



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:

Lately, I've been feeling that I haven't been writing about current events as much as I should. But seriously, where to begin?

I mean, between the voting machines running top-secret software that nobody is allowed to inspect, the blatant fixing of state elections by Secretaries of State who double as campaign operatives, the Patriot Act and other legislation that strip us of our civil liberties and enable the military to spy on us and imprison us without trial, the promotion of wars of choice and torture as a valid interrogation technique... we're literally watching the dismantling of Democracy and the rise of Fascism before our very eyes.

Our worst fears are occurring so quickly, we can't even keep track of it all.

To be sure, there are signs that the worst may at last be over. Bush and his pet war are more unpopular than ever. Virtually every major Republican official in federal office is under felony investigation. A factual news report occasionally slips though the right-wing spin filters in the mainstream media... A few select Democrats have actually begun showing signs of evolving into vertebrates. Oregon Winter may be hitting in full force, but politically, it's starting to feel a bit like Spring.

But to stretch my metaphor to the breaking point, the budding flowers of this Spring are still very tender and fragile. The slightest hint of frost could wipe out all our progress and leave us facing a barren political landscape once again...

I wish I could be more excited by the occasional bud or sprout. But these past five years have made me even more of a Skeptic. I don't need a groundhog to see his shadow in February for me to predict at least three more years of winter...

...And on THAT happy note, I'd like to wish everyone everyone a Merry Solstice (the REAL reason for the season)! See you all at the potluck...

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

CSS Meetings and Events

Special Event:

Time for the Winter Solstice Potluck! Remember to arrive at 1pm, and bring a dish to share...

Calendar:

Saturday, Dec 17th 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck
Saturday, Jan 21st 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Feb 18th 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:

Theology: The Theory of God

Theology, according to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition*, is "the study of religious faith, practice, and experience; especially: the study of God and of God's relation to the world." **Natural theology** is "theology deriving its knowledge of God from the study of nature independent of special revelation." The entry **the-** or **theo-** is defined as "god; God" as in *theism*; *theocentric*. **-logy** is "doctrine; theory; science." Hence, for our purposes, *Theology is the Theory of God*. It is the academic discipline that studies the existence and nature of God and of "his" relationship with humans. It appears then that **theologians**, "specialists in theology," can be expected to precisely demonstrate the existence and the nature of God.

Apologetics is a related word. It is defined as "a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity." **Divine**, in turn, means "of, relating to, or proceeding directly from God or a god; being a deity; or directed to a deity." So Christian apologists claim that their religion was originated by God and that God give Christianity some sort of authority. (Over whom?) **God**, of course, is "the Being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness who is worshipped as creator and ruler of the universe....a being or object believed to have more than natural attributes and powers and to require human worship."

The *Collegiate* is published in the United States for an American readership. The "Christian-centric" nature of the above definitions is clear. Hence, in this essay, we will assume that the god of Christians is named "God," and that this god is male. **Christianity**, distinct from all the other religions of the world, is "the religion derived from Jesus Christ, [and] based on the Bible as sacred scripture." Of course, if the Christian Bible is **sacred**, then it is "entitled to reverence and respect," and, in particular, is "unassailable, inviolable." (How convenient.)

I have the greatest respect for science, true academic scholarship and achievement, and the acquisition of knowledge. Almost all academic fields have contributed to human knowledge and welfare. These include mathematics, the many fields of pure science, such as biology and physics, and the fields of applied science, including engineering and agriculture. They also include the study of the humanities and the social sciences. But I think that theology is a phony discipline. It does not belong in any institution of higher learning: like the fairy-tale emperor, theology, intellectually, is the one academic field that "has no clothes," and almost everyone pretends to not notice.

Theologians have never proven the existence of God, let alone demonstrated his nature. They cannot explain how "the Being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness" (all-

powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, or omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent) can allow human and other suffering. They never tell us how a "supernatural" (outside of nature, or outside of reality) being can interfere with reality (in extreme cases, producing "miracles"). They, as far as I can determine, have never contributed one iota of knowledge to humanity, and their discipline has contributed nothing to human happiness.

Thomas Paine, in *The Age of Reason*, wrote: "The study of theology, as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and it admits of no conclusion."

The Independent newspaper, March 20, 1992, published the following letter by British biologist Richard Dawkins:

Sir: In your dismally unctuous leading article (18 March) asking for a reconciliation between science and 'theology', you remark that 'people want to know as much as possible about their origins'. I certainly hope they do, but what on earth makes you think that 'theology' has anything useful to say on the subject? Science is responsible for the following knowledge about our origins.

We know approximately when the universe began and why it is largely hydrogen. We know why stars form, and what happens in their interiors to convert hydrogen to the other elements and hence give birth to chemistry in a world of physics. We know the fundamental principles of how a world of chemistry can become biology through the arising of self-replicating molecules. We know how the principle of self-replication gives rise, through Darwinian selection, to all life including humans.

It is science, and science alone, that has given us this knowledge and given it, moreover, in fascinating, overwhelming, mutually confirming detail. On every one of these questions theology has held a view that has been conclusively proved wrong. Science has eradicated smallpox, can immunise against most previously deadly viruses, can kill most previously deadly bacteria.

Theology has done nothing but talk of pestilence as the wages of sin. Science can predict when a particular comet will reappear and, to the second, when the next eclipse will occur. Science has put men on the moon and hurtled reconnaissance rockets around Saturn and Jupiter. Science can tell you the age of a particular fossil and that the Turin Shroud is a medieval fake. Science knows the precise DNA instructions of several viruses and

will, in the lifetime of many present readers of the *Independent*, do the same for the human genome.

What has 'theology' ever said that is of the smallest use to anybody? When has 'theology' ever said anything that is demonstrably true and is not obvious? I have listened to theologians, read them, debated against them. I have never heard any of them ever say anything of the smallest use, anything that was not either platitudinously obvious or downright false.

If all the achievements of scientists were wiped out tomorrow there would be no doctors but witch-doctors, no transport faster than a horse, no computers, no printed books, no agriculture beyond subsistence peasant farming. If all the achievements of theologians were wiped out tomorrow, would anyone notice the smallest difference?

Even the bad achievements of scientists, the bombs and sonar-guided whaling vessels, work! The achievements of theologians don't do anything, don't affect anything, don't achieve anything, don't even mean anything. What makes you think that 'theology' is a subject at all?

Yours faithfully, Richard Dawkins

Theology claims to provide knowledge and provide ethical meaning and guidance. But, to People of Reason, theology is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Humanity needs to move on.

John Dearing
President of CSS

Voice of an Angel

With the busy holiday season upon us I'm afraid I haven't had enough time to write an inspired column. Instead I'd like to share with you something that has inspired me for many years. I first read this when I was in High School and was so taken with it that I typed it up, framed it and hung it on my wall.

I still find this very moving.

From Profiles Of The Future by Sir Arthur C. Clarke

Our galaxy is now in the brief springtime of its' life — a springtime made glorious by brilliant blue-white stars as Vega and Sirius, and on a more humble scale our own sun. Not until all these have flamed through their incandescent youth, in a few fleeting billions of years, will the real history of the universe begin.

It will a history illuminated only by the reds and infrareds of dully glowing stars that would be almost invisible to our eyes; yet those somber hues of the all-but-eternal universe may be full of color and beauty to whatever strange beings have adapted to it. They will know that before them lie, not the millions of years of which we measure the eons of geology, not the billions of years that spans the past lives of stars, but years to be counted literally in trillions.

They will have time enough, in those endless eons, to attempt all things, and gather all knowledge. They will not be like gods, because no gods ever imagined by our minds have ever possessed the powers they will command. But for all that, they may envy us, basking in the bright after glow of Creation; for we knew the universe when it was young.

Angela Byers
CSS Treasurer & Webmaster

Now, primitive man is neither a metaphysician nor an idealist. He does not concern himself with the origin and destiny of the universe, nor even with its nature, except so far as his necessities compel him to form some conclusions as to the nature of the forces around him. His gods are in no sense a creation of an "idealising faculty", they are the most concrete matter-of-fact expressions. It is not even a question of morality. He does not say, "Let us make gods in the interest of morality and the higher life"; it is the sheer pressure of facts upon an uninformed mind that leads him to believe in those extra-natural beings, whose anger he is bound to placate.

— Chapman Cohen

"The national government will maintain and defend the foundations on which the power of our nation rests. It will offer strong protection to Christianity as the very basis of our collective morality."

— Adolf Hitler

Report: OSU Scientists Are Highly Respected By Peers

Press Release by Peg Herring,
OSU News & Communication Services, 12/07/2005

<http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ncs/newsarch/2005/Dec05/scientists.htm>

[Editor's Note: *Corvallis Secular Society member Evelyn Sherr is an oceanographer at Oregon State University in Corvallis. She has been recognized as one of the world's top scientists, whose work is most often cited in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Congratulations, Ev! The article recognizing her and eleven other OSU scientists follows.*]

CORVALLIS, Ore. — Isaac Newton, it is said, credited his scientific achievements to “standing on the shoulders of giants.” At Oregon State University, there are more giants’ shoulders than at any other university in Oregon, as measured by the number of times a scientist’s work is cited by peers.

A recent report by ISI Web of Knowledge, an international index of scientific information, lists the top 250 scientists in the world, in each of 21 subject areas, whose work is most often cited in peer-reviewed scientific journals. They comprise less than one-half of one percent of all publishing researchers.

Twelve OSU scientists made the list, including Thayne Dutson, the Reub Long Endowed Professor and dean of OSU’s College of Agricultural Sciences, whose work focuses on meat science and muscle biology.

The ISI list identifies individuals, departments and laboratories that have made fundamental contributions to the advancement of science and technology in recent decades. According to ISI, these researchers have demonstrated great influence in their field as measured by citations to their work - the intellectual debt acknowledged by their colleagues.

The other OSU scientists on the ISI most-cited list are:

- Ronald Wrolstad, distinguished professor emeritus of food science and technology in OSU’s College of Agricultural Sciences, whose work examines antioxidant properties of fruit and fruit pigments;
- Joseph Beckman, a biochemist in OSU’s Linus Pauling Institute, whose work examines how oxidative stress and zinc are involved in Lou Gehrig’s disease;



CSS Member Ev Sherr

- Brian Flay, a social psychologist in OSU’s College of Health and Human Sciences, whose work involves health promotion and disease prevention;
- Shawna Grosskopf, an economist in OSU’s College of Liberal Arts, whose work focuses on public finance and productive performance;
- Jane Lubchenco, distinguished professor of zoology and the Wayne and Gladys Valley Professor of Marine Biology, whose work examines biodiversity, climate change, global sustainability, and coastal marine ecosystems;
- Bruce Menge, distinguished professor of zoology and the Wayne and Gladys Valley Professor of Marine Biology in OSU’s College of Science, whose work includes the topics of scale and interactions in marine community dynamics;
- Lawrence Marple, an electrical engineer in OSU’s College of Engineering, whose work focuses on digital signal processing;

- Evelyn Sherr, an oceanographer in OSU’s College of Oceanic and Atmospheric Sciences, whose work examines the physiology and ecology of marine microbes;
- Bernd Simoneit, an environmental and petroleum geochemist in OSU’s College of Oceanic and Atmospheric Sciences; whose work crosses many disciplines from organic chemistry, geology, atmospheric and oceanic processes to cosmochemistry;
- Robert Duncan, the Alice Rohm Professor of Marine Education and associate dean of OSU’s College of Oceanic and Atmospheric Sciences, and an expert in marine volcanic “hotspots”;
- Lloyd Elliott, a crop scientist with USDA-ARS and courtesy professor in OSU’s College of Agricultural Sciences.

Seven scientists from Oregon Health and Sciences University, two from the University of Oregon and one from Portland State University also made the ISI most-cited list. For the complete list of most-cited researchers in the world, see <http://isihighlycited.com>.

Good News on Cancer? Not for Everyone!

by Ellen Goodman, *Boston Globe*, 11/12/2005

THERE WAS a time when only the loony left believed that the loony right favored death over sex. Not anymore.

If you've been engrossed in the culture-war correspondence on the judicial front, maybe you missed the news on the medical front. While the religious right escorted Harriet Miers out and welcomed Samuel Alito in, a group of scientists announced the beginning of the end of a deadly cancer.

In clinical trials, a new vaccine was 100 percent successful in preventing the virus that causes most cervical cancer, the second-leading cancer killer of women in the world. Every year some 10,000 American women are diagnosed with it and nearly 4,000 die. It now appears that with government approval and funding, we're on our way to ending this scourge.

The success story was greeted with cork-popping enthusiasm by doctors. Eliav Barr of the beleaguered Merck, one of the two companies to develop a vaccine, offered a toast: "This is it. This is the Holy Grail." But it appears that social conservatives aren't drinking from the same chalice.

This was the response of Leslie Unruh of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse: "I personally object to vaccinating children against a disease that is 100 percent preventable with proper sexual behavior."

The honchos at the Family Research Council said tepidly that they "welcome medical advances," but with a very frayed welcome mat. FRC's Tony Perkins said he would not inoculate his own daughter: "It sends the wrong message. Our concern is that this vaccine will be marketed to a segment of the population that should be getting a message about abstinence."

Meanwhile, Gene Rudd of the Christian Medical and Dental Associations acknowledges the worries of fellow travelers: "I've talked to some who have said, 'This is going to sabotage our abstinence message.'"

Success or sabotage? Which is it?

At the heart of the debate is the fact that the vaccine works against the human papilloma virus, which is sexually transmitted. Since HPV is transmitted skin to skin, not just through intercourse, condoms aren't wholly effective against it. This has made HPV one of the most useful tools in the kit bag of fear carried by those who like to describe condom use as "Russian roulette." Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma cites HPV in the campaign to get the FDA to pin new labels on condoms to emphasize why and when they don't work. Abstinence-only teachers use HPV in

manuals that say students must be told that choosing sex may be choosing cancer.

This vaccine would have to be given to preteens before they are sexually active. If that gives them the "wrong message" — that we expect they'll have premarital sex — what exactly is the "right message"? That we care more about their virginity than their life? And if you believe a vaccine promotes sex, is fear the only reliable promoter of abstinence?

Fear-mongering as a public health tactic is very popular these days. There is the endless disinformation campaign that links abortion to breast cancer. There are the burgeoning abstinence-or-else classes riddled with misinformation.

This was the response of Leslie Unruh of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse: "I personally object to vaccinating children against a disease that is 100 percent preventable with proper sexual behavior."

US Representative Henry Waxman found that two-thirds of the abstinence-only education programs are teaching the "right message" with the wrong science. Your tax dollars are at work — to the tune of a billion dollars — teaching students that touching another person's genitals "can result in pregnancy," that "there's no such thing as 'safe' or 'safer' sex" and that loneliness, embarrassment, substance abuse, and personal disappointment "can be eliminated by being abstinent until marriage."

The lessons of abstinence-only expand from the classroom to the drugstore. Tuesday the FDA yet again delayed putting Plan B emergency contraception on the shelves. One reason is the right wing's belief that young teenagers will get access to it. These "values conservatives" believe contrary to research that the morning-after pill will change the night-before behavior. Fear of pregnancy is almost as useful in their kit bag as fear of cancer.

What will happen when the government's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices considers adding the cervical cancer vaccine to the list given routinely to children? Will conservatives prevail over doctors and parents who want to add another layer of protection to the vows of abstinence? Medical science is now working on shots for gonorrhea and chlamydia. If we come up with a vaccine for HIV, which do you choose: an abstinence pledge or a cure?

I always thought it was a bit much to talk about a "Taliban wing" of the Republican Party. After all, the real Taliban stoned women to death if they had sex out of wedlock. What sentence would our Taliban choose? Cancer?

Success or sabotage? Watch how easy it can be to sabotage a success story.

Shake and Bake

Editorial, *New York Times*, 11/29/2005

Let us pause and count the ways the conduct of the war in Iraq has damaged America's image and needlessly endangered the lives of those in the military. First, multilateralism was tossed aside. Then the post-invasion fiasco muddied the reputation of military planners and caused unnecessary casualties. The W.M.D. myth undermined the credibility of United States intelligence and President Bush himself, and the abuse of prisoners stole America's moral high ground.

Now the use of a ghastly weapon called white phosphorus has raised questions about how careful the military has been in avoiding civilian casualties. It has also further tarnished America's credibility on international treaties and the rules of warfare.

White phosphorus, which dates to World War II, should have been banned generations ago. Packed into an artillery shell, it explodes over a battlefield in a white glare that can illuminate an enemy's positions. It also rains balls of flaming chemicals, which cling to anything they touch and burn until their oxygen supply is cut off. They can burn for hours inside a human body.

The United States restricted the use of incendiaries like white phosphorus after Vietnam, and in 1983, an international convention banned its use against civilians. In fact, one of the many crimes ascribed to Saddam Hussein was dropping white phosphorus on Kurdish rebels and civilians in 1991.

But white phosphorus has made an ugly comeback. Italian television reported that American forces used it in Falluja last year against insurgents. At first, the Pentagon said the chemical had been used only to illuminate the battlefield, but had to backpedal when it turned out that one of the Army's own publications talked about using white phosphorus against insurgent positions, a practice well



Above: A delicious aid to cooking.
Below: Iraqi victims of white phosphorous.



known enough to have one of those unsettling military nicknames: "shake and bake."

The Pentagon says white phosphorus was never aimed at civilians, but there are lingering reports of civilian victims. The military can't say whether the reports are true and does not intend to investigate them, a decision we find difficult to comprehend. Pentagon spokesmen say the Army took "extraordinary measures" to reduce civilian casualties, but they cannot say what those measures were.

They also say that using white phosphorus against military targets is legal. That's true, but the 1983 convention bans its use against "civilians or civilian objects," which would make white phosphorus attacks in urban settings like Falluja highly inappropriate at best. The United States signed that convention, but the portion dealing with incendiary weapons has been awaiting ratification in the Senate.

These are technicalities, in any case. Iraq, where winning over wary civilians is as critical as defeating armed insurgents, is no place to be using a weapon like this. More broadly, American demands for counterproliferation efforts and international arms control ring a bit hollow when the United States refuses to give up white phosphorus, not to mention cluster bombs and land mines.

The United States should be leading the world, not dragging its feet, when it comes to this sort of issue — because it's right and because all of us, including Americans, are safer in a world in which certain forms of conduct are regarded as too inhumane even for war. That is why torture should be banned in American prisons. And it is why the United States should stop using white phosphorus.

This Isn't the Real America

by Jimmy Carter, *Los Angeles Times* 11/14/2005

In recent years, I have become increasingly concerned by a host of radical government policies that now threaten many basic principles espoused by all previous administrations, Democratic and Republican.

These include the rudimentary American commitment to peace, economic and social justice, civil liberties, our environment and human rights.

Also endangered are our historic commitments to providing citizens with truthful information, treating dissenting voices and beliefs with respect, state and local autonomy and fiscal responsibility.

At the same time, our political leaders have declared independence from the restraints of international organizations and have disavowed long-standing global agreements - including agreements on nuclear arms, control of biological weapons and the international system of justice.

Instead of our tradition of espousing peace as a national priority unless our security is directly threatened, we have proclaimed a policy of "preemptive war," an unabridged right to attack other nations unilaterally to change an unsavory regime or for other purposes. When there are serious differences with other nations, we brand them as international pariahs and refuse to permit direct discussions to resolve disputes.

Regardless of the costs, there are determined efforts by top US leaders to exert American imperial dominance throughout the world.

These revolutionary policies have been orchestrated by those who believe that our nation's tremendous power and influence should not be internationally constrained. Even with our troops involved in combat and America facing the threat of additional terrorist attacks, our declaration of "You are either with us or against us!" has replaced the forming of alliances based on a clear comprehension of mutual interests, including the threat of terrorism.

Another disturbing realization is that, unlike during other times of national crisis, the burden of conflict is now concentrated exclusively on the few heroic men and women sent back repeatedly to fight in the quagmire of Iraq. The rest of our nation has not been asked to make any sacrifice, and every effort has been made to conceal or minimize public awareness of casualties.

Instead of cherishing our role as the great champion of human rights, we now find civil liberties and personal privacy grossly violated under some extreme provisions of the Patriot Act.

Of even greater concern is that the US has repudiated the Geneva accords and espoused the use of torture in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay, and secretly through proxy regimes elsewhere with the so-called extraordinary rendition program. It is embarrassing to see the president and vice president insisting that the CIA should be free to perpetrate "cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment" on people in US custody.

Instead of reducing America's reliance on nuclear weapons and their further proliferation, we have insisted on our right (and that of others) to retain our arsenals, expand them, and therefore abrogate or derogate almost all nuclear arms control agreements negotiated during the last 50 years. We have now become a prime culprit in global nuclear proliferation. America also has abandoned the prohibition of "first use" of nuclear weapons against nonnuclear nations, and is contemplating the previously condemned deployment of weapons in space.

Protection of the environment has fallen by the wayside because of government subservience to political pressure from the oil industry and other powerful lobbying groups. The last five years have brought continued lowering of pollution standards at home and almost universal condemnation of our nation's global environmental policies.

Our government has abandoned fiscal responsibility by unprecedented favors to the rich, while neglecting America's working families. Members of Congress have increased their own pay by \$30,000 per year since freezing the minimum wage at \$5.15 per hour (the lowest among industrialized nations).

I am extremely concerned by a fundamentalist shift in many houses of worship and in government, as church and state have become increasingly intertwined in ways previously thought unimaginable.

As the world's only superpower, America should be seen as the unswerving champion of peace, freedom and human rights. Our country should be the focal point around which other nations can gather to combat threats to international security and to enhance the quality of our common environment. We should be in the forefront of providing human assistance to people in need.

It is time for the deep and disturbing political divisions within our country to be substantially healed, with Americans united in a common commitment to revive and nourish the historic political and moral values that we have espoused during the last 230 years.

Jimmy Carter was the 39th president of the United States. His newest book is *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis*, published this month by Simon & Schuster.

Coloradan Faces Jail for Refusal to Show ID

by Valerie Richardson, *The Washington Times*, 11/30/2005

DENVER — Deborah Davis' refusal to show her identification to federal police at a bus stop has turned her into a cause celebre among privacy-rights advocates.

Mrs. Davis, a 50-year-old Arvada, Colo., grandmother of five, was handcuffed, placed in a police car and ticketed for two petty offenses by Federal Protective Services officers who were checking passengers' identification Sept. 26 aboard a Regional Transportation District (RTD) bus at the Federal Center stop.

She faces a maximum of 60 days in jail. First, however, federal prosecutors must decide whether to pursue the charges before her hearing Dec. 9 in U.S. District Court here.

"We have a couple of decisions to make — whether to proceed with the charges, whether to proceed with different charges or whether to drop the charges," said Jeff Dorschner, spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Denver.

He said prosecutors would decide how to proceed early next week.

The American Civil Liberties Union has agreed to take her case if it goes to court, and she also is represented by lawyers from the same Denver law firm that defended NBA star Kobe Bryant last year on sexual-assault charges.

Not bad for a woman who's looking for work after losing her job last month as a result of the confrontation with federal police.

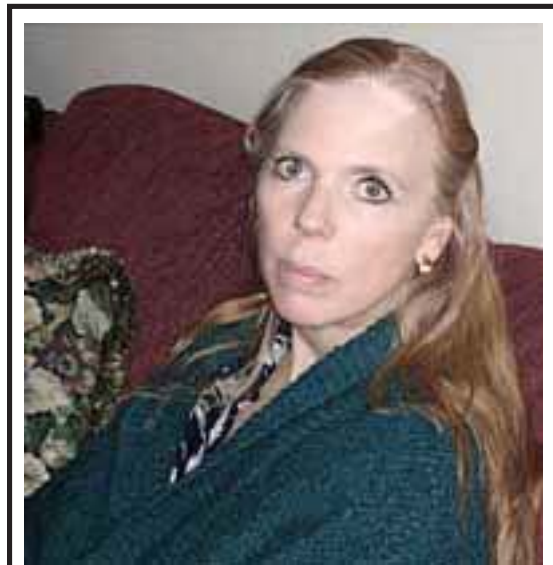
It started when Mrs. Davis began commuting to her new job in Lakewood aboard an RTD bus that made a regular stop at the Denver Federal Center. Each time, federal police boarded the bus and asked passengers for ID.

Mrs. Davis produced her driver's license once, but it rankled her. The next few times, she begged off, saying she had left her ID at home. Finally, an officer told Mrs. Davis that she would need to show proof of her identity the following Monday.

Several things bothered her about the ID checks. She wasn't entering a federal building or even leaving the bus. The officers barely glanced at the passengers' ID cards and

didn't check them against a master list. The whole exercise struck her as "just Big Brother watching you," she said.

"I spent the weekend trying to decide if the Constitution had changed since I was in eighth grade, and I decided it hadn't," said Mrs. Davis, who has a son serving in the Army in Iraq.



Deborah Davis, reluctant privacy-rights activist.

The following Monday, after the officers boarded the bus, one of them "asked me if I had my ID with me, and I said, 'Yes,'" she recalled. "Then he asked me if he could see it and I said, 'No.'"

Mrs. Davis had been talking on her cell phone when the officers approached. "One of them grabbed my cell phone and threw it to the back of the bus," she said.

"The next thing I knew, two big policemen jerked me out of my seat, handcuffed me and threw me in the back of the police car," Mrs. Davis said. "They wrote the tickets and threw them on the ground."

Carl Rusnok, spokesman for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which oversees the Federal Protective Service, said the

practice of checking IDs at the bus stop was instituted after the 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building.

The cursory bus check is part of a "multilayered security system," he said. "There are 9,000 federal facilities in the country, and virtually every one of them requires an ID check."

Bill Scannell, a privacy-rights activist who started a Web site last week about the incident (<http://www.papersplease.org/davis/>) said it has received more than 2 million hits since Thanksgiving. Some backers have called Mrs. Davis the "Rosa Parks of the Patriot Act generation," he said.

[Editor's Note: On December 7th, the U.S. attorney's office in Denver decided not to prosecute, in part because of the publicity generated by this case.]

Impersonating the Lord

Politicians spout off with their interpretations on God's will

by Molly Ivins, *Working for Change*, 12/01/2005

AUSTIN, Texas — The Lord Impersonator is back again. This fella reappears every couple of years and causes no end of trouble. The jokester goes around persuading feeble-minded persons he is the Lord Almighty and that they are to do or say some perfectly idiotic thing under his instructions.

One of the worst cases we've had in Texas was the time the Lord Impersonator convinced 20 people in Floydada to git nekked, get into a GTO and drive to Vinton, La., where they ran into a tree. Seein' 20 nekkid people, including five children, come out of a GTO startled the Vinton cops. The nekkid citizens all said God told them to do it.

Quite a few people have been mishearing the Lord lately. The Rev. Pat Robertson thinks the Lord told the people of Dover, Pa., they shouldn't ask for His help anymore because they elected a school board Robertson doesn't like. And Rep. Richard Baker of Louisiana said right after Hurricane Katrina that "we finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did it."

I kind of doubt Katrina was designed by the Lord as a form of urban renewal. I think it's a big mistake for us to go around putting our own puny interpretations on stuff that happens and then claiming the Lord meant thus-and-such by it. It is my humble opinion that some folks should do a lot more listening to God and a lot less talking for Him.

In that category, I put a whole passel of politicians — including that God-fearing professional patriot Rep. "Duke" Cunningham of San Diego. Cunningham resigned his office after pleading guilty to having accepted \$2.4 million in bribes from defense contractors. "Duke's" big cause in Congress was to get a constitutional amendment to ban flag-burning. Which do you think is more unpatriotic: burning a flag to indicate desperate dissent against American policy or getting elected to Congress and selling out for a Rolls Royce and some antique commodes?

Rep. Tom DeLay, who is under indictment in Texas, is another fine parser of the Lord's intent. According to Mother Jones magazine, DeLay appeared at a prayer breakfast just after the tsunami that killed 240,000 people. "DeLay read a passage from Matthew about a nonbeliever: '... a fool who built his house on sand: the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the

house, and it collapsed and was completely ruined.' Then, without comment, he righteously sat down."

Some Christians seem to me inclined to lose track of love, compassion and mercy. I don't think I have any special brief to go around judging them, but when the stink of hypocrisy becomes so foul in the nostrils it makes you start to puke it becomes necessary to point out there is one more good reason to observe the separation of church and state: If God keeps hanging out with politicians, it's gonna hurt his reputation.

I've always hoped that people like Tom DeLay and Duke Cunningham (and Reps. Bob Ney, Richard Pombo, Dana Rohrabacher, John Doolittle and William J. Jefferson (a D) and Sens. Bill Frist and Conrad Burns) were really stonewall cynics at heart, secretly sneering at the rubes who buy into their holier-than-thou posturing. But I'm afraid they're not.

I'm afraid one actually has to allow for the denial and self-delusion that make it possible for people to be both self-righteous and sleazy at the same time. We are all capable of fooling ourselves in a grand variety of ways.

Another reason why religion and policy make such a bad mix is that religion brings the dread element of certitude into what needs to be a

constant process of questioning. In the New Yorker, Seymour Hersh quotes a former Defense Department official who served in Bush's first term: "The president is more determined than ever to stay the course. He doesn't feel any pain. Bush is a believer in the adage, 'People may suffer and die, but the Church advances.'"

Look, certitude is the enemy of clear thinking. "Never be absolutely sure" is a useful motto, and sailing through our current policies in Iraq without a shadow of a doubt is both foolish and dangerous. I would be far more reassured if I thought the president were second-guessing every move we make than I am to find out he hasn't a shadow of a doubt. For one thing, it shuts him off from considering alternatives, and boy do we need some alternatives.

So here we sit, watching a great, stinking skein of corruption being fished to the surface of Washington, while the town is simultaneously filled with a great babble about God, prayer and morality. Corruption trails head off in all directions — lobbyists, wives, jobs, perverting intelligence, outing agents for petty revenge — all this and a Prayer Breakfast every day.

I've always hoped that people like Tom DeLay and Duke Cunningham [...] were really stonewall cynics at heart, secretly sneering at the rubes who buy into their holier-than-thou posturing. But I'm afraid they're not.

U.S. Losing Friends Over Torture

by Edward M. Gomez, *SF Gate*, 11/15/2005

The seemingly unstoppable pattern of lies and lying about their lies that has become the hallmark of George W. Bush and his administration's top officials, spokespersons and supporters in the media reached something of a bizarre apotheosis last week.

As news analyst Michael Gawenda, writing in the Australian daily the Age, noted incredulously, "When the president of the United States, under repeated questioning and under pressure, has to declare, as he did [during a stop in Panama], 'We do not torture,' you know that even his allies in Congress no longer believe him."

Bush's Panama performance was "a sad spectacle," the Economist snapped. A stinging editorial "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People" in the respected British newsmagazine, which had endorsed candidate Bush in the 2000 election, criticized the way Bush administration officials have handled the torture controversy. Their approach, the publication scoffed, "beggars belief."

Not lost on many foreign observers is the unmistakable — now well-documented — role Vice President Dick Cheney has played in formulating and tirelessly advocating for the Bush administration's torture policy, such as it is. In Jamaica, newspaper columnist Wayne Brown wrote: "I don't know how else to put this: Is ... Dick Cheney mad? And has his titular boss, G.W. Bush, started all unawares down the road to impeachment? It may be too soon to answer those questions, but not to begin asking them." (Jamaica Observer)

Citing the American prison camp at Guantánamo, Cuba, where the U.S. military has long maintained a base, a commentator in Saudi Arabia's Arab News noted: "By all accounts, appalling torture and ill treatment were committed against ... detainees [at Guantánamo], who were denied due process, prisoner-of-war status and the protection of the Geneva Conventions. Reportedly, dozens of suicide attempts and massive 'self-harm action' were thwarted by the military when detainees tried to hang themselves with bedding or clothing, with one attempt resulting in permanent brain damage."

Similarly, as the Economist pointed out, the Washington Post's [recent] revelation "that the C.I.A. maintains a string of jails [in Eastern European countries], where it can keep people indefinitely and in secret, only heightens the suspicion that ... Cheney wants the agency to keep using 'enhanced interrogation techniques.' These include 'waterboarding,' or making a man think he is drowning."

So what's the fuss?

As Republican Senator John McCain's brother Joe McCain told the Australian in an interview related to his soldier-turned-politician sibling's experience as a prisoner-of-war decades ago in Vietnam: "To be fighting from supposedly the higher ground, and yet to have allowed this kind of stuff that goes on in Abu Ghraib [the Baghdad prison that was the focus of a prisoner-abuse scandal last year] — it destroys the fact we're fighting for the better cause. It's just awful."

Like other foreign media, the Australian has been following Senator John McCain's effort to pass legislation to ban torturing by U.S. personnel. The paper interviewed the senator's brother in an effort to learn more, in a personal way, about the motivation behind his brother's push for anti-torture legislation.

Joe McCain said: "The whole point of the Geneva Conventions is, when you get pissed off and get vengeful and you get angry, that's when you have to show the restraint of taking care of a man that you have captured in combat, who can no longer protect himself."

Revelations of torture carried out by U.S. personnel overseas "are all the more shocking because the United States, given its unrivaled status as a big power, sets the tone for what is acceptable behavior for other governments worldwide," Arab News' commentator observed. "When it is dismissive of the rule of law and the sanctity of human rights ... it grants license to other governments to commit similar abuses, like those in Israel and Uzbekistan, Syria and Nepal."

The Economist admonished: "[T]he loss to America in terms of public opinion [is] clear and horrifically large. Abu Ghraib was a gift to the insurgency in Iraq; Guantánamo Bay and its dubious military commissions ... have acted as recruiting sergeants for al-Qaeda around the world. In the cold war, America championed the Helsinki human-rights accords. This time, the world's most magnificent democracy is struggling against vile terrorists who thought nothing of slaughtering thousands of innocent civilians — and yet the [Bush] administration has somehow contrived to turn America's own human-rights record into a subject of legitimate debate."

As the Australian Age's Gawenda puts it, that debate over the Bush administration's tolerance of — or apparent enthusiasm for — torture and the fact that such activity by Americans is being carried out at all is "about chickens coming home to roost. It's about the growing realization in America that the systematic abuse and torture of prisoners and detainees held by the U.S. around the world is a direct consequence of administration policies and directives."

(continued on next page)

For Wayne Brown, Bush's "we do not torture" utterance was "a lie so stark, so beyond-brazen, that one cringed to watch him say it."

Secrecy Gag Prompted by Fear of New Blair-Bush Revelations

by Richard Norton-Taylor and Michael White Thursday,
The Guardian, 11/24/2005

Fears that fresh revelations about disputes between Tony Blair and George Bush on the Iraq conflict could damage Downing Street's intimate relationship with the White House prompted this week's unprecedented threat by the attorney general to use the Official Secrets Act against national newspapers.

Senior MPs, Whitehall officials and lawyers were agreed yesterday that Lord Goldsmith had "read the riot act" to the media because of political embarrassment caused by a sensitive leak of face-to-face exchanges between the prime minister and the US president in the White House in April 2004. He acted after the Daily Mirror said a memo recorded a threat by Mr Bush to take "military action" against the Arabic TV station al-Jazeera. Mr Blair replied that that would cause a big problem, reported the Mirror. David Keogh, a former Cabinet Office official, has been charged under the secrets act with sending the memo on the Blair-Bush conversation to Leo O'Connor, researcher to the former Labour MP Tony Clarke. Mr Keogh and Mr O'Connor will appear before Bow Street magistrates next week.

The meeting between Mr Bush and Mr Blair took place at a time when Whitehall officials, intelligence officers, and British military commanders were expressing outrage at the scale of the US assault on the Iraqi city of Falluja, in which up to 1,000 civilians are feared to have died. Pictures of the attack shown on al-Jazeera had infuriated US generals. The government was also arguing with Washington about the number of extra British troops to be sent to Iraq at a time when it was feared they would be endangered by what a separately leaked Foreign Office memo called "heavy-handed" US military tactics.

There were UK anxieties that US bombing in civilian areas in Falluja would unite Sunnis and Shias against British forces. The criticism came not only from anti-war MPs, but from Mr Blair's most senior military, diplomatic, and intelligence advisers. When Mr Blair met Mr Bush in Washington, military advisers were urging the prime minister to send extra forces only on British terms. General Sir Mike Jackson, the head of the army, said while British troops had to fight with the Americans, "that does not mean we must be able to fight as the Americans".

He acted after the Daily Mirror said a memo recorded a threat by Mr Bush to take "military action" against the Arabic TV station al-Jazeera. Mr Blair replied that that would cause a big problem, reported the Mirror.

Andrew Nicol QC, a media law expert, said he was unaware of any case going to trial where a newspaper or journalist had been prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act. He said Lord Goldsmith appeared to be trying to "put down a marker" to prevent further leaks or publication of further disclosures from the document already allegedly leaked.

Last night the former defence minister Peter Kilfoyle tabled a Commons motion saying Mr Blair should publish the record of his discussion with Mr Bush.

Downing Street stressed that the decision to take action was "entirely up to the attorney general" and was intended to "draw a line in the sand" on further leaks.

U.S. Losing Friends... (continued from page 10)

For Wayne Brown, Bush's "we do not torture" utterance was "a lie so stark, so beyond-brazen, that one cringed to watch him say it." Ultimately, the Jamaican columnist also lamented "[t]he belated explosion of American shame over ... Bush's torture policy [and] the excrescence for which his presidency will be remembered, along with the unprovoked attack which destroyed a whole country (and has so far gotten 15,000 American boys killed or crippled)." (Jamaica Observer)

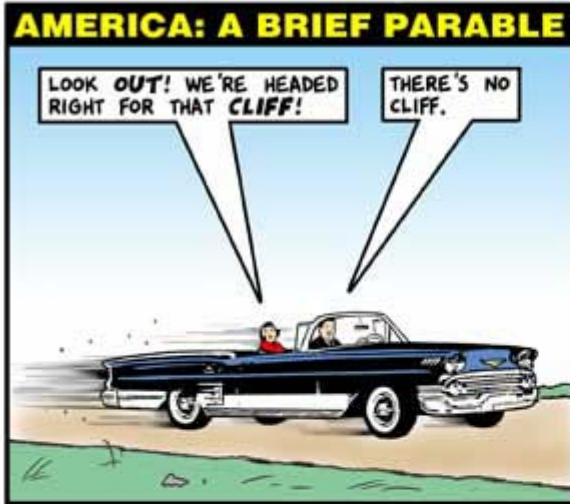
In an increasingly violent world, it may be that the price of Bush's torture policy is merely waiting to be extracted. That payback will come if or when any of America's growing number of enemies ever captures any U.S. soldiers or other personnel and mistreats them. If or when that day comes, Washington will have no good argument to make about the illegality of the horror.

There is no "Complete Idiots Guide to Creationism", but perhaps one is not needed.

— Andrei Codrescu, on NPR,
Aug. 25, 1999, monologue

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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