



Willamette Freethinker



Volume 13, Number 12 — December 2006

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).

From the Editor

The Two Christmasses

Just as there are two “marriages” — the secular “marriage” endorsed by the state, and the religious “marriage” endorsed by (whatever religious tradition you get married in, if any) — there are also two “Christmasses”. There’s the secular “Christmas” (often shortened to “Xmas”), involving massive amounts of shopping, decorated trees, and the fat guy with the beard and his menagerie of magical helpers — and there’s the religious “Christmas” with the manger scenes, angels, and the “Happy Birthday Jesus” party hats.

Whenever you see a sign or bumper sticker pleading with you to “remember the reason for the season”, what you’re really seeing is some uber-Christian shaking his fist at the fact that secular Xmas has so completely dominated Christ’s birthday party in this country.



Now as a rule, I’m generally in favor of anything that annoys the ultra-religious. And in fact, I’ve always approved of the secularisation of religious events — but it can be a two-edged sword. One the one hand, it dilutes the religious aspect of the events — de-fanging them, as it were — and making them more palatable to a wider variety of people. On the other hand, with more people now partaking of the “watered-down” religious event, it’s easier for religious types to pretend that “everybody” agrees with their religion, and to try and increase their control.

For example: In court, Christians swear that “In God We Trust” on the money doesn’t really mean anything — but outside of court, they claim it “proves” we’re a Christian Nation. In court, Christians swear that plaques of the Ten Commandments in government buildings just symbolize the historical basis for our current system of Law, and that giant crosses on hillsides are just war memorials. But offer to replace them with the Bill of Rights, or statues of soldiers, and watch them scream!

These people are not interested in history, or memorials. As much as they deny it, their only goal is to “Christianize” our country as much as possible. And as much as I enjoy celebrating my utterly non-religious Xmas, part of me wonders if I’m helping America “look” more Christian...

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

Announcements

Is it already Winter Solstice? Then it’s time for another potluck! Bring a dish to share with your secular friends, and remember to arrive by 1pm (an hour earlier than regular meetings).

We look forward to seeing you there!

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Dec 16th 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck
Saturday, Jan 20th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Feb 17th 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).



In this issue:

- From the President p.2
- Voice of an Angel p.4
- Church No Longer Swears Truth of Bible p.5
- Doctors Aren’t Chaplains p.6
- Falwell’s Flub p.7
- Christian Video Game is Force for Evil p.8
- Dalai Lama Says Secularism is Route... p.8
- My Pledge p.9
- Newspaper Letter p.10

From the President

The Relation Between Societal Health, Religiosity and Secularism

Creighton University is a Roman Catholic Jesuit college in Omaha, Nebraska. Published at Creighton is *The Journal of Religion & Society (JR&S)*, <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/>. It is described as “a cross-disciplinary, electronic journal published by the Rabbi Myer and Dorothy Kripke Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Creighton University.” The Journal, in Volume 7 (2005), included the article “Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies: A First Look.” It is by Gregory S. Paul. Interestingly, Paul is a distinguished paleontologist, not a sociologist. His entry in Wikipedia includes the following:

“Gregory S. Paul (born 1954) is a freelance paleontologist, author and illustrator. He is best known for his work and research on theropod dinosaurs, and his detailed illustrations, both live and skeletal. Paul pioneered the ‘new look’ of dinosaurs. He was the first professional to depict them as active, warm-blooded and — in the case of the small ones — feathered. Aside from many scientific articles, Paul has written two books on paleontology, both lavishly illustrated by the author himself: *Predatory Dinosaurs of the World* (1988) ... and *Dinosaurs of the Air* (2002).”

Paul has written for The Council for Secular Humanism’s *Free Inquiry* magazine. He is the author of “The Great Scandal: Christianity’s Role in the Rise of the Nazis” (FI, Oct/Nov 2003 and Dec 2003/Jan 2004). In the Dec 2006/Jan 2007 issue, he has another article: “Foreign Policy’s Faux Pas: Why God Belief Is Not Winning Here and Abroad.” He is described there as “an independent evolutionary scientist and paleontologist with interests in the relationship between science and religion.”

Paul writes in the introduction to his *JR&S* paper: “Two centuries ago there was relatively little dispute over the existence of God, or the societally beneficial effect of popular belief in a creator. In the twentieth century extensive secularization occurred in western nations, the United States being the only significant exception. If religion has receded in some western nations, what is the impact of this unprecedented transformation upon their populations? Theists often assert that popular belief in a creator is instrumental towards providing the moral, ethical and other foundations necessary for a healthy, cohesive society. Many also contend that widespread acceptance of evolution, and/or denial of a creator, is contrary to these goals. ... Agreement with the hypothesis that belief in a creator is beneficial to societies is largely based on assumption, anecdotal accounts, and on studies of limited scope and quality restricted to one population.”

“When the theory of biological evolution removed the need for a supernatural creator, concerns immediately arose over the societal implications of widespread abandonment of faith. Anti-evolution creationism ... has abjectly failed [as science]. The continuing popularity of creationism in America indicates that it is in reality a theistic social-political movement partly driven by concerns over the societal consequences of disbelief in a creator.”

The Belief that Religiosity is Socially Beneficial

Paul notes that many conservative theists consider evolutionary science a leading contributor to social dysfunction because it inspires disbelief in a moral creator. The creationist *Discovery Institute* seeks to reverse the destructive cultural consequences of materialism. To do this, they are attempting to insert “intelligent design” into education, thus destroying “Darwinism.” Conservative political and social leaders have worked to elevate popular concerns over evolution to make it a major “fear factor.” Former House majority leader Tom DeLay contended that high crime rates and tragedies like the Columbine assault will continue as long as schools teach children “that they are nothing but glorified apes who have evolutionized [sic] out of some primordial soup of mud.” Pope Benedict XVI lauded the benefits of belief in a creator and contended, “we are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution.”

Moderate and liberal religious leaders also contend that religiosity is socially advantageous, even if they accept evolution. They hold that high rates of belief in a creator and of religious practice correlate with lowering rates of lethal violence, suicide, non-monogamous sexual activity, and abortion, as well as improved physical health. The view that western secular materialism leads to “cultures of death” is the official opinion of the Papacy.

Faith-based charities and education are promoted by the Bush administration and allies as effective means of addressing various social problems. Former presidential candidate Al Gore supported teaching both creationism and evolution; his running mate Joe Lieberman asserted that belief in a creator is instrumental to “secure the moral future of our nation, and raise the quality of life for all our people.”

Paul states: “With surveys showing a strong majority from conservative to liberal believing that religion is beneficial for society and for individuals, many Americans agree that their church-going nation is an exceptional, God blessed, ‘shining city on the hill’ that stands as an impressive example for an increasingly skeptical world. But in the other developed democracies religiosity

continues to decline precipitously and avowed atheists often win high office, even as clergies warn about adverse societal consequences if a revival of creator belief does not occur."

Paul's Results and Discussion

He writes, "Among the *developed democracies* absolute belief in God, attendance of religious services and Bible literalism vary over a dozenfold, atheists and agnostics five fold, prayer rates fourfold, and acceptance of evolution almost twofold. Japan, Scandinavia, and France are the most secular nations in the west, the United States is the only prosperous first world nation to retain rates of religiosity otherwise limited to the second and third worlds. *Prosperous democracies* where religiosity is low are referred to below as *secular developed democracies*. Correlations between popular acceptance of human evolution and belief in and worship of a creator and Bible literalism are negative. The least religious nation, Japan, exhibits the highest agreement with the scientific theory, the lowest level of acceptance is found in the most religious developed democracy, the U.S."

Paul reports that the U.S. is the only prosperous democracy with a high homicide rate. The U.S. has had many more mass student murders in schools than have all the secular democracies combined. Other prosperous democracies do not significantly exceed the U.S. in rates of nonviolent and non-lethal violent crime, and are often lower. He states that "The positive correlation between pro-theistic factors and juvenile mortality is remarkable, especially regarding absolute belief, and even prayer." He reports that life spans tend to decrease as rates of religiosity rise, and that higher rates of religious affiliation, attendance, and prayer do not result in lower juvenile-adult mortality rates on a cross-national basis.

"Rates of adolescent gonorrhea infection remain six to three hundred times higher in the U.S. than in less theistic, pro-evolution secular developed democracies. At all ages levels are higher in the U.S., albeit by less dramatic amounts. The U.S. also suffers from uniquely high adolescent and adult syphilis infection rates. ... Increasing adolescent abortion rates show positive correlation with increasing belief and worship of a creator, and negative correlation with increasing non-theism and acceptance of evolution; again rates are uniquely high in the U.S. Claims that secular cultures aggravate abortion rates (John Paul II) are therefore contradicted by the quantitative data."

"In general, higher rates of belief in and worship of a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult mortality, STD infection rates, teen pregnancy, and abortion in the prosperous democracies. The United States is almost always the most dysfunctional of the developed democracies, sometimes spectacularly so, and almost always

scores poorly. The view of the U.S. as a 'shining city on the hill' to the rest of the world is falsified when it comes to basic measures of societal health. ... Higher rates of non-theism and acceptance of human evolution usually correlate with lower rates of dysfunction, and the least theistic nations are usually the least dysfunctional."

"Although they are by no means utopias, the populations of secular democracies are clearly able to govern themselves and maintain societal cohesion. Indeed, the data examined in this study demonstrates that only the more secular, pro-evolution democracies have, for the first time in history, come closest to achieving practical 'cultures of life' that feature low rates of lethal crime, juvenile-adult mortality, sex related dysfunction, and even abortion. The least theistic secular developed democracies such as Japan, France, and Scandinavia have been most successful in these regards. The non-religious, pro-evolution democracies contradict the dictum that a society cannot enjoy good conditions unless most citizens ardently believe in a moral creator. The widely held fear that a Godless citizenry must experience societal disaster is therefore refuted."

My Conclusions

The results of Paul's research conflict with the widely-held belief in this country that religion is beneficial for society and for individuals. The opposite is demonstrated. For more information, including an extensive bibliography, read Paul's paper at <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2005/2005-11.html>.

If human morality comes from a god, then all people should have identical senses of morality. They do not. Natural explanations have been found for countless phenomena, including those for phenomena once believed to have supernatural causes. At the same time, *no* phenomenon has ever been demonstrated to have a supernatural cause. Hence the likelihood that morality was supernaturally implanted in *homo sapiens*, rather than having evolved naturally, approaches zero.

[Thanks to CSS member Robert Neary for bringing Gregory Paul's article to my attention.]

John Dearing
President of CSS

**Be nice to America — or
we'll bring democracy to
your country.**

Voice of an Angel

It's a NewSpeak Bellyfeel!

"By corrupting the language, the people who wield power are able to fool the others about their activities and evade responsibility and accountability." — Cato Institute.

Ever since 9/11/01, we have been inundated with "NewSpeak". Here are a few that I find most irritating.

Insurgent: I am so sick of this word, I want to poke my eardrums out when hear it. It's gotten so bad that on an episode of **Star Trek: Enterprise**, when the crew goes back in time to an alternate WW2 where the Nazis have taken over America, the Nazis were calling the American Resistance "insurgents". It sounded so ridiculous I had to laugh. Like most of the words here, this is a coward's word. Let's call them what they are — Rebels, Guerillas, maybe Freedom Fighters? Oh wait, that makes them sound legitimate, we can't have that! After all these are "evil" people — anyone who isn't on "our" side is "evil"!

Sectarian: These Sectarians seem to be causing most of the trouble in the Middle East. Just where is the land of Sectaria? And why aren't we bombing THEM?! I want to run a poll to ask the average American: "What does the word Sectarian mean?" I bet you 75% of average people are clueless. Let's stop hiding behind words people don't understand. Let's stop saying "Sectarian Violence" and START saying "RELIGIOUS Violence". Oops! There I go again, expecting the media to be courageous. People like to think "Religious Violence" is an oxymoron, but we ALL know it's been a reality since the founding of the very first religion.

Cut & Run: You hear Bush saying it daily — if we "Cut & Run" it means we lose the war. It means we don't "win". All I can say to this is — WHO CARES?!! Why are these people so caught up with this idea of "winning". This is NOT a football game. We are talking about the lives of young men and women — 30 of whom died yesterday (12/6/06) alone! If we "Cut & Run" and it

saves hundreds of lives, is THAT not "winning"? To use a quote from *Demolition Man*: "Could you (all) please dump some hormones? We need every cortex we can get here." Grow up people!

Then there's all the other Bush NewSpeak:

- People are no longer hungry, they are "experiencing very low food security".
- Soldiers don't go to war, they are just "Redeployed".
- Someone being held captive at Guantanamo is an "internee".
- An "internee" who's been tortured who then kills themselves, didn't commit suicide, it was a "self-injurious behavior incident".
- Torturously redefining the meaning of Torture.
- Calling it the "Patriot Act" to make opposition unpatriotic.
- The Death Tax, No Child Left Behind, the Safe Families Act, the Clean Skies Initiative, Healthy Forests...

All that those in power have to do is get people, mainly the media, to repeat the "acceptable" words over and over. Soon the words are part of our everyday language, even though those repeating the words often have no clue what they mean. Does the average American really know what the Patriot Act does? Most likely not, but the name tells them not to question it.

It all reminds me of a sort of "urban legend" — a story that gets repeated over and over and takes on a life of its own. Soon no one can even recall where the whole thing started in the first place. Yet, we all need to be reminded where this twisted reality is originating. We need look no farther than 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

But really now, it's all a doubleplusgood bellyfeel! I am just duckspeaking with all this ungood crimethink. The Party knows what's best. War is Peace.



"Ozy and Millie"

I'VE FOUND A LOOPHOLE YOU CAN'T DEFEAT! RELIGIOUS BELIEFS CAN BE ANYTHING, THEY DON'T REQUIRE A RATIONAL EXPLANATION, AND IT'S OFFENSIVE TO DISPUTE THEM IN ANY WAY!



Catholic Church No Longer Swears By Truth of the Bible

by Ruth Gledhill, *UK Times Online*, 10/5/2005

The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church has published a teaching document instructing the faithful that some parts of the Bible are not actually true.

The Catholic bishops of England, Wales and Scotland are warning their five million worshippers, as well as any others drawn to the study of scripture, that they should not expect "total accuracy" from the Bible.

"We should not expect to find in Scripture full scientific accuracy or complete historical precision," they say in *The Gift of Scripture*.

The document is timely, coming as it does amid the rise of the religious Right, in particular in the US.

Some Christians want a literal interpretation of the story of creation, as told in Genesis, taught alongside Darwin's theory of evolution in schools, believing "intelligent design" to be an equally plausible theory of how the world began.

But the first 11 chapters of Genesis, in which two different and at times conflicting stories of creation are told, are among those that this country's Catholic bishops insist cannot be "historical". At most, they say, they may contain "historical traces".

The document shows how far the Catholic Church has come since the 17th century, when Galileo was condemned as a heretic for flouting a near-universal belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible by advocating the Copernican view of the solar system. Only a century ago, Pope Pius X condemned Modernist Catholic scholars who adapted historical-critical methods of analysing ancient literature to the Bible.

In the document, the bishops acknowledge their debt to biblical scholars. They say the Bible must be approached in the knowledge that it is "God's word expressed in human language" and that proper acknowledgement should be given both to the word of God and its human dimensions.

They say the Church must offer the gospel in ways "appropriate to changing times, intelligible and attractive to our contemporaries".

The Bible is true in passages relating to human salvation, they say, but continue: "We should not expect total accuracy from the Bible in other, secular matters."

They go on to condemn fundamentalism for its "intransigent intolerance" and to warn of "significant dangers" involved in a fundamentalist approach.

"Such an approach is dangerous, for example, when people of one nation or group see in the Bible a mandate for their own superiority, and even consider themselves permitted by the Bible to use violence against others."

Of the notorious anti-Jewish curse in Matthew 27:25, "His blood be on us and on our children", a passage used to justify centuries of anti-Semitism, the bishops say these and other words must never be used again as a pretext to treat Jewish people with contempt. Describing this

passage as an example of dramatic exaggeration, the bishops say they have had "tragic consequences" in encouraging hatred and persecution. "The attitudes and language of first-century quarrels between Jews and Jewish Christians should never again be emulated in relations between Jews and Christians."

As examples of passages not to be taken literally, the bishops cite the early chapters of Genesis,

comparing them with early creation legends from other cultures, especially from the ancient East. The bishops say it is clear that the primary purpose of these chapters was to provide religious teaching and that they could not be described as historical writing.

Similarly, they refute the apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation, the last book of the Christian Bible, in which the writer describes the work of the risen Jesus, the death of the Beast and the wedding feast of Christ the Lamb.

The bishops say: "Such symbolic language must be respected for what it is, and is not to be interpreted literally. We should not expect to discover in this book details about the end of the world, about how many will be saved and about when the end will come."

In their foreword to the teaching document, the two most senior Catholics of the land, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, and Cardinal Keith O'Brien, Archbishop of St Andrew's and Edinburgh, explain its context.

The bishops say: "Such symbolic language must be respected for what it is, and is not to be interpreted literally. We should not expect to discover in this book details about the end of the world, about how many will be saved and about when the end will come."

(continued on page 10)

Doctors Aren't Chaplains

The misguided effort to meld religion and medicine

by Richard P. Sloan, director of the behavioral medical program at
Columbia University Medical Center and the New York State Psychiatric Institute

How would you like your doctor, at your next examination, to ask not only about your diet and symptoms but about your spiritual life?

How would you like your surgeon to ask, while you're on the gurney ready to be wheeled in for an operation, if you'd mind if he says a quick prayer?

Or if he suggested that perhaps you should?

These questions are not farfetched these days. A concerted effort is underway to make religious practices part of clinical medicine. About two-thirds of U.S. medical schools now offer some form of training on the role of religion and spirituality in medicine, according to Dr. Harold Koenig of Duke University.

With support from the National Institutes of Health, researchers are now studying the effect of third-party prayer on cancer patients. Research on the connection between religious activity and cardiac health was published in the *Lancet*, one of the top peer-reviewed medical journals. The John Templeton Foundation, whose annual prize on spiritual discoveries exceeds the amount of the Nobel Prize in medicine, has funded dozens of medical researchers, some at top-tier institutions, who claim an association between religious devotion and better health.

Some prominent physicians are calling for the wall of separation between religion and medicine to be torn down. They declare that the future of medicine is prayer and Prozac, and they recommend that doctors take a "spiritual history" during a patient's initial visit and annually thereafter. Walter Larimore, an award-winning physician, for instance, has declared that excluding God from a consultation should be grounds for malpractice.

Of course, religion is not utterly irrelevant to patients. If it were, hospitals would not have chaplains and chapels. But before organized medicine decides that religion has any value in physical healing, several things ought to be considered. First, the scientific evidence supposedly linking religious practices with better health is shockingly weak — so bad, in fact, that if we were discussing drugs, the Food and Drug Administration would have to find them unsafe and ineffective. Most research studies that claim to show how religious involvement is associated with better health fail to rule out other factors that might account for the relationship.

We all agree, for instance, that there is a real connection between lung cancer and carrying a cigarette lighter in your pocket, but no one thinks that the lighter causes

cancer. The lighter is a marker of another factor — smoking — that has been scientifically proved to cause the cancer.

In precisely the same way, religious practices are likely to be markers of some other factor — for example, social support from family, friends or the community or, perhaps, the absence of behavioral risk factors — that may lower the risk of disease.

Studies that show, for example, the health benefits of attending worship services or reading the Bible often make this mistake. A study of residents of Washington County, Md. — the largest study ever to demonstrate that church attendance was associated with reduced mortality — made precisely this error; it failed to recognize that attendance itself was a marker for good health.

The effort to link health and religion has other problems as well. For one thing, doctors already have so little time in their interactions with patients that they routinely fail to follow established guidelines for preventive care and for treatment of chronic disease. If, in the future, physicians spend their limited time with patients engaging in spiritual inquiries, they will have even less time to address depression, smoking cessation, weight control or diabetes self-care — factors that are demonstrably related to disease and an increased risk of mortality.

More problematic still is the actual effect on patients when physicians abuse the privileged authority inherent in the role of the doctor by manipulating the religious sentiments of frightened and vulnerable patients. Physicians risk transgressing other ethical boundaries when they tell their patients that religious practices can improve their health. Asserting that prayer can promote recovery can lead patients who fare poorly to question their spiritual devotion and to experience guilt and remorse over their supposed religious failures.

Perhaps most important of all, efforts to connect religion and medical practice are bad for religion itself. Bringing religion to the examining table subjects it to the laws of science, stripping away all elements of transcendence.

A recent report, for instance, suggesting that religious experience is based on the neurochemistry of the serotonin system in the brain is a perfect example of how religion is trivialized by studying it scientifically.

The same goes for efforts to use modern neuroimaging techniques to take a "photograph of God," as proposed by University of Pennsylvania neurologist Andrew Newberg,

(continued on page 7)

Falwell's Flub

Jerry-rigged policy opens door for Pagan proselytizing in Virginia public school

by Rob Boston, *Americans United blog*, 12/5/2006

A group of Pagans in Albemarle County, Va., was recently given permission to advertise their multi-cultural holiday program to public school children — and they have the Rev. Jerry Falwell to thank for it.

The dispute started last summer when Gabriel and Joshua Rakoski, twins who attend Hollymead Elementary School, sought permission to distribute fliers about their church's Vacation Bible School to their peers via "backpack mail." Many public schools use special folders placed in student backpacks to distribute notices about schools events and sometimes extra-curricular activities to parents.

School officials originally denied the request from the twins' father, Ray Rakoski, citing a school policy barring "distribution of literature that is for partisan, sectarian, religious or political purposes."

A Charlottesville weekly newspaper, *The Hook*, reports that Rakoski "sicked the Liberty Counsel on the county," and the policy was soon revised to allow religious groups to use the backpack mail system. Liberty Counsel is a Religious Right legal group founded by Mathew Staver and now affiliated with Falwell.

Some local Pagans who attend Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church, a Unitarian-Universalist congregation in Charlottesville, decided to take advantage of the new forum as well. They created a one-page flier advertising a Dec. 9 event celebrating the December holidays with a Pagan twist and used the backpack system to invite the entire school community.

"Have you ever wondered what 'Holidays' refers to?" reads the flier. "Everyone knows about Christmas — but what else are people celebrating in December? Why do we celebrate the way we do?"

The flier invites people to "an educational program for children of all ages (and their adults), where we'll explore the traditions of December and their origins, followed by a Pagan ritual to celebrate Yule."

It concludes, "Come for one or both parts and bring your curiosity."

Many members of this congregation are strong supporters of church-state separation who don't believe public schools should promote any religion. But they were also unwilling to cede the field to Falwell and his fundamentalist allies. Falwell opened the backpack forum, and the Pagans were determined to secure equal time.

Suddenly not everyone was pleased by the open forum. Jeff Riddle, pastor of Jefferson Park Baptist Church in Charlottesville, wrote on his personal blog, "If the school allows the Baptist or Methodist church to send home a note to its students about Vacation Bible School, it also has to allow the Unitarian Church to send home a note about its 'Pagan ritual to celebrate Yule'.... This kind of note adds weight to the argument that it is high time for Christians to leave public schools for reasonable alternatives (homeschooling and private Christian schools)."

Another conservative Christian blogger in the county complained about finding the flier in her child's folder. Apparently unaware of Falwell's role in bringing it about, the blogger who goes by the name Cathy, noted disclaimer language at the bottom of the flier noting that the event is not connected to the school and wrote, "They [the school officials] aren't endorsing or sponsoring this? Then it shouldn't have been included in the Friday folders. The Friday folders have never been used for any thing other than school work and school board and/or County sanctioned/sponsored programs."

She then fumed that a "pagan ritual" is "an educational experience my children don't need."

Well, Cathy and Jeff, it's a new day. Your pals Falwell and Staver have opened up this forum, and now everyone gets to use it. Isn't that what you wanted all along — freedom of religion? That freedom means all religions — even ones you don't happen to like.

Doctor's Aren't Chaplains...

(continued from page 6)

the author of a recent book on "neurotheology." That represents precisely the false idolatry that many religions caution us to avoid.

All of us, sooner or later, will succumb to illness and death. Some will die prematurely. Others will live longer than expected. For many, illness will raise important religious and spiritual concerns, providing comfort to some and anxiety to others.

No one disputes the significance of these concerns, but recognizing that they arise in times of illness doesn't mean that doctors should take them on as part of their responsibility. These are matters for patients, their families and the ordained clergy.

Christian Video Game “is a Force for Evil”

by Ruth Gledhill, *UK Times*, 12/6/2006

A video game that depicts a crusade of violence by Christians could be heading for the bestseller charts this Christmas, even though it has been condemned by Muslims and secularists.

The game, **Left Behind: Eternal Forces**, is set in post-apocalyptic New York and features God's army battling the Antichrist.

Based on *Left Behind*, the bestselling Christian fantasy book series created by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, it puts players in command of brainwashed legions fighting for Christianity.

Players are ordered to convert or kill to advance to the next level and remodel America as a Christian-controlled state, and establish its world vision of Christ's dominion.

They pit battles between the paramilitary Christian Tribulation Force and the grey, faceless, Global Community Peacekeepers of the Antichrist, said to be modelled on the United Nations. The fantasy is based on what might happen if the events of the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, happened today.

Critics accuse its creators of mixing religion and violence to appeal to teenage fans of violent games such as **Grand Theft Auto**.

The game was sold originally in the US. British outlets are releasing the game for the Christmas market. The *Left Behind* books have sold more than 63 million copies.

Muslim groups have denounced the game as portraying Islam as evil and accuse its creators of insulting their faith. The **Muslim Association of Britain** called for the game to be banned, describing it as evil.

It said: “This game is irresponsible and highly racist. It demonises every other religion which isn't Christianity. People must boycott this violent game.

“Games like this poison the minds of young people.”

Terry Sanderson, the president of the **National Secular Society**, said: “Fundamentalists on both the Christian and the Muslim side are creating this kind of nasty, extreme propaganda and aiming it at young people. I'm not into banning things or censoring them, but I think most Muslims and most Christians would recognise that this is crude and despicable hate-mongering and give it a wide berth.”

The creators of the game have dismissed the criticism, saying that the religious storyline in the game is not taken from the Bible and is a creation of the *Left Behind* authors, which should not be taken seriously.

Dalai Lama Says Secularism is the True Route to Happiness

by National Secular Society,
Newsline, 11/17/2006

[http://www.secularism.org.uk/
dalailamasayssecularismisthetrue.html](http://www.secularism.org.uk/dalailamasayssecularismisthetrue.html)

The Dalai Lama has come out in defence of secularism. Speaking in Tokyo, the Tibetan spiritual figurehead said: “Secularism does not mean rejection of all religions. It means respect for all religions and human beings including non-believers. I am talking to you not as a Tibetan or a Buddhist but as a human being having a friendly discussion and sharing my experiences on the benefits of cultivating basic human values.”

In a lecture on “A Good Heart — The key to Health and Happiness” the Dalai Lama emphasises that cultivating secular ethics — which he said has nothing to do with religion — benefits all human beings. He said strengthening inner values of warm-heartedness and compassion benefits both believers and non-believers in leading a happy and meaningful life. He said, “Love and compassion attracts, hatred and anger repels.” He also appealed for nuclear disarmament and that the 21st century should be made a century of dialogue.

Underlining the importance of internal and external values for a happy life, he said Japan has the potential to combine both values with its rich spiritual tradition and technological progress. “You have a rich spiritual tradition. The Shinto values of protecting nature and respect for the environment are relevant to this day. Buddhism as Japan's traditional religion teaches humane values.”

Responding to a question from the audience, he said Japan is the most relevant nation in taking the lead towards abolition of nuclear weapons as the country had suffered the deadly impacts of history's first nuclear weapon. He also called for a complete ban on arms sales especially to undemocratic nations. “Peace does not mean absence of conflicts. Differences will always be there. Peace means solving these differences through peaceful means; through dialogue, education, knowledge; through humane ways,” the Dalai Lama said amidst a thunderous applause.

Terry Sanderson, president of the **National Secular Society**, said: “It is not often that we can raise a cheer for a religious leader, but the Dalai Lama is sensible to say that a universal ethic is better than one based on religion. Secularism asks us to keep our religion to ourselves, which enables us as human beings to share what unites us rather than what divides us.”

My Pledge

by Michael Moore, 11/17/2006

I WOULD LIKE TO extend an olive branch. Those of you who consider yourselves conservative and usually vote Republican have not had a very good couple of weeks. Trust me, I know how this feels.

In fact, those of us on the other side of the fence don't really know what it's like to win, so if we seem a bit awkward right now (were we supposed to vote for the majority leader the speaker said to vote for, or stick to our promise to the other guy?), forgive us.

I know you are dismayed at the results of last week's election. You've got to be freaking out about what this bunch of tree-hugging, latte-sipping, men-kissing-men advocates will do now that the country is in our hands. I don't blame you. We'd never admit it, but we secretly admire you because you know how to chop down a tree, take your coffee black and enjoy watching women kissing women. Good on you!

What I don't want is for you to drop into the deep funk we liberals have been in for two-plus decades. Yes, your Republican revolution is over, but hang in there. And do not despair. I, and the millions who voted for Democrats, have no interest in revenge for the last 12 years. In fact, let me make 12 promises as to how we will treat you, the minority, in the coming years.

Thus, here is "A Liberal's Pledge to Disheartened Conservatives":

1) We will always respect you. We will never, ever, call you "unpatriotic" simply because you disagree with us. In fact, we encourage you to dissent and disagree with us.

2) We will let you marry whomever you want (even though some among us consider your Republican behavior to be "different" or "immoral"). Who you marry is none of our business. Love, and be in love — it's a wonderful gift.

3) We will not spend your grandchildren's money on our personal whims or to enrich our friends. It's your checkbook too, and we will balance it for you.

4) When we soon bring our sons and daughters home from Iraq, we will bring your sons and daughters home too. We promise never to send your kids off to war based on some amateur Power Point presentation cooked up by men who have never been to war.

5) When we make America the last Western democracy to have universal health coverage, and all Americans are able to get help when they fall ill, we promise that you too will be able to see a doctor, regardless of your ability to pay. And when stem cell research delivers treatments and cures for diseases that afflict you and your loved ones, we'll make sure those advances are available to you and your family too.

6) When we clean up our air and water, you too will be able to breathe the cleaner air and drink the purer water. When we put an end to global warming, you will no longer have to think about buying oceanfront property in Yuma.

7) Should a mass murderer ever kill 3,000 people on our soil, we will devote every single resource to tracking him down and bringing him to justice. Immediately. We will protect you.

8) We will never stick our nose in your bedroom or your womb. What you do there as consenting adults is your business. We will continue to count your age from the moment you were born, not the moment you were conceived.

9) We will not take away your hunting guns. If you need an automatic weapon or a handgun to kill a bird or a deer, then you really aren't much of a hunter and you should, perhaps, take up another sport. In the meantime, we will arm the deer to make it a fairer fight.

10) When we raise the minimum wage, we will raise it for your employees too. They will use that money to buy more things, which means you will get the money back! And when women are finally paid what men make, we will pay conservative women that wage too.

11) We will respect your religious beliefs, even when you don't practice those beliefs. In fact, we will actively seek to promote your most radical religious beliefs ("Blessed are the peacemakers," "Love your enemies," "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" and "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me"). We will let people in other countries know that God doesn't just bless America, he blesses everyone. We will discourage religious intolerance and fanaticism — starting here at home.

12) We will not tolerate politicians who are corrupt and break the law. And we promise you we will go after the corrupt politicians on our side first. If we fail to do this, we need you to call us on it. Simply because we are in power does not give us the right to turn our heads the other way when our party goes astray. Please perform this important duty as the loyal opposition.

I promise all of the above to you because this is your country too. You are every bit as American as we are. We are all in this together. We sink or swim as one. Thank you for your years of service to this country and for giving us the opportunity to see if we can make things a bit better for our 300 million fellow Americans — and for the rest of the world.

Now pull yourself together and let's go have a Frappuccino.

Newspaper Letter

Statesman-Journal, Salem OR, 10/30/06

President continues to be a threat to democracy in U.S.

Soon, George Bush will have caused as many U.S. deaths as were suffered on 9/11. Such tragic loss might be necessary in a just, defensive war — which the Iraq war is not.

The Bush administration used 9/11 so they could attack Iraq, create a puppet state and control Middle East politics and oil. Completely misunderstanding the nature of the region, their blunders have had the exact opposite effect: made the oil supply more unstable, created more terrorists, made Shiite Iran dominant and markedly increased the danger for the U.S. and the world.

I'm proud of our brave troops, doing a magnificent job under extremely difficult circumstances. However, this lieutenant colonel, USMC (retired) bitterly resents the 23,000 casualties, taken by my comrades-in-arms because of Bush's unnecessary rush to war.

The president preaches democracy to others but constantly curtails it with illegal king-like powers, undermining the Constitution with warrantless searches, due-process restrictions, approving torture and rendition, destroying habeas corpus, etc.

How much more can real patriots take? Impeach the president. Vote out the congressional members who support war or freedom restrictions. Defend the Constitution. Save our checks and balances. Remember, one more Hush-nominated Supreme Court Justice and our democratic republic is lost.

— Josh Reese [CSS Member], Salem

Church No Longer Swears...

(continued from page 5)

They say people today are searching for what is worthwhile, what has real value, what can be trusted and what is really true.

The new teaching has been issued as part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of Dei Verbum, the Second Vatican Council document explaining the place of Scripture in revelation. In the past 40 years, Catholics have learnt more than ever before to cherish the Bible. "We have rediscovered the Bible as a precious treasure, both ancient and ever new."

A Christian charity is sending a film about the Christmas story to every primary school in Britain after hearing of a young boy who asked his teacher why Mary and Joseph had named their baby after a swear word. The Breakout Trust raised £200,000 to make the 30-minute animated film, It's a Boy. Steve Legg, head of the charity, said: "There are over 12 million children in the UK and only 756,000 of them go to church regularly.

That leaves a staggering number who are probably not receiving basic Christian teaching."

"Merry Christmas" is starting to sound more threatening than jolly — are the well-wishers really wishing me well, or are they reminding me that we live in a Christian nation and I had better get used to it?"

— Lauren Hayden,
Minnesota Daily

To Join or Subscribe:

If you enjoy reading this newsletter, and are concerned about the growing threat to the principle of Separation of Church and State in this country, then please consider joining Corvallis Secular Society, subscribing to this newsletter, or making a donation:

Newsletter subscription: \$18/year (\$1.50/month)

Full CSS membership: \$30/year (\$2.50/month)
(includes newsletter)

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS OUT TO "CSS", AND MAIL TO OUR TREASURER (SEE BOTTOM-RIGHT SECTION).

Memberships and newsletter subscriptions are on a calendar-year basis (i.e. they always expire in December), and we prefer they not be renewed for more than one year at a time. People subscribing mid-year only need to pay for the remaining issues for that year. This is to keep our bookkeeping as simple as possible.

Thank you for supporting our efforts to promote atheism, humanism, and freethought in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

Contacting Us:

<p>President</p> <p>Use this address for: Comments/questions about CSS. (Please NO payments).</p>	<p>John S. Dearing 126 NW 21st St. Corvallis, OR. 97330 (541) 754-2557 President@CorvallisSecular.org</p>
<p>Vice President / Editor</p> <p>Use this address for: newsletter submissions.</p>	<p>Reed H. Byers 3035 SE 24th Ave. Albany, OR. 97322 (541) 924-9128 Editor@CorvallisSecular.org</p>
<p>Treasurer / Webmaster</p> <p>Use this address for: Membership/subscription payments, or comments about the CSS web page.</p>	<p>Angela C. Byers 3035 SE 24th Ave. Albany, OR 97322 (541) 924-9128 Webmaster@CorvallisSecular.org</p>

Disclaimer: This newsletter contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in our efforts to advance understanding of humanist, environmental, political, human rights, economic, democracy, scientific, and social justice issues, etc. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material in this newsletter is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml> If you wish to use copyrighted material from this newsletter for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.