me what religious underpinnings they choose to draw from in so doing.

I think most Americans can adequately assess how closely a candidate's policy views match their own without knowing how he views the Divine.

DANKATONA Columbus, Ohio, June 22, 2004

To the Editor:

My grandparents came to this country to escape religious persecution. They had little formal education, but they understood better than many of us today the need for a wall between church and state.

When David Brooks suggests that a presidential candidate wear his religion on his sleeve to garner votes, he is asking that candidate to disrespect a basic principle of our Constitution.

He is also asking him to pander to a single group when the candidate should be running as president of all the people.

RON COHEN Waltham, Mass., June 22, 2004

To the Editor:

That it is possible and useful for John Kerry to appear more religious further proves the wisdom of Machiavelli: It is not necessary for a statesman to actually be religious; it is just as useful to appear so as to be so.

ILYA P. WINHAM Chicago, June 22, 2004

To the Editor:

As one of David Brooks's so-called secular leftists, I reject being characterized as being "among religious illiterates" (column, June 22).

To the contrary, it is my knowledge of and respect for more than one religion — indeed, the splendid variety of religious experience — that has made me secular.

TOM PARRETT New York, June 22, 2004

It will be a sad day in American politics when a candidate with the credentials, breadth of experience and long record of service to his country of Mr. Kerry is judged a poor politician because he is not religious enough.

"I'm a pedestrian. I see religion like footwear. Some people like to wear really comfortable shoes; some people like to wear big, tall boots, really immerse themselves in it. I choose to go barefoot, just don't step on my toes and we can get along just fine."

— K. Muir

Pledging Allegiance to My Daughter

by Michael Newdow, 6/21/2004

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/21/opinion/21NEWWD.html>

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Last week the Supreme Court ruled in effect that once parents are involved in family court proceedings, their federal rights are at risk. This decision sets a dangerous precedent that violates the rights of citizens to have the federal judiciary address their claims.

The case, which I brought, presented the court with an important question: is a classroom recital of the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional? The pledge — with its claim that ours is “one nation, under God” — is recited daily in the public school attended by my daughter. Because I am an atheist, she is, in essence, told every school morning that her father’s religious views are wrong.

This is an injury to me personally, which should give me “standing”: the right to have the court adjudicate my claim. Nonetheless, the merits of the case were never addressed. Instead, the court ruled that since I do not have legal custody of my daughter, I do not have the right to pursue the matter in the federal courts.

As Chief Justice William Rehnquist noted in his concurring opinion, the majority did not dispute that I had standing under Article III of the Constitution, which requires a personalized injury before a person can litigate. The court did, however, cite a “prudential” reason for denying me the right to bring this lawsuit, saying that the federal judiciary should “leave delicate issues of domestic relations to the state courts.”

Although that’s certainly a reasonable policy, there’s a problem with applying it in this case: nothing I requested was a family law matter.

I began my effort to remove “under God” from the pledge in 1998, when my child’s mother, Sandra Banning, and I were good friends. This was more than a year before we first went to family court. In fact, it wasn’t until July 2002 — after my victory in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit — that the issue of my daughter’s legal custody entered into the pledge case. In bringing the case, my goal was simply to uphold the separation of church and state, especially in my daughter’s public school, that is required by the Constitution.

Any decision on the merits would have been unrelated to — and would have had no effect on — the family law judge’s orders. Nor would it would have infringed upon the rights of either Ms. Banning or our child. The “prudential” considerations, therefore, seem questionable at best.

The court strained to limit standing in this case, saying that “it is improper for the federal courts to entertain a claim by a plaintiff whose standing to sue is founded on family law rights that are in dispute when prosecution of the lawsuit may have an adverse effect on the person who is the source of the plaintiff’s claimed standing.” But my standing was not founded on disputed rights under family law; my daughter is told her father is wrong no matter what the custody arrangement.



Similarly, any “adverse effect” on my daughter would have been due to private biases, not as a result of any custody arrangement. As the Supreme Court has previously stated (in a case the majority cited, no less): “Private biases may be outside the reach of the law, but the law cannot, directly or indirectly, give them effect.” Changing the federal judiciary’s standing rules in response to private biases is certainly giving them effect.

What’s to limit this policy in the future? If a school district reverts to racially segregated classrooms, does a divorced black mother have no standing because the father prefers that policy? If — in direct violation of Supreme Court precedent — a public school district starts teaching the biblical account of Creation, is a scientist prohibited from challenging that practice because the other parent is a fundamentalist Christian?

And what if a mother agrees with her daughter’s teacher that it’s proper to start off every school day by having the class stand up and say that it’s fine to treat atheists (like the girl’s father) as second-class citizens? Wait a minute: that’s precisely the case that, after tens of thousands of hours invested over six years, the Supreme Court simply dismissed last week.

Our Constitution is the rule book that is supposed to guarantee to every citizen that each branch of government will do its duty and uphold his or her rights. In this case, Congress broke the rule that says government may not take a position on questions of religious belief. Then the state court system broke the rule that says that fit parents have a fundamental constitutional right to love and protect their children (as might be appreciated by the fact that no reasonable justification for my loss of legal custody has ever been presented). And now — in the highest court in the land — the federal courts have broken the rule that says they will adjudicate any claim of injury that is properly brought before them.

God bless America.

Walking? Or Just Talking?

'Family values' crowd drags God into the mud of partisan politics

by Molly Ivins

<http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?ItemID=17204>

AUSTIN, Texas — When it comes to religion, I've always believed it's more important to walk the walk than to talk the talk. I come from a tradition (Episcopal) that considers it rather in bad taste to wear your religion on your sleeve, presumably from Matthew, Chapter 6, Verses 5 and 6:

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Of course, I also had some Baptist input and so am fond of making a joyful noise unto the Lord. Texans even like to sing hymns around campfires while drinking beer — I'm not sure if that counts.

I long ago learned to shy away from the stink of sanctimony. We are all familiar with pietistic hypocrites and spiritual humbugs wearing dog collars. I doubt the clergy is more afflicted with canting Pharisees than the legal profession is with sleazy chisellers, but neither type is exactly rare.

When you throw politics into the religious mix, or vice versa, you get some real beauts in the hypocrisy department. Just to take a recent example, Jack Ryan of Illinois, the one who had to drop his campaign for the Senate after his divorce papers revealed he had forced his wife to go to sex clubs with him, was one of the "family values" crowd who opposes gay marriage because it's such a threat to the institution. Please. And although Bill Clinton was too polite to mention it in his book, quite a remarkable number of Republican leaders who were hell-bent on impeaching him for his folly were themselves adulterers.

Back in the 1950s, when the late Rep. Bob Eckhardt was still in the Texas Legislature, a bill to cut off all state aid to illegitimate children was under debate. After listening to some of his "Christian" colleagues explain why illegitimate children should be left to starve, Eckhardt rose and said, "I am not so much concerned about the natural bastards as I am about the self-made ones." I consider that one of the most Christian things I've ever heard said during legislative debate.

I sometimes think we've gotten ourselves into a pointless argument in this country, as we rather often do, by exaggerating the extremes. We are not faced with a choice between imposing some Christian version of Sharia law on the one hand, or "driving religion out of the public square" altogether on the other.

Two hundred years of not terribly rigid separation of church and state has given us one precious gift. As a quote attributed to James Madison (never been able to find the correct citation on it) put it, "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe with blood for centuries." Religious strife is still soaking the soil with blood, isn't it, in Kosovo and elsewhere.

To the extent that politics should be based on moral and ethical considerations, of course it has religious foundations. But dragging God into partisan politics is, in my view, a sin.

Is it Christian to cut money for Head Start?
Is it Christian to cut poor children off

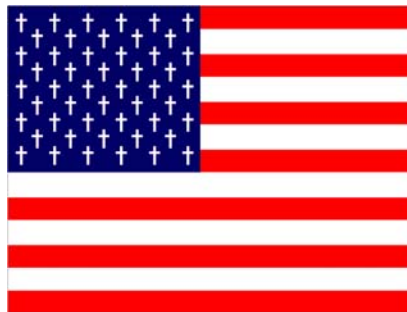
health care? Is it Christian to cut old people off Medicare? Is it Christian to write memos justifying torture? Is it Christian to cut after-school, nutrition and AIDS programs so multimillionaires can have bigger tax cuts?

Historically, the Bible has been used to justify some stupefying crimes, including slavery and genocide. I see no indication we are any better at divining the Lord's intent now than we ever were.

As regular readers know, I call upon the Lord rather frequently myself, often for patience in dealing with those who presume to speak in His name. To whatever extent each of us is affected by religion, I suppose we inevitably bring that into the public sphere. But I seriously question the wisdom of doing so in any organized or deliberate fashion. Drag God into politics, and you'll ruin His reputation in no time.

Again, this may be a matter of taste, but I have seen too many Psalm-singing, Bible quoting, Holy Joe hypocrites in politics to think these frauds improve the moral tone of our public life. Getting snookered by some canting humbug is even more depressing than getting snookered by a plain old crook.

Beware those who make a show or a parade of their piety: Keep watching for the ones who walk the walk.



Army Will Help Distribute Bible Verse Medallions

by Elizabeth A. Davis, Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — The Army has reversed itself and will continue to help a nonprofit group distribute honorary medallions that cite a Bible verse.

Fallen Friend, which since 1995 has distributed nearly 2,000 medallions to survivors of those killed in the line of duty, had been told by the Army in May that it could no longer help forward the medallions because the inscription "John 15:13" was inappropriate and might offend some families.

The verse, which is not on the gold-colored medallion, reads, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

The chief of the Army's Casualty Operations Division notified Fallen Friend President Bob Parker on Thursday of the Army's change of heart.

"Upon further evaluation, it has been determined that while there is a Biblical reference on the medallion, this reference is not of such nature that it is likely to be offensive to most next of kin," Lt. Col. Kevin Logan wrote in an e-mail to Parker. "I am sincerely sorry for any inconvenience our earlier decision made on you and your organization."

Since word spread of Parker's troubles with the Army, he has received numerous e-mails and letters in support.

"This is what makes America beautiful," Parker said in a telephone interview from his home in Clairfield, about 40 miles north of Knoxville. "If people hadn't gotten involved, the Army wouldn't have changed its mind."

The military branches provide Parker the names of the deceased, and he sends the medals to the branches to be distributed to the survivors. The medallions are also inscribed with the person's name and the words "A Fallen Friend."

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