



# 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:

I found myself watching “Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street” a few days ago. Well, not quite “watching” — but somehow as I was flipping channels on the TV next to my computer, I wound up leaving it on THIS channel as I worked on my “computer stuff”. (Why they were playing it in March, I’ll never know.)

At first, I thought it was the original movie... until I noticed much later that it was all in color, and I recognized some of the actors. It was actually a 1994 remake, and it was surprisingly good!

But as I let myself get drawn into it, I started engaging in the usual eye-rolling. You know what I mean. The story is a sweet little fairy tale that makes you all warm and fuzzy inside, until you shake yourself loose from the spell and realize that you’re watching a bunch of adults (the “good guys”), patting themselves on the back for saying that they believe in Santa Claus.

“Oh, I believe in Santa Claus!”... “So do I!”... “I believe in Santa Claus!”... “I believe” ... “I believe”...

At which point, you realize once again that this is the whole point of the story — to make people feel good about believing whatever they like and thumbing their nose at reason. Rationality, in this story, is represented by the utterly unlikeable prosecuting attorney, whose sole motivation is to lock up the poor innocent old man whose only crime is that he thinks he’s Santa Claus. Everyone else “believes” in the magic, oh yes they do, so wonderful happy endings await them all.

One thing I found particularly telling, was that they changed the ending in this new version of the movie. In the original 1947 version, the fact that the post office is delivering all of Santa Claus’s mail to the defendant is apparently sufficient cause for the judge to rule in his favor.

In the 1994 version, a little girl gives the judge a Christmas card, containing a \$1 bill with the words “In God We Trust” circled in red. This leads the judge to realize that the government already endorses belief in magical beings without a shred of proof (so help me, that’s his argument), and therefore, it’s OK for the government to recognize that the defendant is Santa Claus, and therefore not insane.

We Humanists often say that believing in God is as silly as believing in Santa Claus. This new version of “34<sup>th</sup> Street” now claims that believing in Santa Claus is as reasonable as believing in God.

I’ll bet you’re rolling YOUR eyes now, too!

Unfortunately, we live in an era where “34<sup>th</sup> Street” logic is alive and well — where clapping your hands loudly and proclaiming “I believe!” is actually considered superior to the cold reason of those old fuddy-duddies who want to teach evolution in the classroom, or who want actual proof of wrongdoing before unilaterally invading other countries...

It sure would be nice if reality were as scripted as sappy Christmas movies like this one. Because when “34<sup>th</sup> Street” happens in real life, the lunatic that the judge sets free usually goes off and kills somebody...

*Reed Byers*

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

## CSS Meetings and Events

### Calendar:

Saturday, Mar 18<sup>th</sup> 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck  
Saturday, Apr 15<sup>th</sup> 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting  
Saturday, May 20<sup>th</sup> 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

## Infant Euthanasia

Euthanasia is the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals (as persons or domestic animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy. Euthanasia for seriously-defective newborn babies is a contentious ethical issue that has come into the news again. The Dutch government is setting up a committee to regulate the practice, effectively making the Netherlands, where euthanasia for those over 12 is legal, the first country to formally allow infant euthanasia as well.

*Free Inquiry* magazine published an op-ed on this issue in its Dec. 2003/Jan.2004 issue (V24N1P17). It was entitled, "On Advocating Infant Euthanasia," by Barbara Smoker. (Ms. Smoker is a former president of Britain's *National Secular Society*.) She wrote:

Most secular humanists advocate the legalization of voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide for those with incurable medical conditions that are, to themselves, intolerable. More contentious is euthanasia for seriously defective newborn babies — because it cannot, of course, be voluntary....I feel strongly that it is cruel, and therefore immoral, to preserve a baby's life when there are such severe handicaps that chances of happiness are manifestly low. For life can, of course, be far worse than death.

In a sense, the euthanasia of a newborn baby is a very late abortion — and, when severe defects have unfortunately not been diagnosed until the baby is actually born, why should the child be forced to endure an intolerable life until he or she is old enough to choose suicide or until natural death finally brings relief? The situation immediately after birth is not the same as that of an older child becoming severely disabled, perhaps through illness or accident: whereas a newborn baby has very limited awareness, no idea of any future, and no real stake in life, an older child has become a real little person, with personal relationships, a sense of his or her own identity, and an idea of purpose—the very things that give human beings human rights and status.

Parents or doctors, or other responsible people, naturally have to make every decision on behalf of a

newborn baby; but it is often said that a decision for something as crucial as euthanasia should be postponed until the child is old enough to decide for himself or herself. I disagree: the decision to postpone euthanasia is itself a crucial decision on behalf of the child. In fact, it is a decision to condemn him or her to, say, eighteen years of extreme suffering.

In practice, it is usual in Britain (and probably in the United States and other civilized countries) for doctors to instruct nurses to starve seriously defective neonates to death — giving them only water, not milk. This is certainly better than keeping them alive — but not as merciful as a quick, lethal injection, if only the law allowed it. Starvation may take about ten days, and though the babies themselves, being sedated, are unlikely to suffer much, their parents and nurses certainly do. And what of the duty to society? In most cases the parents of a neonate who dies could produce a perfectly healthy baby in a year's time, and, since we now have a social duty to limit our families, it is only sensible to limit them to those with a reasonable prospect of a normal human life.

The proposals for infant euthanasia are for babies born with *extreme*, intolerable, and incurable illnesses: for

instance, those born with no brains or with severe spina bifida (a congenital cleft of the spinal column with hernial protrusion of the meninges and sometimes the spinal cord). The BBC reported on December 14, 2004, that the proposed Dutch committee of experts would define the specific criteria that would apply in their country. Doctors there say that pediatricians worldwide are in favor of ending the lives of newborns in certain circumstances. In fact, this often does take place, quietly. But specifically legalizing the procedure and defining the circumstances when it can take place will, in my view, actually prevent abuse, reduce suffering, and legally protect those involved. In France, 74% believe infant euthanasia should be acceptable; in the Netherlands, 72%.

*The Guardian* reported on December 21, 2004, that "Once a month on average somewhere in the Nether-

lands a doctor injects a newborn baby with a lethal cocktail of morphine and sedatives. Within a few hours, the baby is dead. The agonising decision is taken,

**The agonising decision is taken, invariably at the pleading of distraught parents, because the infant is born into excruciating pain with life-threatening illness or disability and with little or no prospect of recovery or successful treatment. Routinely, the killings are carried out in secret. The reasons for the deaths are covered up. The death certificates the doctors are obliged to fill out are falsified in order to render the doctors immune to prosecution for murder.**

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The article quotes Dr. Eduard Verhagen, head of pediatrics at Groningen hospital: "It's time to be honest about the unbearable suffering endured by newborns with no hope of a future. All over the world doctors end lives discreetly out of compassion without any kind of regulation. This is a subject that nobody likes to acknowledge, let alone discuss."

The usual objection has been raised: that allowing infant euthanasia in specific circumstances is a "slippery slope" that will lead to legalization of euthanasia in ever more cases. But Dr. Louis Kollée, head of pediatrics at the Radboud University Medical Centre in the eastern Dutch town of Nijmegen, contends the opposite: "If the practice is not controlled and regulated, then we will end up on the slippery slope. We don't want this type of decision to become easy. We don't want to increase the number of patients whose lives are terminated. It must be exceptional. It shouldn't be done. But sometimes a doctor can't do anything else."

So should infants with severe disorders be kept alive even when their pain cannot be reduced? *ABC News* noted on March 10, 2005 ("Is Euthanasia for Babies OK?"), that "Decisions to end life-prolonging treatment, or to not begin that treatment, are made regularly throughout Europe and the United States. In many cases, families wrestle with the issue by consulting with doctors and clergy. Authorities are not alerted and there is no media spotlight. But situations like the Terri Schiavo case in Florida — where the parents and husband of a severely brain-damaged woman have taken their fight over whether to withdraw her feeding tube to court — reveal that euthanasia is never an easy issue to discuss, especially when it involves those who cannot speak for themselves. The question of infant euthanasia is 'part of appropriate pediatric medicine,' said Glenn McGee, director of the Center for Medical Ethics Research at Albany Medical Center in New York state and editor of *The American Journal of Bioethics*. 'These babies are not being killed — they are being appropriately cared for,' McGee said. 'Our society has gone off the edge in terms of protecting the vulnerable by forcing them to suffer.'"

Dr. Verhagen has tried to end the "unbearable and incurable suffering" of infants born with conditions so horrific, so excruciatingly painful, that their doctors and even their parents think they would be better off dead. Of

course, the Vatican has condemned infant euthanasia, and he has received hate mail, mostly from Americans. But why formalize (legalize) a procedure that takes place anyway? *The New York Times*, in The Saturday Profile: "A Crusade Born of a Suffering Infant's Cry" (March 19, 2005), reported:

EUTHANASIA is legal in the Netherlands except for children under 12. But Dr. Verhagen has documented 22 cases of reported infant euthanasia in the last seven years, including the four in his own hospital, and there may be many more — 15 to 20 a year, by one estimate — that no one knows about. Based on past court decisions on infant euthanasia, in which doctors were acquitted of murder charges, Dutch prosecutors have chosen in recent years not to pursue similar cases. Dr. Verhagen, 42, wants a team of physicians, together with the baby's parents, to decide openly in very rare, extraordinary cases whether or not to end a child's life. Better that, he said, than a lone pediatrician behind a hospital curtain armed with too much pain reliever. "If you do this, the most important decision man can take, you must do it in a spotlight, you must do it with the curtains opened instead of closed, because it's extremely difficult and you can't be wrong," he said.

A father of three who spent years tending to sick children in underdeveloped countries, Dr. Verhagen became a pediatrician with the sole intention of saving lives, not ending them. And that's exactly what he did until Sanne was born on his ward four years ago with a severe form of Hallopeau-Siemens syndrome, a rare skin condition. Her skin would literally come off if anyone touched her, leaving painful scar tissue in its place. The top layers of mucous membranes inside her mouth and esophagus fell away any time she was fed, which was done by tube. In the most optimistic situation, she would live until her 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> birthday and then die of skin cancer, Dr. Verhagen said.

Sitting in his office, a few of his own children's paintings brightening an otherwise barren scene, Dr. Verhagen tried to evoke the kind of pain he says Sanne was in. He clenched his fists and mimicked the way she balled her tiny hands. Her cry was not that of a normal, healthy baby but the shriek of an extraordinarily sick one. And her vital signs — heartbeat, blood pressure and respiration — reflected those of a child in extreme stress, he said. Pain relievers seemed to be useless. Making matters worse, Dr. Verhagen and his colleagues had to bandage Sanne's scar tissue knowing they were contributing to a vicious circle: every time they replaced the bandages, a little more skin fell off. Soon, Dr. Verhagen said, Sanne resembled a mummy.

(continued on page 10)

# “Clarence Darrow, The Search for Justice” Play Commentary

by Robert Neary, CSS Member, 2/27/2006

On the evening of Saturday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, I attended a one-man live performance of “Clarence Darrow, The Search for Justice” starring Gary L. Anderson. Produced in collaboration with the American Legends Theatre Works, Mr. Anderson is touring the country performing his portrayal of the eloquent and formidable Clarence Darrow, famous for his defense of John Scopes who was put on trial in Tennessee for teaching Evolution in public school.

Although well known for his legal prowess against William Jennings Bryan in the famous “Scopes Monkey Trial”, Clarence Darrow’s greatest contributions were probably more significant among the many other court cases he argued which pitted the very foundations of our constitutional freedoms against a government too willing to set aside those freedoms for the behalf of rich and powerful corporate interests. Mr. Anderson’s performance was powerful, moving and humorous. Much like Hal Holbrook’s well-known portrayal of “Mark Twain Tonight”, Mr. Anderson donned the identity of Clarence Darrow for his three-hour performance at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship hall in Corvallis.

Gary L. Anderson is a member of the Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Radio and Television Artists. He has acted in numerous musicals, comedies, dramas, motion pictures and television. Space does not permit listing here Mr. Anderson’s professional resume of performances. I will only say that Mr. Anderson was wonderfully successful in transporting the audience back into the time of 1923 where, for three hours, we believed that we were in the presence of the great lawyer and orator, Clarence Darrow.

Clarence Darrow, like William Jennings Bryan and other public figures were the “rock stars” of their time. Newspapers were the media of the day and radio was in its infancy. In fact, the Scopes Monkey Trial was the first court trial in history to be broadcast on radio. In their day, men such as Clarence Darrow were highly sought after and booked for speaking engagements around the country. People would line up for hours to pay to hear these learned men speak. Mr. Darrow had just come out with his autobiography and his publicist, to promote the

sale of his books, had put on tonight’s lecture. The stage thus set, Mr. Darrow began his lecture.

Of course everyone wanted to hear about the Monkey Trial. It is not widely recalled that the trial was instigated by the action of the ACLU at the time. Throughout the southern United States, State legislatures, at the urging of evangelical Christians, were placing laws on the books making it against the law to teach Darwin’s Theory of Evolution in public school. Because these laws struck at the heart of the separation of church and state, the ACLU was eagerly searching for someone to break the law so the issue could be brought to argument before the court.

**Interestingly, Darrow was not the ACLU’s first choice for the defense. However, Mr. Scopes agreed to go through with the trial only on the condition that he be represented by Clarence Darrow. A circus mentality ensued over the small town, and for the first time via the magic of radio, the world heard the first shots fired in what we today refer to as the “Culture Wars”.**

In actuality, the city fathers of Dayton, Tennessee were also very eager to have the trial held in their town. It was expected that the publicity would attract attention to the town and bolster the local economy. Hundreds of newspaper reporters from around the world descended upon Dayton, and with them demonstrators supporting both the evangelical and secular humanist points of view. A whole economy bloomed around the venue for this “Case of the Century”. Darrow reminded the audience that the media had already anointed five of his criminal cases with the moniker “Case of the Century”.

Unfortunately there was a bit of difficulty actually finding a teacher willing to subject himself to being indicted and put on trial for the crime of teaching Evolution. The actual science teacher in the Dayton High School refused to participate, fearing the destruction of his career. John Scopes was actually the school’s football coach. However, after some prodding he reluctantly agreed to admit that he had filled in as a substitute teacher and might have, occasionally, taught Evolution in class. Interestingly, Darrow was not the ACLU’s first choice for the defense. However, Mr. Scopes agreed to go through with the trial only on the condition that he be represented by Clarence Darrow. A circus mentality ensued over the small town, and for the first time via the magic of radio, the world heard the first shots fired in what we today refer to as the “Culture Wars”.

But leaving the trial story briefly (as Mr. Darrow said himself, he wanted to be sure we came back after intermission) Clarence Darrow told a little about his

formative years as a boy in Ohio, How his father was a learned and educated man and how young Clarence always had books at his disposal. History, philosophy, and yes, even the Holy Bible. It was during this time of learning and self-exploration that he became an Agnostic. In a humorous anecdote he relates how he tried labor on a hot summer day and decided that he didn't want to work, so he became a lawyer.

Darrow married his high school sweetheart and set up law practice in Chicago. He worked briefly for the City of Chicago in cases brought against the city by the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. The railroad, recognizing the young lawyer's prowess, hired him away from the City of Chicago to work for them. And soon the young lawyer found he was bringing in a lucrative income as corporate counsel to the railroad to support his growing family.

Then in 1894 the American Railway Union, headed by labor leader Eugene V. Debs, called a strike against the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, the "Pullman Strike" as it is known to history. President Grover Cleveland sided with the corporate moguls over the working people and, as had happened many times before and since, sent Federal troops in to break the strike. Eugene V. Debs was thrown into jail and indicted for "conspiracy". Debs asked Darrow to defend him in court. Faced with this moral dilemma Darrow resigned from the railroad to defend Debs and the union.

Darrow explained how "conspiracy" had become a tool of the government to silence free expression and suppress any opposition to corporate power. Turning to the audience now as if we were sitting jurors, Darrow explained how one boy could steal a dime from the corner grocery and be charged with no more than petty theft. But if TWO boys simply talked about stealing the dime, then a conspiracy has occurred for which the accused could face the penitentiary even though no theft, no crime had occurred. Debs, facing horrendous charges, was convicted only of obstructing the mail and sentenced to six months in prison.

Darrow saw himself as the voice of the poor, the oppressed, and as the upholder of the constitutional rights promised to all Americans. In choosing to defend many unpopular clients, unions, socialists, and working people he made bitter enemies. Some called him a "traitor". In defending militant unionists and arsonists he was accused of defending "terrorists". "History repeats itself", said Mr. Darrow, "That is the problem with history".

After intermission, the audience found itself sitting in the hot and muggy July afternoon, in the courthouse in Dayton, Tennessee. Presiding over the case, Judge John T. Raulston sat at the bench, an American flag as his backdrop. And hanging over the American flag hung a large banner proclaiming "Read Your Bible". Darrow protested when the beginning of each trial began with a prayer. He protested the Bible banner, but Judge Raulston was unmoved. Finally, Mr. Darrow asked that a banner be

placed adjacent to the Bible banner, which read "Read Your Darwin". The Bible banner came down.

Clarence Darrow had assembled a crack team of witnesses, scientists from all over the country - experts on geology, biology, and genetics. But Judge Raulston excluded them all as not relevant to the case being tried. You see, Evolution was not on trial. John Scopes was on trial to determine if he had, or had not, taught Evolution in public school.

But Judge Raulston did allow one expert witness to testify. He allowed the prosecuting attorney, William Jennings Bryan, to testify as an expert on the "Holy" Bible. This opened the door for Darrow to cross-examine Bryan and publicly have the expert witness admit the flaws in the literal interpretation of the Bible. "If Adam and Eve had two sons, where did Cain's wife come from"? If Genesis says the sun wasn't created until the third day, how did God know it was the third day if a day is one 24-hour rotation of the earth"? And throughout the testimony the stammering Bryan revealed the weaknesses from literally interpreting the Bible.

We like to think that the voices of reason and rationality prevailed and the case was won. In actuality, Darrow requested the jury to find Mr. Scopes guilty. You see, by losing the case, it could be brought before a higher court for appeal. That was the intentional strategy of Darrow and the ACLU. The judge fined John Scopes \$100. A year later the Tennessee Supreme Court reversed the decision on a technicality. The case never proceeded further. But as a result of the "Case of the Century" being heard, almost all the states with anti-Evolution statutes on their books were eventually repealed.

The aged and now tired Clarence Darrow standing before us recounted how he had paid a personal toll for his work defending the poor, the rights of free speech and assembly, and forever a staunch opponent of the death penalty. He saved over 120 men from execution at the hands of the State. But at great cost; divorce from his first wife, long hours away from his children and grandchildren, and even defending himself against charges of jury tampering. Having his integrity put on trial was a devastating blow to his self-esteem and his career.

Darrow said people often asked him if he had found religion as he neared the end of his life. But he continued to hold that there was nothing after death but rest.

At the end of the performance and to a standing ovation, the actor Gary L. Anderson emerged from the persona of Clarence Darrow. At several times during the evening the comments from the lips of this great orator, about the erosion of civil liberties and the suppression of justice in his time, rang parallel with events happening now, in OUR time. Clearly the current battle over the teaching of Intelligent Design is yet another resurrection of re-trying the Scopes Monkey Trial again. "Whatever you do", urged Mr. Anderson, "... please do SOMETHING!".

# In South Dakota, At Least The Pretense Is Finally Over

by Ellen Goodman, *Boston Globe*, 3/10/2006

Two months ago, when all eyes were on Samuel Alito's confirmation hearings, I traveled 1,300 miles west to Sioux Falls, S.D. I went to see the state where the right to abortion had already come down to this: one clinic, one day a week, one doctor. The women in the waiting room had come from all over the state. The doctor had flown in from Minneapolis.

South Dakota had become a legislative laboratory for abortion restrictions. It had followed the blueprint that Alito himself had laid out in the 1980s. This was a strategy to add so many restrictions — one law at a time — that *Roe v. Wade* would collapse without ever being overturned.

As Kate Looby, the head of the state Planned Parenthood, said that day, we could end up with a hollow right to abortion that would mean nothing to the women of South Dakota.

Now Alito is on the bench and abortion opponents believe, in the words of South Dakota state legislator Roger Hunt, "This is our time." The "purists" are in charge now. All the pretense is gone. And the laboratory door has closed with a bang. Or, to put it more accurately, a ban.

On Monday, Governor Mike Rounds signed a bill that bans all abortions except those to protect the life of the woman. No exception for rape. Or incest. Or to protect a woman's health.

The purists dropped the old blueprint in favor of a direct, head-on battle. The ban passed with the clear, stated intention of overturning *Roe* in a changed Supreme Court. This is a ban so extreme that it outflanks the prolife president. It's a confrontation so direct that even many in the antiabortion leadership are uneasy with the strategy and the timing. Though not, you will note, with the goal.

Nevertheless, is it possible that South Dakota and other states following suit have done the country a favor? As Nancy Keenan of NARAL Pro-Choice America put it simply: "They've come out from behind the curtain." Forget the political jockeying by proliferators to gain a foothold with moderates. Never mind laws on parental notification and consent in the name of family involvement. Or attempts to ban one abortion procedure at a time. Or laws to mandate misinformation and waiting periods.

Until now the antiabortion right has not only tried to frame itself as moderate, it has dressed up in woman-friendly camouflage. It has touted research that makes one

false claim after another linking abortion with depression and breast cancer. It has cast women as the hapless victims of abortion and portrayed its own side as protectors.

Even this week, with superb irony, Governor Rounds promised tender care for the women he would force to continue their pregnancies. Representative Hunt explained that women themselves would not be prosecuted under the law because any woman choosing abortion was "not thinking clearly." (Tell that to the US soldier who made a 700-mile round trip to the clinic that January day.)

This is what it looks like in front of the curtain. South Dakota's law would make felons out of doctors who perform nearly any abortion. The government would replace women as moral decision-makers. And it would trump doctors as medical decision-makers.

After all, if abortion is legal only when the woman's survival is at risk, who makes that decision? If, according to the law, a doctor has to "make

reasonable medical efforts . . . to preserve both the life of the mother and the life of her unborn child," who judges those efforts? A cop? A court? One of those activist judges the right so loves to hate?

The ban, slated to go into effect July 1, will be challenged in court and possibly by a statewide vote. But hopes of prolife purists are clearly pinned on the belief in a Supreme Court majority ready to reverse *Roe*. The hopes of the rest of us are pinned on seeing, really seeing, extremists in the spotlights.

"I think the South Dakota issue reflects the divisiveness that Americans are tired of," says NARAL's Keenan. Much political chatter this year has urged prochoice advocates and politicians to move to the right. How many more times are they required to recite the pledge — "We want abortion to be safe, legal, and rare" — while prolife purists fight to make it unsafe and illegal?

On Tuesday, NARAL Pro-Choice America launched a Prevention First Day of Action. The press release of the day read optimistically: "Birth Control, Something We Can All Agree On." But the subject of the day was the ban and the battle.

Common ground, anyone? South Dakota just put another torch to it.

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# Who's Afraid of Polygamy?

by John Tierney, *New York Times*, 3/11/2006

If gay marriage becomes legal, its opponents have been warning, the next step in America's moral deterioration will be legalized polygamy. These conservatives won't be happy with "Big Love," the HBO series starting tomorrow night.

This story of a husband with three wives in Utah will not terrify Americans. Polygamy doesn't come off as a barbaric threat to the country's moral fabric. It looks more like what it really is: an arrangement that can make sense for some people in some circumstances, but not one that could ever be a dangerous trend in America.

After watching the husband on the show struggle to pay for three households and watching his three wives struggle for his attention, the question that comes to mind is not how to keep polygamy illegal. The question is why we bother to ban something that takes so much work these days.

When polygamy was outlawed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Supreme Court upheld the ban by citing the "evil consequences" of a practice that "has always been odious among the northern and western nations of Europe." It dismissed polygamy as "a feature of the life of Asiatic and of African people," as if that were reason enough to damn it.

Yet an institution that has been around for so long must have had something going for it. Humans aren't as inclined to polygamy as some apes are — we probably evolved as hunter-gatherers who mostly had one mate at a time — but some form of polygamy has existed in the vast majority of cultures.

Some opponents of polygamy call it the exploitation of women by rich men, and that's true if the wives are coerced into the marriages. But many wives have willingly chosen it, like the three women on "Big Love," who have married a successful businessman.

These three wives, who live in adjacent houses, sound much like the women in polygamous marriages I've talked to in rural Africa. The African wives told me they had mixed feelings about the arrangement — and their fellow wives — but over all, they figured it was better to share one prosperous husband than to marry someone else without land, cows or a job.

That's the way social scientists figure it, too. Polygamy isn't the cause of women's low status in traditional societies, but rather a consequence of their trying to move up. The biggest losers from polygamy are the poorer men who end up with no wives. Women benefit because polygamy increases their number of marriage prospects —

and in traditional societies, marriage is often the only way for a woman to improve her status.

Even in those societies, polygamy is practiced by just a small minority because few men have enough resources to entice more than one wife. As a society modernizes and women become educated, they gain other economic options and become less and less willing to share a husband. Eventually polygamy is out of question for practically everyone, men and women. At that point, the monogamous majority can safely proclaim its moral superiority and outlaw the practice for everyone else.

Critics say children would be better off growing up in a home with a full-time father, but a part-time one is better than what's in many homes today. The father in "Big Love" is more like Ward Cleaver than today's alpha males who've dumped a series of wives and families.

Polygamy isn't necessarily worse than the current American alternative: serial monogamy.

Elizabeth Joseph, a lawyer and journalist who was married to a polygamist in Utah, says her experience handling divorce cases made her appreciate the stability of her marriage. She also appreciated other perks, like the round-the-clock day care that enabled her to keep an unpredictable schedule at work and to relax when she came home.

"If I'm dog-tired and stressed out, I can be alone and guilt-free," she explained in a speech to the National Organization for Women. "It's a rare day when all eight of my husband's wives are tired and stressed at the same time." She told the NOW audience that polygamy "offers an independent women a real chance to have it all" and represented "the ultimate feminist lifestyle."

She won't persuade many American women, feminists or otherwise. But if a few consenting adults like her still want to practice polygamy, there's no reason to stop them. And if the specter of legalized polygamy is the best argument against gay marriage, let the wedding bells ring.

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**"I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother, and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine."**

— Charles Darwin, *Autobiography*

# The Christians are Coming, the Christians are Coming!

by Shlomo Shamir, *Haaretz*, 2/26/2006

submitted by Virginia Fillingim, CSS Member

NEW YORK — Rabbi James Rudin is less scared by global terror threatening American democracy, or by the conservative administration based on a pious president in the White House, which is threatening individual liberty and the freedom of worship. He is more bothered by the campaign currently being conducted for the takeover by the Christian religion of all areas of life in the United States. This is “the most significant internal struggle since the Civil War,” says Rudin, a Reform rabbi who is accepted in the United States as an authority on interreligious relations.

In his book “The Baptizing of America,” recently published by Thunder’s Mouth Press, and in conversations, Rudin does not hesitate to use blunt language to demonstrate the danger that is inherent in the words he has chosen for the subtitle of his book: “The Religious Right’s Plans for the Rest of Us.” He set about writing the book after he retired from his position as head of the committee on interreligious relations at the American Jewish Committee, a position in which he served for 35 years.

“While America is currently fighting a global war against international terrorism, there is an equally important war going on within the United States,” argues Rudin, and like the Civil War, “the outcome of today’s conflict will decisively determine the future of the American republic. Christocrats are waging an all-out campaign to baptize America. It is a struggle that will decide whether the United States remains a spiritually vigorous country but without an officially established religion, or whether America will become Christianized.”

In an interview, he repeatedly stressed to the American public the same warning he wishes to instill through the book. He says that the outcome of the struggle will determine whether “America will become ‘Christianized,’ a land in which the religious beliefs and practices of Christian conservatives become the dominant faith: a legally mandated American theocracy exercising control over all aspects of our country’s public and private life.”

In his position at the AJC over the years, Rudin maintained many ties with churches and Christian institutions of various sects and communities. Therefore, he says today, it is necessary to stress that those who are leading what he defines as a “campaign to baptize

America” are a minority among the organized Christians in the United States. But he immediately adds that they are a strong and aggressive group, with motivation and financial resources.

In his book Rudin calls the Christian elements who are involved in promoting the baptizing of America “Christocrats.” He explains this is not a new term in America and that it was first used by Benjamin Rush, a physician who was among the 56 signatories of the Declaration of Independence. Rush used the term

“Christocrat” in a positive way — to encourage the integration of Christianity and democracy and to emphasize the founding fathers’ religious tolerance. Rudin dismisses the terms “fundamentalism” and “religious extremism.” According to him, Christocrats is a more precise term for defining the fanaticism and devotion of those who are working to turn America into a country of a single religion.

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“Christocrats are most likely evangelical Protestants, but they can be conservative Roman Catholics or Eastern Orthodox Christians. Most of today’s Christocrats are white, but an increasing number of Blacks and Hispanics also merit that term of identification,” he says.

Aware of the affection that prevails in Israel for American evangelicals, Rudin warns against ignoring the distinction they make between Judaism and the State of Israel. He says that they declare their love of Israel, but they do not love Judaism; they wave a placard that on one side says “We love Israel” and on the other, “Jesus is the Savior.” According to Rudin, there is proof that central members of the evangelical movement are involved in activity that aims to revile Judaism.

## Christocratic republic

The increased efforts to impose Christianity on America, warns Rudin, will lead to a Christocratic republic different from anything ever experienced in the United States. The scenario that he describes in his book is nearly apocalyptic: Every major aspect of life will be under the supervision and control of the Christocrat leaders.

“In the current war, Christocrats seek permanent control of the major political, cultural, educational, medical,

judicial, economic, media and legal institutions of the United States," he says.

James Rudin is not the only senior figure in the Jewish community who has raised an outcry in the face of the Christian activity gathering momentum. A few months ago the director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham Foxman, attracted media attention in a speech he delivered at an organization conference. He warned that the organized Christian establishment has recently increased efforts to change the balance between religion and state that has thus far been scrupulously maintained in the United States. Foxman warned of the creeping spread of religious fundamentalism.

In a paper written by experts from the Anti-Defamation League, which included documented information on the activity of radical Christians in the United States, there is a quotation from D. James Kennedy, the head of Coral Ridge Ministries: "Our job is to reclaim America for Christ whatever the cost and to exercise godly dominion over every aspect and institution of human society."

The Presbyterian church that he established in Florida now has 9,000 members and the school affiliated with it has 1,000 students. In addition, Kennedy controls a television network and radio stations. In fiscal year 2004 he raised donations amounting to \$22 million.

Rudin devotes a number of pages in his book to the activities of Evangelical preacher Rod Parsley, the leader of a mega-church in Columbus, Ohio that controls financial resources estimated at about \$40 million and operates a network of 400 television stations and cable channels. Parsley frequently tours the United States and appears at mass meetings under the slogan "No More Silence." In his sermons he exhorts the evangelical believers to play what he calls "an active role in the local and national political arena."

Rudin explains that the Christian campaign is carried out mostly on the local level and in the municipal arena and therefore does not reach the center of the public discourse. He notes, for example, that evangelicals have been taking control of public funds — federal or state — in the communities where they are active. The monies are directed to funding Christian schools or church charitable institutions. In the United States there is a phenomenon of the establishment of Bible classes at workplaces, in which prayer services are held. Participation is not compulsory, but employees are told that their participation is desirable and valued.

"The evangelicals feel like they are under siege," says Foxman. "In their opinion, a culture war has broken out in America. These feelings have strengthened their aspiration and their efforts to deepen Christian influence in America."

Foxman thinks that last year's Super Bowl half-time show, in which Janet Jackson was seen revealing a breast, was traumatic for many evangelicals and has made their reaction more extreme. It is no coincidence that in recent

months the public polemic on the issue of abortion has flared up. At the same time, the evangelicals in the United States have found a tempting field of action in the debate over whether it is permissible to teach intelligent design theory in schools as an alternative to the theory of evolution.

Rudin and Foxman agree that the aspiration to give Christianity the status of the preferred religion does not carry anti-Semitic messages. However, warns Rudin, there have been many "nations where religion and state have been inextricably ensnared, with disastrous results."

### 'Vicious cycle'

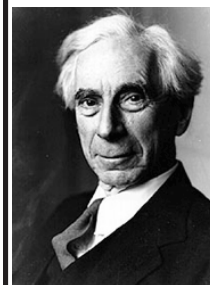
Michelle Goldberg, an investigative journalist who writes for the online magazine Salon, says that this is "a vicious circle. George Bush came into power with the help of the evangelicals, and now they are getting stronger with his help."

Some of the gigantic evangelical churches, the mega-churches, in states like Ohio and Colorado, says Goldberg, function in fact like branches of the Republican Party.

Goldberg has gained fame for the systematic watch she keeps on the activities of the evangelical church heads and its documentation. Her book "Kingdom Coming" (published by W.W. Norton), will be distributed to the shops in May.

"The churches, which are recognized as tax-exempt institutions, are prohibited from having any involvement in election campaigns," explains Goldberg, "but the evangelical churches have discovered a sophisticated way to circumvent the prohibition. They hitch a ride on an issue like single-sex marriage, and in the case of a fight for principle they initiate political operations for the benefit of candidates."

In her book Goldberg surveys the operational patterns of key evangelical clerics, who declare openly that the height of their ambition is to impose Christianity on all areas of American life. "They aim to change not only the administration — but also the law, the judicial system, the schools and in effect to subordinate every area of life to Christianity," she says. In her opinion, too, the evangelical activity is not directed against Jews, but nevertheless she wonders what the place for Jews would be in a Christian America.



**"The most savage controversies are those about matters as to which there is no good evidence either way. Persecution is used in theology, not in arithmetic."**

— Bertrand Russell (1872-1970),  
British author, philosopher,  
"An Outline in Intellectual Rubbish,"  
Unpopular Essays (1950)

# From the President

## (continued from page 3)

Her parents demanded an end to her suffering, which moved Dr. Verhagen to consider euthanasia. Fearing criminal prosecution, he and hospital officials refused and eventually sent Sanne home, where she died of pneumonia half a year later. Dr. Verhagen felt he had failed Sanne and her parents, believing all three had suffered longer than necessary. "We were very unhappy," he said. "We felt like we didn't give good care here."

Dr. Verhagen says he watched a child being euthanized who had a severe form of spina bifida. "The child goes to sleep," he said. "It stops breathing." "I mean, it's difficult to give the right emotion there, but it's beautiful in a way," he said, somewhat aware of how this might sound to a layman. "They are children who are severely ill and in great pain. It is after they die that you see them relaxed for the first time. You see their faces in a way they should be for the first time." Dr. Verhagen does not admit to doubts about whether he is doing the right thing. It is, after all, what he would want for his own children, he said. "If my child would be so ill that it would fall into this category, I would ask someone else to end its life," he said, emphasizing that he could never do it himself. "At that moment, I would be a father and not a doctor."

Finally, according to *The Sunday Times* (March 5, 2006), a committee is now being set up in the Netherlands to regulate infant euthanasia. Dr. Verhagen's "Groningen

protocol" has been adopted as the standard to be upheld by the committee: it emphasizes that life can be ended only in cases involving "unbearable suffering", with parental consent and after consultation with other physicians.

"If a child is untreatably ill," Verhagen explained, "there can be horrendous suffering that makes the last few days or weeks of this child's life unbearable. Now the question is: are you going to leave the child like that or are you going to prevent that suffering?" He went on: "Does the child have to sit it out until the end? I think that the answer is no. There can be circumstances where, under very strict conditions, if all the requirements are fulfilled, active ending of life can be an option — but only in cases of untreatable disease and unbearable suffering."

### Conclusion

Deciding to end the life of a horribly suffering, incurable infant is a profoundly agonizing act. But in rare instances, it is the humane act. It occurs now, quietly. It would be better if it were brought out into the open everywhere, with a procedure, including safeguards, legally defined. As experience with Oregon's own Death With Dignity law has shown, the "slippery-slope" predictions of opponents are false. The Dutch have crafted a carefully-thought out procedure; governments elsewhere should do the same.

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