



# Willamette Freethinker



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A publication of Corvallis Secular Society

<http://CorvallisSecular.org>

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

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

## Announcements

Those of you who receive the print version of this newsletter may have noticed last month that while I had the title page right, when creating the page headers for the rest of the newsletter, my brain blew a fuse and for a brief moment, I thought the month after May was April.

Furthermore, this error managed to escape the elaborate, extensive proofreading process that Angela and I go through each month (otherwise known as "...zat look good?" "Yeah looks fine". "...kay"). I've really gotta quit doing these things in my sleep...

[The error was corrected for our online newsletter, so nobody reading this online will know what a bumbling Editor they have... until they read this.]

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## "Nonreligious" research project comes to CSS

What the \*bleep\* do we know about the nonreligious in the United States? The general answer is: not a lot in detail, particularly about those who are affiliated with nonreligious organizations. The last independent survey of such individuals was of a national atheist organization — in 1932!

Frank Pasquale, Ph. D., is a social psychologist and cultural anthropologist who has embarked on a project to provide a more detailed picture of the non-religious in the Pacific Northwest and the U. S. than ever before. He will be on hand to describe the aims and nature of his research and to enlist your participation in a region-wide survey at our meeting this month.

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## CSS Meetings and Events

### Calendar:

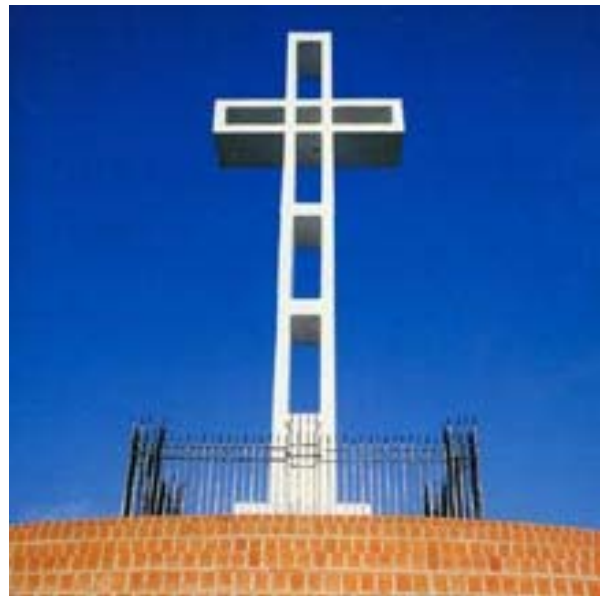
Saturday, Jul 15<sup>th</sup> 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting  
Saturday, Aug 19<sup>th</sup> 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting  
Saturday, Sept 16<sup>th</sup> 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck

### Regular meeting time:

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

### Regular meeting location:

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



Supreme Court to consider Mt. Soledad cross in San Diego. (See page 10.)

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# From the President

## Freedom of Expression

**“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”**

— US Constitution, Amendment I

As I write this column, it is the evening of July 4: Independence Day in the United States. Outside, fireworks are exploding: citizens are celebrating our nation’s freedoms, achieved through revolution and preserved in our Constitution. One of these freedoms is the freedom of speech, found in the First Amendment.

According to Wikipedia ( [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_speech](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_speech) ), “*Freedom of speech* is the concept of being able to speak freely without censorship. It is often regarded as an integral concept in modern liberal democracies. The right to freedom of speech is guaranteed under international law through numerous human rights instruments, notably under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, although implementation remains lacking in many countries. The synonymous term *freedom of expression* is sometimes preferred, since the right is not confined to verbal speech but is understood to protect any act of seeking, receiving and imparting information or ideas, regardless of the medium used.

“In practice, the right to freedom of speech is not absolute in any country, although the degree of freedom varies greatly.... In most all liberal democracies, it is generally recognized that restrictions should be the exception and free expression the rule; nevertheless, compliance with this principle is often lacking.”

SFGate.com recently published an article, “When Speech Becomes a Crime,” by Cinnamon Stillwell. Ms. Stillwell is a San Francisco writer. ( <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2006/06/28/cstillwell.DTL> ). She wrote:

“Roman Catholic Robert Smith is fired from an appointment on the Washington Metro transit authority board by Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich for the crime of saying that he doesn’t approve of homosexuality. Journalist and author Oriana Fallaci cannot visit her native country of Italy for fear of being thrown in prison because of a lawsuit brought against her by the Italian Muslim Union for the crime of ‘defaming Islam.’ British neo-Nazi David Irving is sentenced to three years in prison in Austria for a 1989 speech in which he committed the crime of Holocaust denial. College Republican Steve Hinkle is found guilty by California Polytechnic State University (San Luis Obispo) for ‘disruption’ for the crime of putting up a flyer advertising a black conservative speaker.

“What do the above examples have in common? They are the logical outgrowth of a dangerous trend sweeping the Western world: the criminalization and censorship of speech. Outright censorship and draconian speech codes have long been a staple of Third World authoritarian regimes. But Western democracies and in particular the United States (where the First Amendment is supposed to reign supreme) have always prided themselves on protecting free speech. Yet because of the creeping reach of political correctness, one can now be put in prison, lose a job, be kicked out of school or be otherwise censored simply for uttering an unpopular opinion.

“It’s called hate speech. If there ever were a more Orwellian concept, it would be difficult to find. For much like the concept of ‘thought crimes’ in George Orwell’s novel *1984*, hate crimes and hate speech suppose intent on the part of the ‘perpetrator’ that may or may not have any basis in reality. What is often mere criticism or disapproval is labeled ‘hatred’ and thus made worthy of punishment. Such a perspective demands that one think only nice thoughts about others. But when it did it become law that we have to like everyone? While bigotry is indeed unpleasant, it is not in and of itself a crime. Whether one acts on that bigotry or incites others to violence in accordance is another matter. The old adage, ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me,’ comes to mind.”

Stillwell also wrote on “protecting Islamists from criticism”: “Meanwhile, the push to silence what’s been labeled ‘Islamophobia’ is giving rise to further restrictions on speech. In the United States and Canada, groups such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations have instigated numerous lawsuits and brought pressure to bear on writers, radio talk-show hosts and anyone else guilty of criticizing Islam or Islamic culture in any way, shape or form. Talk-show host Michael Graham was fired by Washington radio station WMAL for calling Islam a ‘terrorist organization’ on his show, after CAIR instituted a letter-writing campaign and demanded an apology. CAIR has used a series of libel or defamation suits to go after those who dare bring to light some of the group’s own unsavory ties.”

The *National Secular Society Newslines* (email newsletter) of 30 June 2006 ( <http://www.secularism.org.uk> ) included the article, “Tyrants and abusers at launch of UN human rights council.” It reads in part:

The UN’s new Human Rights Council met for the first time on Monday... Almost immediately at the first meeting calls started for some kind of censure of those criticising religion. Najeeb Al-Bader, first secretary at Kuwait’s UN mission said that his country has categorically rejected any infringement or defamation of religions, cultures or civilizations. Al-Bader said that the publication of the Danish cartoons was a “condemned and unacceptable” act. He added that it “did not only hurt 1.3 billion Muslims around the world, but it also infringed on the principles of tolerance, understanding, cultural freedoms and freedom of belief”. Al-Bader opined

that freedom of expression does not include the right to encroach on other peoples' beliefs...

However, such calls did not go entirely unchallenged. The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), to which the NSS is affiliated, called on the Council to rebuff demands by Islamic states for action to stop "defamation of religion". Roy Brown of IHEU was speaking after delegates from a range of Muslim countries argued that the Council should set standards that would halt "Islamophobia" in Western countries.

"The right to question religion and to freely express one's views on religious matters is a human right," he said.

"Human beings have human rights, religions do not. This Council has a solemn duty to protect people, not ideas, religions, customs or traditional practices, especially when they are used as justification for the abuse of human rights," said Brown, international spokesman for the IHEU, one of the non-governmental organisations addressing the session.

Iran told the Council, which replaces the old Human Rights Commission, that it should incorporate measures against defamation "particularly of the divine message of Islam" into the international rights standards it helps shape. Many see this as an attempt to stifle criticism of the abysmal human rights records of many Islamic states.

What exceptions to the freedom of expression are recognized by the courts in the US? According to the website <http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/freedom1.html#B> ("Freedom of Expression at the National Endowment for the Arts") they are:

1. **Defamation:** Defamation is the publication of a statement of alleged fact which is false and which harms the reputation of another person.
2. **Causing panic:** The classic example of speech which is not protected by the First Amendment, because it causes panic, is falsely shouting "fire" in a crowded theater. This is narrowly limited to situations in which a reasonable person would know that it was very likely that his or her speech would really cause harm to others.
3. **Fighting words:** In the famous case of *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire*, the US Supreme Court held that the First Amendment does not protect "fighting words — those which by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace." (315 US 568, 572 [1942]) This famous exception is much discussed in recent decades, but rarely the basis for a decision upholding an abridgement of free speech.
4. **Incitement to crime:** It is a crime to incite someone else to commit a crime, and such speech is not protected by the First Amendment.
5. **Sedition:** Although not without controversy, the US Supreme Court has upheld statutes which prohibit the advocacy of unlawful conduct against the government or the violent overthrow of the government. As with prohibitions discussed earlier, the expressions in question are assessed according to the circumstances.

6. **Establishment of Religion:** Some speech is restricted because it constitutes the establishment of religion, which is itself prohibited by the First Amendment to the US Constitution. ("Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.") Prayer led by a principal in a public school would violate the establishment clause. Thus, a school policy prohibiting the principal from leading such prayers would not violate the right of free speech. This is controversial to some, who believe that banning prayer in the public schools limits an equally important right, freedom of religion. This tension illustrates the not-uncommon challenge of balancing competing and perhaps even irreconcilable values in the Constitution.

7. **Obscenity:** In *Miller v. California* (413 US 14 [1973]) the US Supreme Court established a three-pronged test for obscenity prohibitions which would not violate the First Amendment: (a) whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; (b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and (c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value.

**Offense:** Although so-far rejected by American courts, some theorists argue that speech which is merely offensive to others should be another exception to the First Amendment.

## Conclusion

As the writer of the Wikipedia article quoted above wrote, restrictions to the freedom of expression should be the exception, and free expression the rule. In *On Liberty* (1859), John Stuart Mill proposed this test for appropriate government restrictions on human liberties (his "harm" principle): "The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant." This standard would disallow the legal prohibition of obscenity, as well as that of offense, because they do not cause real harm.

Expression which causes no physical harm, but merely offends a listener's religious beliefs or sensibilities, must be allowed. Blasphemy is a crime in many countries, though not always enforced. Tyrants are always trying to abridge human rights, and we need to be vigilant. As an example, Bavarian premier Edmund Stoiber is now pushing for stronger blasphemy laws. He demands that all forms of blasphemy regardless of religion be made a criminal offense. He is calling for tougher consequences for those who deliberately insult the religious feelings of others, including a three-year prison sentence in severe cases.

But as the IHEU representative quoted above stated, "The right to question religion and to freely express one's views on religious matters is a human right." In particular, laws protecting religion from criticism encroach on the beliefs and freedoms of the nonreligious community.

*John Dearing*  
President of CSS

# Voice of an Angel

While browsing through the news sites on the web this past week I came across a rather disturbing article (see *Breast Ironing* on the following page). The article tells of a practice forced upon millions of helpless little girls. I had never heard of this before and it never ceases to amaze me how many ways people in this world find to mutilate little girls — all “for their own good”. This particular practice destroys the girls breasts.

The excuse offered for the practice is a fear the girl will be sexual harassed or raped because of her developing breasts. I really have to wonder which is truly worse — being raped by a stranger or being systematically tortured by your mother (or other female relative) over the course of six to twelve months? You MIGHT be raped, but it is a 100% fact that you will have to live with mutilated breasts for the rest of your life, and possibly never be able to breast feed your child.

**The survey of more than 5,000 girls and women aged between 10 and 82 from throughout Cameroon, published last month, estimated that 4 million women in the central African country have suffered the process.**

**The practice is most common in the Christian and animist South of the country, rather than in the Muslim North and Far North provinces, where only 10 percent of women are affected.**

— *Breast Ironing*, Reuters  
(see next page)

All this is another way of trying to control a woman's sexuality. Throughout history, and continuing today there seems to be a fear of female sexuality. Most of this fear seems to come from the inability of a male to control himself. Just look at (as Bill Maher like to call them) the “Beekeeper Suits” that many Moslem woman are forced to wear. Why? Well, it's simple, if a man saw a woman he would lose control of himself. It seems rather obvious to me that it is the MAN who needs to be controlled!

The real excuse offered for this form of female sexual control is: “it's part of our religion”. They then expect us to respond positively. As long as you mention god it's okay for you to do what you like! Even questioning someone's “religious customs” often gets a violent reaction.

**Imagine if some white nation kept their black population in a beekeeper's suit. The UN would have a riot. Jesse Jackson's head would explode. They get away with it by invoking religion. We like our women to tease us to the n<sup>th</sup> degree; they're like, “If we can't have the pussy, we don't want to see any of it. Throw a tarp over it!”**

— *Bill Maher*

## Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (the removal of part, or all, of the female genitalia) is one more horrible ordeal millions of women suffer through.

**An estimated 135 million of the world's girls and women have undergone genital mutilation, and two million girls a year are at risk of mutilation — approximately 6,000 per day. It is practised extensively in Africa and is common in some countries in the Middle East. It also occurs, mainly among immigrant communities, in parts of Asia and the Pacific, North and Latin America and Europe.**

**In many societies, an important reason given for FGM is the belief that it reduces a woman's desire for sex, therefore reducing the chance of sex outside marriage. The ability of uncut women to be faithful through their own choice is doubted. In many FGM-practising societies, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a woman to marry if she has not undergone mutilation.**

— *Amnesty International*

I have to really wonder about all these “traditions”, and I keep asking myself why are women inflicting these practices on their own daughter, especially after going through these same horrors themselves. After all, they have first hand experience of not only the physical effects, but also the psychological effects these practices create. I imagine both effects are equally great. So why do they do it? I seem to come to the same conclusions every time — fear.

What sort of fear? Fear that they will be beaten in the streets by men. Fear that a man will rape them. Fear that a man will not marry them. These women live in fear of men. Even in our own society every female has this fear to some degree, mostly depending on the situation. I don't think most men can even begin to understand the sorts of fear women live under — although I do think many try. (Please don't think this column is meant to be “man-bashing” in any way.) I feel lucky to have been raised by a man who completely respects women and I have a husband with the same values.

What are the solutions? I don't know them all, but I do know education of both women AND men is the place to start. Yet, we can't ignore the “500 pound gorilla in the room” — religion. Until we stop allowing people to use religion as an excuse for abusive behavior, nothing will truly change.

*Angela Byers*

CSS Treasurer & Webmaster

# “Breast Ironing” Widespread

by Reuters, 7/7/2006

YAOUNDE, Cameroon — Worried that her daughters’ budding breasts would expose them to the risk of sexual harassment and even rape, their mother Philomene MOUNGANG started ‘ironing’ the girls’ bosoms with a heated stone.

“I did it to my two girls when they were eight years old. I would take the grinding stone, heat it in the fire and press it hard on the breasts,” MOUNGANG said. “They cried and said it was painful. But I explained that it was for their own good.”

“Breast ironing” — the use of hard or heated objects or other substances to try to stunt breast growth in girls — is a traditional practice in West Africa, experts say. A new survey has revealed it is shockingly widespread in Cameroon, where one in four teenagers are subjected to the traumatic process by relatives, often hoping to lessen their sexual attractiveness.

“Breast ironing is an age-old practice in Cameroon, as well as in many other countries in West and Central Africa, including Chad, Togo, Benin, Guinea-Conakry, just to name a few,” said Flavien Ndonko, an anthropologist and local representative of German development agency GTZ, which sponsored the survey.

“If society has been silent about it up to now it is because, like other harmful practices done to women such as female genital mutilation, it was thought to be good for the girl,” said Ndonko. “Even the victims themselves thought it was good for them.”

However, the practice has many side-effects, including severe pain and abscesses, infections, breast cancer, and even the complete disappearance of one or both breasts. The survey of more than 5,000 girls and women aged between 10 and 82 from throughout Cameroon, published last month, estimated that 4 million women in the central African country have suffered the process.

“You ask me why I did it?” said MOUNGANG. “When I was growing up as a little girl my mother did it to me just as all other women in the village did it to their girl children. So I thought it was just good for me to do to my own children.”

## Common in Town

The practice is now more common in urban areas than in villages, because mothers fear their children could be more exposed to sexual abuse in towns and try to suppress outward signs of sexuality, the survey said.

Its findings have prompted a nationwide campaign to educate mothers about its dangers and to try to eradicate it. A similar campaign some years ago helped drastically to reduce rates of female genital mutilation in Cameroon.

“A girl...has to be proud of her breasts because it is natural. It is a gift from God. Allow the breasts to grow naturally. Do not force them to disappear or appear,” said a leaflet from the campaign.

MOUNGANG said she stopped ironing her daughters’ breasts after one girl developed blisters and abscesses. “I took her to the hospital and the doctor scolded me and advised never to

do it again because it could ruin my daughter,” she said.

“When Mariane married and delivered her first baby, it took a long time — about a month — for her breasts to start producing milk and the child almost died. I was told it was because I had ironed them.”

The younger a girl develops, the more likely she is to have her bosom ironed — 38 percent of girls developing breasts under the age of 11 had undergone the procedure.

The practice is most common in the Christian and animist South of the country, rather than in the Muslim North and Far North provinces, where only 10 percent of women are affected.

The survey found that in 58 percent of cases breast ironing was carried out by mothers worried that the onset of puberty could provoke sexual harassment, inhibit their daughters’ studies or even stunt their growth.

Many mothers were alarmed because an improvement in nutrition and living conditions had caused young girls’ breasts to develop earlier than ever.

## Destroying Breasts

“Massaging the breasts with hot objects is painful, very painful, and can completely destroy the breasts,” said Bessem Ebanga, executive secretary of women’s rights group RENATA, herself a former victim. “Some girls could be traumatized throughout their lives and their sexual behavior could be disturbed forever.”

Thirteen-year-old Geraldine Mbafor could not hold back her tears as she narrated her ordeal. “I had just finished doing my homework when my mother summoned me to the kitchen. She boiled water and in the water she put a grinding stone. She then removed the stone holding it with a thick cloth to protect her hands, and placed it my breasts and started ironing them,” she stated. “I felt so much pains that I started crying. After that she bandaged my breasts with a band called breast-band ... She did this to me for two and a half months.”

According to 14-year-old Amelia, who would not give her family name, her breasts started developing when she was 9. Her elder sister decided to massage them every evening with a towel soaked in hot water. “This was very painful, and every evening before I slept, she would put a big elastic belt well fastened round my chest to flatten my breasts. Six months later the flesh that held my breasts was already weak. At 10, I already had fallen breasts and each time I undress I’m ashamed and it is a big complex.”

Nevertheless, support for and opposition to the tradition remains evenly balanced. According to the survey, 39 percent of women opposed it, while 41 percent expressed support and 26 percent were indifferent.

For Ndonko, the campaign is a battle to respect the physical integrity of young girls — with broader implications for human rights. “If nothing was done today, tomorrow the very parents may even resolve to slice off the nose, the mouth or any other part of the girl which they think is making her attractive to men.”

# Why Don't Atheists Show Up?

by Wayne Everett Orgar, CSS Member, 6/26/2006

As I sat down to write a brief report on the 2006 West Coast Regional Atheist Meet that was held on June 24<sup>th</sup> in Foster City, California, I intended to keep it short and informative. I soon found myself pacing the floor near my computer, partly from feelings of frustration, disappointment and a little anger perhaps. I needed to change my approach to communicate what I really thought had to be said.

It's not that the program wasn't good. This was an excellent meeting. David Kong, California's State Director for American Atheists, and his colleagues once again did an excellent job organizing the mini-conference. Notables such as Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists; Eddie Tabash, constitutional lawyer and part-time judge on the Los Angeles County Supreme Court; David Eller, Professor of Anthropology and author of the much-acclaimed book, "Natural Atheism"; Clark Adams, President of Internet Infidels and the Las Vegas Freethought Society; were the main presenters along with others such as Richard Carrier, classical historian, philosopher, author and arguably, one of the most influential graduate students in the country!

The official attendance was 142 people. This wasn't a much better draw than the Oregon Atheist/Humanist annual symposiums that have been discontinued. Even though these Oregon symposiums drew freethinkers from Washington, Idaho, and California (even Michael Newdow came up from Elk Grove to attend in 1999), the number of people was much less than it should have been for the population in this area and the freethought membership that was on record. The same is true of the West Coast Regional Atheist Meet. The San Francisco Bay area, which is not that far from Sacramento, is a densely populated area noted for its liberal perspective. There are numerous atheist and humanist groups in this region. Although 142 people were more than expected, this number reflects the great problem we face in advocating for ourselves politically. I have traveled across this country going to similar conferences. It is the same everywhere.

Let's be honest with ourselves. These small numbers only reveal to our opposition that we are not yet united in any way and don't have much support of the freethinking community. Using the more conservative estimate of 5-8% of non-theists in the country, the Regional Meet should have drawn thousands. Although our leaders like to use the larger 14% or even 18% non-religious or "un-churched" label to estimate our size for political reasons,

these labels are vague. It is hard to know who actually comprises this group. For example many Christians say they are not religious. Although I am more comfortable with the conservative estimate, this is still a large percentage of the U. S. population. Why don't atheists and humanists show up?

In November of 2002, the Godless Americans March on Washington was held. After reviewing the freethought groups that endorsed this demonstration for the civil rights of non-believers in the United States, I was appalled at the number of state and national organizations that refused to go online and take the minute it took to endorse this advocacy. I lived in Oregon at the time. Out of the several atheist and humanist groups in the state, only one endorsed the march. That was pathetic.

Is it that we are not joiners? I'm sorry, but I don't think that is true. I have seen no study to confirm this character trait in non-theists. Show me the data and I'll consider it. What is obvious is that non-theists don't join the freethinking groups, locally or nationally, that exist in this

country. Most atheists and humanists I have known do join professional, hobby, or special interest groups. A few years ago, I had a young female friend who was an atheist and gay. She belonged to a soccer league and gay organization. She told me that her gay advocacy was more important to her than her being an atheist.

That was her choice but it was short-sighted. The roots of the anti-gay attitude are in the soil of belief of a paternal god who hates gays and commands that they be killed. It is only by exposing the lack of evidence for such a god that this movement will be weakened. As Eddie Tabash pointed out in the Regional Meet, as tired as we are with arguing against the existence of gods, we have to continue doing so to keep our country secular. Even in a democracy, freedoms have to be fought for over and over again. Haven't you noticed that this god fiction is at the root of many of our issues today, such as the denial of the scientific method and facts, the fighting in the Middle East and Indonesia, healthcare choices (cancer vaccines, birth control, abortion), end-of-life decisions, gay marriage...the list is endless.

The rise of the intelligent design movement and creationism is a case in point. Evolutionary scientists didn't realize that they needed to strongly promote the facts of evolution publicly, not just in academic journals. It is this complacent attitude that allowed America to become the laughing-stock among developed nations with regard to one of the stupidest god fictions of all —

**Let's be honest with ourselves. These small numbers only reveal to our opposition that we are not yet united in any way and don't have much support of the freethinking community.**

creationism. We will have to fight this fight continually for a long time.

If you are a busy professional or family person, now is the time to reconsider your priorities. Eliminate one other organization and join an atheist or humanist group. If you have children, what kind of country do you want your children or grandchildren to live in? Our secular America is in danger. Wake up!

I am not denying that one person or a small group can make a difference. Only fourteen of us protested in the summer of 1998 at the Promise Keepers rally in Eugene, OR. Still, we reached thousands of theists that day by simply standing with our signs at the entrance so the attendees had to walk by us. It was on a busy commercial street. Hundreds of drivers also saw our messages. Time after time though, it starts to look like non-theists are just a small bunch of agitators with nothing better to do on a Saturday. This couldn't be further from the truth. We are a large part of this country that sees our rights being threatened.

It is time for atheists and humanists to put aside the unproductive argument over which name is better to use, atheist or humanist. This only serves our opposition. To those humanists who think the word atheist causes a bad reaction, you are terribly naïve. The word humanist is not respected and can be found in our opponent's literature just as much in a negative light as the word atheist. To those atheists who don't like the word humanist, get real. Many if not most atheists in this country hold to humanist philosophy. Admit it and let's move on!

Non-theists hold political views from libertarian to liberal and, yes, to conservative views depending on the issue. Our world is too complex to easily apply one label to how we will respond to any given issue. We all have to be willing to give up some of our political positions to work together as freethinkers to fight for what is most important, a secular America. Do I need to remind you that there are still five states that have laws on the books outlawing atheists from holding public office? Do you want to keep going through life explaining that you can not truthfully take an oath that ends "so help me god"?

Our first priority isn't to join with "liberal" religious groups. They will do quite nicely without us. Our first priority should be to learn to work together among ourselves. How bogus is it to say we can work with religious groups to achieve political gain when we can't even work together in large numbers to advocate for our non-religious point of view? Religious organizations don't need our help. We have limited resources. We have to focus these resources on ourselves first. We need to represent our position very clearly, the non-theist position. No one else will do this for us.

At the Regional meeting, Dave Kong asked for a show of hands for how many would participate in a Godless March on Sacramento. Most raised their hands. If this happens, there is no reason why atheists and humanists

from California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, or Arizona should not be represented in large numbers.

I make no claim to be a super activist and I won't take space telling about my personal efforts...except to say one of my more fun things is to write to local ministers every time their church literature ends up at my door. They just don't expect an atheist to "witness" back to them! Many activists are far more active than I am. Like many of you, I do what I can in a way that I feel comfortable and competent. I do not suggest doing anything you are not comfortable with or incompetent doing. This can hurt any movement.

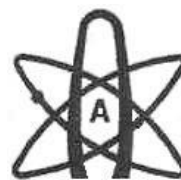
However, it takes no competence to show up at a meeting, donate some money, or join a freethought organization. There is just no excuse.

**[Editor's Note: Wayne makes an excellent point in this article; American freethinkers desperately need to rouse ourselves and get more involved. Even just showing up at meetings and events can make a difference. We need to be seen and heard, in numbers large enough to make folks notice.]**

***I'm not so sure about not working with liberal religious groups — I think they are a sizeable, largely-untapped reservoir of folks (many of whom merely identify as Christian out of social inertia), who agree with us many issues (such as discrimination, and separation of church and state), and who are more likely to receive sympathetic media attention than we are — but Wayne's point is, we can't even consider forming such an alliance, because we're too fractured, ourselves!***

***We nontheists need to be more active, if we ever hope to be taken seriously and make a real difference.]***

Surprisingly, the Department of Veterans Affairs allows the following symbols for the graves and memorial markers for fallen soldiers:



Atheists



Humanists

...but it doesn't allow:



Wicca

**[See article on next page.]**

# Abortion Fight Aims for Ballot

## Initiative seeks parental notice

by Julia Silverman, Associated Press, 7/7/2006

PORTLAND — Sixteen years after Oregon voters became the first in the nation to turn down a law mandating that parents be notified if their teenage daughters sought an abortion, backers of the idea are poised to try their luck again on the November ballot.

There are 35 states with laws requiring some level of parental involvement in teenage abortions. Nine others have similar laws that are in limbo because of legal challenges, leaving Oregon as one of six states with no parental involvement laws on the books.

The Oregon law would require that the parents of girls between the ages of 15 and 18 be notified before their daughter has an abortion. Girls would not be allowed to get an abortion until 48 hours after the parent receives written notice of the proposed abortion by certified mail.

The parents of girls under 15 are already required to know about major medical procedures.

“Parents are involved in teenagers’ lives in every other area,” said Sarah Nashif, who is managing the ballot measure campaign. “Why is abortion the exception to that rule?”

The proposal doesn’t require parents to give their permission for the procedure, and it would allow abortions without parental notice in a medical emergency. It also allows a teenage girl to request an administrative hearing before a judge to ask for an abortion without notice to her parents.

Backers of the measure turned in 115,845 signatures to the Secretary of State’s office on Thursday, a day before signatures were due. More than 90 percent of the names were collected by volunteers, Nashif said.

To get the measure on the ballot, 75,630 of those signatures will need to be valid. The Secretary of State’s office has 30 days to verify the signatures.

Since Oregon’s 1990 vote on Measure 10 — which failed 52 percent to 48 percent — abortion has moved even closer to the forefront of the American political landscape. South Dakota voters are set to vote in November on the constitutionality of that state’s outright ban on almost all abortions.

Nationally, there’s been increasing debate over whether requiring parental knowledge reduces the rate of teenage abortions. A recent New York Times analysis of six states that have implemented parental involvement laws found no clear evidence that the laws reduced the number of minors who get abortions.

And figures from the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive rights organization in New York and Washington, D.C.,

found that more than six in 10 teenagers in states without a parental consent requirement said one or both parents knew about their abortion.

“When they can’t talk to their parents, it is because there is a good reason — a violent or abusive household. And requiring notice to the person who may be causing the abuse might just make a bad situation worse,” said Nancy Bennett, a spokeswoman for Planned Parenthood’s political action committee in Oregon.

Asking a judge for permission could also prove an insurmountable hardship for some teens, Bennett said.

But Nashif countered that under the current system, teen girls who have been raped, or abused, may just go straight back to the same situation.

“Some responsible adult needs to ask the question, and not send her back into an abusive situation,” Nashif said. “A judge would be able to pull her out of that situation.”

To the south of Oregon, California voters will consider a parental involvement law this fall. A previous attempt to pass such legislation there failed by 53 percent to 47 percent during a special election in November 2005.

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## Fallen Wiccan Soldier Left With No Memorial

by Alan Cooperman, *Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — At the Veterans Memorial Cemetery in the small town of Fernley, Nev., there is a wall of brass plaques for local heroes. But one space is blank. There is no memorial for Sgt. Patrick Stewart.

That’s because Stewart was a Wiccan, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has refused to allow a symbol of the Wicca religion — a five-pointed star within a circle, called a pentacle — to be inscribed on U.S. military memorials or grave markers.

The department has approved the symbols of 38 other faiths; about half are versions of the Christian cross. It also allows the Jewish Star of David, the Muslim crescent, the Buddhist wheel, the Mormon angel, the nine-pointed star of Bahai and something that looks like an atomic symbol for atheists.

Stewart, 34, is believed to be the first Wiccan killed in combat. He was serving in the Nevada National Guard when the helicopter in which he was riding was shot down in Afghanistan in September.

He was posthumously awarded a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.

# Church Constructs Monument to Christianity in Likeness of Lady Liberty

## 72-foot monument in Hickory Hill to be unveiled on July Fourth

by Whitney Boyd, The Commercial Appeal, 6/29/2006

[http://www.commercialappeal.com/mca/local/article/0,2845,MCA\\_25340\\_4809191,00.html](http://www.commercialappeal.com/mca/local/article/0,2845,MCA_25340_4809191,00.html)

As drivers wait for a green light on Winchester Road, they automatically lean their heads forward to view the 72-foot sea-foam-green Statue of Liberation overlooking Hickory Hill.

The towering replica of the Statue of Liberty — with a few Christian touches — is being erected in front of the 12,000-member World Overcomers Outreach Ministries Church at Winchester and Kirby Parkway.

Replacing the recognizable torch, Lady Liberty holds a cross.

A beige sheet veils much of the \$260,000 statue and will be removed during a Fourth of July ceremony.

Lady Liberty's uncovered eyes already peer down on the community. A tear falls from her right eye representing her concern for America.

Church members said the mixture of the statue and Christian symbols represent "America belonging to God through Jesus Christ."

The statue's famous inscription — "Give me your tired, your poor ..." — has been replaced with Roman numerals representing the Ten Commandments.

The seven-spiked crown that represents the seven seas of the world, has been changed to signify the seven redemptive names of Christ, according to church pastor Apostle Alton R. Williams.



The cross-bearing statue stands in front of the World Overcomers Outreach Ministries Church, a perfect spot, says pastor Apostle Alton R. Williams, for passersby to think about their relationship with God. A sheet covers much of the \$260,000 statue until its unveiling next week.

Inscribed on the crown is the name Jehovah.

Workers are still assembling the Statue of Liberation for her Independence Day debut, but not all members of the community are happy.

"That church is trashing the meaning of America," said 11-year Hickory Hill resident Evelyn Douglass.

"The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of the United States of America," she said. "The cross represents a specific religion. It's not right that they are mixing the two."

Douglass now takes the long way home to avoid "the big green thing."

Across the street at Mapco Express, manager Mary Preyer awaits the final product.

"I like the idea of the Statue of Liberty holding a cross representing freedom through Jesus Christ," Preyer said. "I just think its funding could have been put to better use for the neighborhood. It's definitely got people talking."

Conversation is exactly what Williams hopes the statue will spark.

"People don't talk about Christ anymore and our morals are gone," Williams said. "People cannot drive by our statue without thinking about their relationship with God."

# High Court to Consider San Diego's Memorial Cross

## by Associated Press, 7/3/2006

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court intervened Monday to save a large cross on city property in Southern California.

A lower court judge had ordered the city of San Diego to remove the cross or be fined \$5,000 a day.

Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, acting for the high court, issued a stay while supporters of the cross continue their legal fight.

Lawyers for San Diegans for the Mount Soledad National War Memorial said in an appeal that they wanted to avoid the "destruction of this national treasure." And attorneys for the city said the cross was part of a broader memorial that was important to the community.

The 29-foot cross, on San Diego property, sits atop Mount Soledad. A judge declared it was an unconstitutional endorsement of religion.

The cross, which has been in place for decades, was contested by Philip Paulson, a Vietnam veteran and atheist.

Three years ago, the Supreme Court had refused to get involved in the long-running dispute between Paulson and the city.

Kennedy granted the stay to the city and the cross' supporters without comment pending a further order from him or the entire court.

The cross was dedicated in 1954 as a memorial to Korean War veterans, and a private association maintains a veterans memorial on the land surrounding it.

Mayor Jerry Sanders has argued that the cross, sitting atop Mount Soledad in La Jolla, is an integral part of the memorial and deserves the same exemptions to government-maintained religious symbols as those granted to other war monuments.

In May, U.S. District Court Judge Gordon Thompson, Jr., ordered the city to take down the 29-foot cross before August 2 or pay daily fines of \$5,000.

Thompson's ruling, which he described as "long overdue," found the cross to be an unconstitutional display of government preference of one religion over another.

Last year, San Diego voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot proposition to transfer the land beneath the cross to the federal government. The measure was designed to absolve the city of responsibility for the cross under the existing lawsuit. But a California Superior Court judge found the proposition to be unconstitutional.

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