



Willamette Freethinker



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

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

FBI Investigates Missing GOP Money

by Philip Shenon, *New York Times*, 3/6/2008

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of thousands of dollars are missing and presumed stolen from the chief fund-raising arm of House Republicans, according to party officials who described the findings of emergency internal audits.

The financial records of the group, the National Republican Congressional Committee, may also have been falsified for several years, Republican officials said. The campaign committees of several Republican lawmakers may also have been victims of a scam that is now under criminal investigation by the F.B.I.

The audits were ordered after the abrupt departure several weeks ago of Christopher J. Ward, who had been treasurer of the committee. Lawmakers said that Mr. Ward, who served a similar role for dozens of individual members of Congress and their political committees, is the focus of the F.B.I.'s criminal investigation.

The committee has acknowledged publicly that it was aware of "irregularities in our financial audit process" and that it had called in the F.B.I. in February because "these irregularities may include fraud."

But until now the committee has not acknowledged that any money was missing from its bank accounts or that the financial irregularities might extend beyond the national committee to the campaign funds of individual Republican lawmakers who also worked with Mr. Ward, a longtime party operative.

The Republican officials said they could not discuss the details of their findings on the record because of the continuing criminal investigation.

The officials said the fund-raising committee had since determined that its books had not been audited since 2003 and that Mr. Ward had submitted a series of falsified audits.

(continued on page 7)

From the Editor A Geeky Tribute

I simply must note the passing of one of geekdom's greatest heroes. Co-founder of TSR Inc, co-creator of Dungeons and Dragons (and by extension, the entire role-playing genre), **Ernest Gary Gygax**, failed his saving throw vs disease, and died on March 4, at the age of 69.



You cannot be my age without at least being AWARE of D&D, and you cannot be a GEEK my age without having played it — alot — in it's many different incarnations.

My life would have been much poorer, had it not been for this man. So thanks, Gary. Here's hoping that in your next life, you roll better stats...

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

CSS Meetings and Events

This month, CSS member Stephen Hawkes will be speaking about his experiences being raised a Mormon in Britain, and teaching at Brigham Young University.

Calendar:

Saturday, Mar 15 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Apr 19 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, May 17 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting

Regular meeting time:

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

Regular meeting location:

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

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From the President

How Does American Elementary and Secondary Education Compare with that of Other Nations?

The United States is the richest nation on Earth. We can afford to create an educational system that is second to none. So how do we compare to other countries? Not well, unfortunately.

This question is addressed in the article, "How They Do It Abroad," by Linda Darling-Hammond (*Time*, February 14, 2008)⁽¹⁾. (Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun professor of education at Stanford University.) She notes that top-quality teachers are the most important resource for improving education. She writes:

The highest-achieving countries — Finland, Sweden, Ireland, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Canada — have been pouring resources into teacher training and support. These countries routinely prepare their teachers more extensively, pay them well in relation to competing occupations and give them lots of time for professional learning....

All teacher candidates in Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands, for example, receive two to three years of graduate-level preparation for teaching, at government expense, plus a living stipend. Unlike the U.S., where teachers either go into debt to prepare for a profession that will pay them poorly or enter with little or no training, these countries made the decision to invest in a uniformly well-prepared teaching force by recruiting top candidates and paying them while they receive extensive training. With its steep climb in the international rankings, Finland has been a poster child for school improvement. Teachers learn how to create programs that engage students in research and inquiry on a regular basis....

Singapore, top-ranked in math by the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, treats teaching similarly. When I visited Singapore's National Institute of Education, the nation's only teacher-training institution, nearly all the people I spoke with described how they were investing in teachers' abilities to teach a curriculum focused on critical thinking and inquiry — skills needed in a high-tech economy. To get the best teachers, the institute recruits students

from the top third of each graduating high school class into a fully paid four-year teacher-education program (or, if they enter later, a one-to-two-year graduate program) and puts them on the government's payroll. When they enter the profession, teachers' salaries are higher than those of beginning doctors.

Expert teachers are given time to serve as mentors to help beginners learn their craft. The government pays for 100 hours of professional development each year for all teachers. In addition, they have 20 hours a week to work with other teachers and visit one another's classrooms.... In a study of mathematics teaching and learning in Japan, Taiwan and the U.S., James Stigler and Harold Stevenson noted that "Asian class lessons are so well crafted [because] there is a very systematic effort to pass on the accumulated wisdom of teaching practice to each new generation of teachers and to keep perfecting that practice by providing teachers the opportunities to continually learn from each other."

Finland's success in education is detailed in "Finnish Way to Education Excellence," by Walter Gardner (*Providence Journal*, February 27, 2008)⁽²⁾. (Walter Gardner taught English in Los Angeles for 28 years and was a lecturer in the UCLA School of Education.) He notes that Finland's 15-year olds placed No. 1 in math and science on the recent Program for International Student Assessment. He writes:

At the heart of Finland's stellar reputation is a philosophy completely alien to America. The country of 5.3 million in an area twice the size of Missouri considers education an end in itself — not a means to an end. It's a deeply rooted value that is reflected in the Ministry of Education and in all 432 municipalities. In sharp contrast, Americans view education as a stepping stone to better-paying jobs or to impress others. The distinction explains why we are obsessed with marquee names, and how we structure, operate and fund schools....

One of the major reasons for the job satisfaction that Finnish teachers report is the great freedom they enjoy in their instructional practices. As long as they

adhere to the core national curriculum, teachers are granted latitude unheard of in the U.S. The scripted lesson plans that teachers here are increasingly being expected to follow would be rejected out of hand as an insult by teachers in Finland and by their powerful union, which has a growing membership of some 117,500 members.

If none of these facts are enough to raise doubts about the policies the U.S. has in place or on the drawing board, Finland's testing practices should raise a final red flag. The Finns do not administer national standardized tests during the nine years of basic education. Instead, the National Board of Education assesses learning on the basis of a sample representing about 10 percent of a stipulated age group. Individual school results are strictly confidential, and schools are neither ranked nor compared. The data collected are available only to the schools in question and to the National Board of Education, which use them to help improve instruction. The naming and shaming that No Child Left Behind relies on in its obsession with quantification would be unthinkable.

What ultimately emerges from studying Finland is the realization that the reform movement in America is based on a business model fundamentally at odds with the education model used by a country with the world's finest schools. While it's always risky to attempt to apply findings from one country to another, particularly when the two are so different, it's a mistake to turn our backs on Finland's approach.

My suggestions for improving America's educational system

1. Change our spending priorities. Education at all levels should be well-funded, and free. This should be considered an investment and a necessity, not a luxury. Where is our great wealth actually going? Much of it is wasted, in my view. As just one example, when all the costs are considered, we are spending *trillions* of dollars on Bush's War in Iraq. What is the return on this investment? Yet we are spending relatively little domestically, except to build ever more prisons. (In mathematics and science testing, our children rank near the bottom. But America *is* the world's number one incarcerator.)
2. Recruit top students to education, subsidize their training, and pay them a competitive wage when they

begin to teach. Our nation faces a shortage of teaching talent, in part due to the retirement of the baby-boomer teachers. Good pay can help stem the flood of new teachers, especially the best and brightest, who leave the profession after only a few years.

3. Honor education and educators. We should want the best teachers possible for our children, because our children's futures are influenced by the education they receive. Research suggests that a good teacher is the single most important factor in boosting achievement.
4. Mentor new teachers. Provide teachers with adequate professional development and with the time to work with other teachers.
5. Get rid of our obsession with testing, quantifying and ranking children and schools, such as is found in the No Child Left Behind Act.
6. Make sure that teachers, especially in the higher grades, have a deep knowledge of the subject they teach. How can a teacher effectively teach high school biology, for instance, without having a thorough grounding in biology?
7. Make available and fully fund the complete range of classes appropriate for our schools. Besides solid offerings in mathematics, science, and language, it is important, for example, to provide art, music, drama, and physical education.
8. Every child has the right to an education that is free from superstition. To the best of our ability, education should be reality-based: grounded in science and in good scholarship. Hence religious schools and home schooling should not be allowed. Superstition, religion, dogma, faith, and creed are the antithesis, and hence the enemy, of education. Free inquiry and free thought are the prerequisites to a true education, as opposed to mere schooling, training, or indoctrination.

Your suggestions

Which suggestions above make sense to you? Which don't? And what other ideas do you have to improve our educational system? This is an important topic, and particularly so in an election year. Those we elect at all levels will have a great influence on the course of education in the years to come. Vote wisely.

John Dearing
President of CSS

Footnotes:

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1713557,00.html>

⁽²⁾ http://www.projo.com/opinion/contributors/content/CT_gardner27_02-27-08_C48VQ41_v12.39b8f4d.html

Hillary's Prayer:

Hillary Clinton's Religion and Politics

by Kathryn Joyce and Jeff Sharlet, *Mother Jones*, 9/1/2007

It was an elegant example of the Clinton style, a rhetorical maneuver subtle, bold, and banal all at once. During a Democratic candidate forum in June, hosted by the liberal evangelical group Sojourners, Hillary Clinton fielded a softball query about Bill's infidelity: How had her faith gotten her through the Lewinsky scandal?

After a glancing shot at Republican "pharisees," Clinton explained that, of course, her "very serious" grounding in faith had helped her weather the affair. But she had also relied on the "extended faith family" that came to her aid, "people whom I knew who were literally praying for me in prayer chains, who were prayer warriors for me."

Such references to spiritual warfare — prayer as battle against Satan, evil, and sin — might seem like heavy evangelical rhetoric for the senator from New York, but they went over well with the Sojourners audience, as did her call to "inject faith into policy." It was language that recalled Clinton's Jesus moment a year earlier, when she'd summoned the Bible to decry a Republican anti-immigrant initiative that she said would "criminalize the good Samaritan...and even Jesus himself." Liberal Christians crowed ("Hillary Clinton Shows the Way Democrats Can Use the Bible," declared a blogger at TPMCafe) while conservative pundits cried foul, accusing Clinton of scoring points with a faith not really her own.

In fact, Clinton's God talk is more complicated — and more deeply rooted — than either fans or foes would have it, a revelation not just of her determination to out-Jesus the gop, but of the powerful religious strand in her own politics. Over the past year, we've interviewed dozens of Clinton's friends, mentors, and pastors about her faith, her politics, and how each shapes the other. And while media reports tend to characterize Clinton's subtle recalibration of tone and style as part of the Democrats' broader move to recapture the terrain of "moral values," those who know her say there's far more to it than that.

Through all of her years in Washington, Clinton has been an active participant in conservative Bible study and prayer circles that are part of a secretive Capitol Hill group known as the Fellowship. Her collaborations with right-wingers such as Senator Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) and

former Senator Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) grow in part from that connection. "A lot of evangelicals would see that as just cynical exploitation," says the Reverend Rob Schenk, a former leader of the militant anti-abortion group Operation Rescue who now ministers to decision makers in Washington. "I don't....there is a real good that is infected in people when they are around Jesus talk, and open Bibles, and prayer."



For 15 years, Hillary Clinton has been part of a secretive religious group that seeks to bring Jesus back to Capitol Hill. Is she triangulating — or living her faith?

Clinton's faith is grounded in the Methodist beliefs she grew up with in Park Ridge, Illinois, a conservative Chicago suburb where she was active in her church's altar guild, Sunday school, and youth group. It was there, in 1961, that she met the Reverend Don Jones, a 30-year-old youth pastor; Jones, a friend of Clinton's to this day, told us he knows "more about Hillary Clinton's faith than anybody outside her family."

Because Jones introduced Clinton and her teenage peers to the civil rights movement and modern poetry and art, Clinton biographers often cast him as a proto-'60s liberal who sowed seeds of

radicalism throughout Park Ridge. Jones, though, describes his theology as neoorthodox, guided by the belief that social change should come about slowly and without radical action. It emerged, he says, as a third way, a reaction against both separatist fundamentalism and the New Deal's labor-based liberalism.

Under Jones' mentorship, Clinton learned about Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich — thinkers whom liberals consider their own, but whom young Hillary Rodham encountered as theological conservatives. The Niebuhr she studied was a cold warrior, dismissive of the progressive politics of his earlier writing. "He'd thought that once we were unionized, the kingdom of God would be ushered in," Jones explains. "But the effect of those two world wars and the violence that they produced shook his faith in liberal theology. He came to believe that the achievement of justice meant a clear understanding of the limitations of the human condition." Tillich, whose sermon on grace Clinton turned to during the Lewinsky scandal, today enjoys a following among conservatives for revising the social gospel — the notion that Christians are to improve humanity's lot here on earth by fighting poverty, inequality, and exploitation — to emphasize individual redemption instead of activism.

Niebuhr and Tillich's combination of aggressiveness in foreign affairs and limited domestic ambition naturally led Clinton toward the gop. She was a Goldwater Girl who, under the tutelage of her high school history teacher Paul Carlson (whom Jones describes as "to the right of the John Birchers"), attended biweekly anticommunist meetings and later served as president of Wellesley's Young Republicans chapter. Out of step with the era's radicalism, Clinton wrote Jones from college, lamenting that her fellow students didn't believe that one could be "a mind conservative and a heart liberal." To Jones, this question indicated that Clinton shared Niebuhr's notion of Christians needing to have "a dark enough view of life that they can be realistic about what's possible."

Two decades later, while Bill was campaigning for president, Clinton picked up that theme once more, displaying a theological depth that conservative believers could appreciate. In an interview with the United Methodist Reporter, she expressed regret that her church had focused too much on social gospel concerns in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, "to the exclusion of personal faith and growth." The spirit, believe theological conservatives, matters more than the flesh. Clinton added that she was happy to see her liberal denomination becoming more salvation centered in the '90s.

When Clinton first came to Washington in 1993, one of her first steps was to join a Bible study group. For the next eight years, she regularly met with a Christian "cell" whose members included Susan Baker, wife of Bush consigliere James Baker; Joanne Kemp, wife of conservative icon Jack Kemp; Eileen Bakke, wife of Dennis Bakke, a leader in the anti-union Christian management movement; and Grace Nelson, the wife of Senator Bill Nelson, a conservative Florida Democrat.

Clinton's prayer group was part of the Fellowship (or "the Family"), a network of sex-segregated cells of political, business, and military leaders dedicated to "spiritual war" on behalf of Christ, many of them recruited at the Fellowship's only public event, the annual National Prayer Breakfast. (Aside from the breakfast, the group has "made a fetish of being invisible," former Republican Senator William Armstrong has said.) The Fellowship believes that the elite win power by the will of God, who uses them for his purposes. Its mission is to help the powerful understand their role in God's plan.

Clinton declined our requests for an interview about her faith, but in *Living History*, she describes her first encounter with Fellowship leader Doug Coe at a 1993 lunch with her prayer cell at the Cedars, the Fellowship's majestic estate on the Potomac. Coe, she writes, "is a unique presence in Washington: a genuinely loving spiritual mentor and guide to anyone, regardless of party or faith, who wants to deepen his or her relationship with God."

The Fellowship's ideas are essentially a blend of Calvinism and Norman Vincent Peale, the 1960s preacher of positive thinking. It's a cheery faith in the "elect" chosen by a single voter — God — and a devotion to Romans 13:1: "Let every

soul be subject unto the higher powers....The powers that be are ordained of God." Or, as Coe has put it, "we work with power where we can, build new power where we can't."

When Time put together a list of the nation's 25 most powerful evangelicals in 2005, the heading for Coe's entry was "The Stealth Persuader." "You know what I think of when I think of Doug Coe?" the Reverend Schenck (a Coe admirer) asked us. "I think literally of the guy in the smoky back room that you can't even see his face. He sits in the corner, and you see the cigar, and you see the flame, and you hear his voice — but you never see his face. He's that shadowy figure."

Coe has been an intimate of every president since Ford, but he rarely imposes on chief executives, who see him as a slightly mystical but apolitical figure. Rather, Coe uses his access to the Oval Office as currency with lesser leaders. "If Doug Coe can get you some face time with the President of the United States," one official told the author of a Princeton study of the National Prayer Breakfast last year, "then you will take his call and seek his friendship. That's power."

"If you're going to do religion in public life," concurs Schenck, a Jewish convert to fundamentalist Christianity who's retained his sense of irony, Coe's friendship is a kind of "kosher...seal of approval."

Coe's friends include former Attorney General John Ashcroft, Reaganite Edwin Meese III, and ultraconservative Rep. Joe Pitts (R-Pa.). Under Coe's guidance, Meese has hosted weekly prayer breakfasts for politicians, businesspeople, and diplomats, and Pitts rose from obscurity to head the House Values Action Team, an off-the-record network of religious right groups and members of Congress created by Tom DeLay. The corresponding Senate Values Action Team is guided by another Coe protégé, Brownback, who also claims to have recruited King Abdullah of Jordan into a regular study of Jesus' teachings.

The Fellowship's long-term goal is "a leadership led by God — leaders of all levels of society who direct projects as they are led by the spirit." According to the Fellowship's archives, the spirit has in the past led its members in Congress to increase U.S. support for the Duvalier regime in Haiti and the Park dictatorship in South Korea. The Fellowship's God-led men have also included General Suharto of Indonesia; Honduran general and death squad organizer Gustavo Alvarez Martinez; a Deutsche Bank official disgraced by financial ties to Hitler; and dictator Siad Barre of Somalia, plus a list of other generals and dictators. Clinton, says Schenck, has become a regular visitor to Coe's Arlington, Virginia, headquarters, a former convent where Coe provides members of Congress with sex-segregated housing and spiritual guidance.

We contacted all of Clinton's Fellowship cell mates, but only one agreed to speak — though she stressed that there's much she's not "at liberty" to reveal. Grace Nelson used to be the organizer of the Florida Governor's Prayer Breakfast,

which makes her a piety broker in Florida politics — she would decide who could share the head table with Jeb Bush. Clinton's prayer cell was tight-knit, according to Nelson, who recalled that one of her conservative prayer partners was at first loath to pray for the first lady, but learned to "love Hillary as much as any of us love Hillary." Cells like these, Nelson added, exist in "parliaments all over the world," with all welcome so long as they submit to "the person of Jesus" as the source of their power.

Throughout her time at the White House, Clinton writes in *Living History*, she took solace from "daily scriptures" sent to her by her Fellowship prayer cell, along with Coe's assurances that she was right where God wanted her. (Clinton's sense of divine guidance has been noted by others: Bishop Richard Wilke, who presided over the United Methodist Church of Arkansas during her years in Little Rock, told us, "If I asked Hillary, 'What does the Lord want you to do?' she would say, 'I think I'm called by the Lord to be in public service at whatever level he wants me.'")

Coe counsels that Fellowship cells shouldn't engage in direct evangelical activism, but rather allow Christian causes to benefit from the bonds that develop within the cells. Former Nixon counsel Chuck Colson provides a rare illustration of the process in his 1976 *Watergate* memoir, *Born Again*. Facing prosecution in 1973, Colson allowed Coe to ensconce him in a Fellowship cell with a Nixon foe, Senator Harold Hughes. Hughes became the Nixon hatchet man's staunchest defender, voting in favor of a possible pardon for Colson and later supporting Colson as he built Prison Fellowship, now one of the most powerful organizations of the Christian right.

That's how it works: The Fellowship isn't out to turn liberals into conservatives; rather, it convinces politicians they can transcend left and right with an ecumenical faith that rises above politics. Only the faith is always evangelical, and the politics always move rightward.

This is in line with the Christian right's long-term strategy. Francis Schaeffer, late guru of the movement, coined the term "cobelligerency" to describe the alliances evangelicals must forge with conservative Catholics. Colson, his most influential disciple, has refined the concept of cobelligerency to deal with less-than-pure politicians. In this application, conservatives sit pretty and wait for liberals looking for common ground to come to them. Clinton, Colson told us, "has a lot of history" to overcome, but he sees her making the right moves.

These days, Clinton has graduated from the political wives' group into what may be Coe's most elite cell, the weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast. Though weighted Republican, the breakfast — regularly attended by about 40 members — is a bipartisan opportunity for politicians to burnish their reputations, giving Clinton the chance to profess her faith with men such as Brownback as well as the twin terrors of Oklahoma, James Inhofe and Tom Coburn, and, until recently, former Senator George Allen (R-Va.). Democrats in the group include Arkansas Senator Mark Pryor, who told

us that the separation of church and state has gone too far; Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) is also a regular.

Unlikely partnerships have become a Clinton trademark. Some are symbolic, such as her support for a ban on flag burning with Senator Bob Bennett (R-Utah) and funding for research on the dangers of video games with Brownback and Santorum. But Clinton has also joined the gop on legislation that redefines social justice issues in terms of conservative morality, such as an anti-human-trafficking law that withheld funding from groups working on the sex trade if they didn't condemn prostitution in the proper terms. With Santorum, Clinton co-sponsored the Workplace Religious Freedom Act; she didn't back off even after Republican senators such as Pennsylvania's Arlen Specter pulled their names from the bill citing concerns that the measure would protect those refusing to perform key aspects of their jobs — say, pharmacists who won't fill birth control prescriptions, or police officers who won't guard abortion clinics.

Clinton has championed federal funding of faith-based social services, which she embraced years before George W. Bush did; Marci Hamilton, author of *God vs. the Gavel*, says that the Clintons' approach to faith-based initiatives "set the stage for Bush." Clinton has also long supported the Defense of Marriage Act, a measure that has become a purity test for any candidate wishing to avoid war with the Christian right.

Liberal rabbi Michael Lerner, whose "politics of meaning" Clinton made famous in a speech early in her White House tenure, sees the senator's ambivalence as both more and less than calculated opportunism. He believes she has genuine sympathy for liberal causes — rights for women, gays, immigrants — but often will not follow through. "There is something in her that pushes her toward caring about others, as long as there's no price to pay. But in politics, there is a price to pay."

In politics, those who pay tribute to the powerful also reap rewards. When Ed Klein's attack bio, *The Truth About Hillary*, came out in 2005, some of her most prominent defenders were Christian conservatives, among them Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert Mohler. "Christians," he declared, "should repudiate this book and determine to take no pleasure in it."

Senator Brownback understood the temptation. He used to hate Clinton so much, he told us, that the hate hurt. Then came the Clintons' 1994 National Prayer Breakfast appearance with Mother Teresa, who upbraided the couple for their pro-choice views. Bill made no attempt to conceal his anger, but Hillary took it and smiled. Brownback remembers thinking, "Now, there's gotta be a great lesson here." He didn't know what it was until Clinton got to the Senate and joined him in supporting DeLay's Day of Reconciliation resolution following the 2000 election, a proposal described by its backers as a call to "pray for our leaders." Now, Brownback considers Clinton "a beautiful child of the living God."

Clinton, for her part, turned Mother Teresa's sucker punch into political opportunity. She met with the nun after the prayer breakfast, visited her orphanage in India, helped her set up another one in Washington (which has since become an apparently inoperative branch of Mother Teresa's conservative Vatican order, the Missionaries of Charity), and generally built a highly visible friendship with a figure whose moral bona fides also came with an anti-abortion imprimatur that couldn't but help Clinton on the right.

Of course, no matter how much Clinton speaks of common ground, she doesn't stand a chance of winning votes among pro-lifers. As Tom McClusky of the **Family Research Council**, command central for Washington's Christian right, told us, movement conservatives consider legislation like Clinton's Putting Prevention First Act, which supports greater access to birth control and sex ed, "just another condom giveaway."

But the senator's project isn't the conversion of her adversaries; it's tempering their opposition so she can court a new generation of Clinton Republicans, values voters who have grown estranged from the Christian right. And while such crossover conservatives may never agree with her on the old litmus-test issues, there is an important, and broader, common ground — the kind of faith-based politics that, under the right circumstances, will permit majority morality to trump individual rights. The libertarian Cato Institute recently observed that Clinton is "adding the paternalistic agenda of the religious right to her old-fashioned liberal paternalism." Clinton suggests as much herself in her 1996 book, *It Takes a Village*, where she writes approvingly of religious groups' access to schools, lessons in Scripture, and "virtue" making a return to the classroom.

Then, as now, Clinton confounded secularists who recognize public faith only when it comes wrapped in a cornpone accent. Clinton speaks instead the language of nondenominationalism — a sober, eloquent appreciation of "values," the importance of prayer, and "heart" convictions — which liberals, unfamiliar with the history of evangelical coalition building, mistake for a tidy, apolitical accommodation, a personal separation of church and state. Nor do skeptical voters looking for political opportunism recognize that, when Clinton seeks guidance among prayer partners such as Coe and Brownback, she is not so much triangulating — much as that may have become second nature — as honoring her convictions. In her own way, she is a true believer.

The very concept of sin comes from the bible. Christianity offers to solve a problem of its own making! Would you be thankful to a person who cut you with a knife in order to sell you a bandage?

— Dan Barker, *Losing Faith in Faith*

FBI Investigates...

(continued from page 1)

A lawyer for Mr. Ward, Ronald C. Machen of the Wilmer Hale law firm in Washington, had no comment. A spokeswoman for the F.B.I.'s Washington field office acknowledged that the bureau had opened an investigation at the request of the Republican committee.

The F.B.I. investigation comes at an especially awkward time for House Republicans, who are struggling to raise money for Congressional races in November.

Their job has been made even more difficult by the large number of Republican lawmakers — more than two dozen from the House — who have announced their retirements, and by a series of unrelated criminal and ethics investigations of other Congressional Republicans.

Mr. Ward had been treasurer of the national Republican committee since 2003. He had also been a partner in a private campaign consulting firm, Political Compliance Services, that gained notice in the 2004 presidential campaign because of its work on behalf of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, a group that ran advertisements that criticized the military record of Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, the Democratic presidential nominee.

Committee officials said that bookkeeping irregularities were discovered in January after the chairman of the panel's auditing committee, Representative Mike Conaway of Texas, a certified public accountant, repeatedly asked to meet with representatives of the audit firm that was supposed to be reviewing the committee's books.

"I just kept insisting that we meet with the auditors," Mr. Conaway said in an interview. "It finally came into my head, and as the circumstances unfolded, that no audit had been done."

He said that Mr. Ward had promised to set up a meeting with the auditors and scheduled the gathering in late January.

But 30 minutes before the scheduled meeting, committee officials said, Mr. Ward sent an e-mail message to colleagues announcing that, in fact, no audit had been done. The officials said the fund-raising committee had since determined that its books had not been audited since 2003 and that Mr. Ward had submitted a series of falsified audits. The committee then called in the F.B.I. It is not clear, lawmakers said, if any fees were paid to audit firms in recent years by the committee, or where that money ended up.

"This was a longtime trusted employee and there were no obvious signs that he was living beyond his means," Mr. Conaway said.

Mr. Conaway said that the many Republican lawmakers who used Mr. Ward for their campaign funds or for bookkeeping for their political action committees were now hurriedly reviewing their own books for evidence of missing money or other improprieties.

The Bias Against Atheists as Bad as Any Prejudice

by Cynthia Whitfield, *Eugene Register-Guard*, 2/11/2008

In a recent letter to the editor, a local man, self-identified as an atheist, bemoaned the fact that politics in this country are so intimately connected with religion. He was dismayed that not only the religious right, but also liberal Democrats, feel the need to go on record as being churchgoing Christians.

Indeed, Americans tend to be more religious than Europeans. Only 3 percent to 7 percent of Americans call themselves atheists, compared with 11.9 percent worldwide. A whopping 32 percent of the French are atheists; more than 30 percent are agnostics.

In some countries the exact number of atheists is hard to pinpoint, researchers say — some people are afraid to identify themselves as atheists because of perceived social stigma.

Americans are uneasy with atheists. A recent national survey conducted by the University of Minnesota shows most Americans distrust atheists — rating atheists below recent immigrants, gays and other minorities. Americans objected to their children marrying atheists more than any other minority, and 52 percent of Americans said they would not vote for a well-qualified atheist for president.

Such attitudes are “a glaring exception to the rule of increasing social tolerance over the last 30 years,” according to Penny Edgell, associate sociological professor and the study’s lead researcher.

Maybe so, but it does explain why candidates want to assure Americans of their piousness. Considering the small number of admitted atheists, it’s not surprising that many atheists, unlike the letter-writer, are afraid of coming out of the closet.

Although Oregon and Washington have the highest proportion of religiously unaffiliated and self-identified “nonreligious” residents, only 1.2 percent of all Oregonians describe themselves as agnostics, and even fewer claim to be atheists.

Atheists say they’re often misunderstood. For example, some people claim atheism is a religion or implies a particular worldview. But that’s inaccurate. Theism is the belief in God, while atheism is the absence of belief in God. Period. As atheists are quick to point out, there are no rituals, traditions, or agreed-upon set of values to live by. Instead, they believe, sound morality naturally results from compassion and logical reasoning. The wonder of nature can be appreciated, but nothing is worshipped. Beyond that, atheists are a diverse group.

In this country, religion is deeply intertwined with morality. Many people think it’s difficult, if not impossible, to live a moral and ethical life without a belief in God or a supernatural power greater than themselves.

It’s certainly true that many religious people volunteer their time, money and expertise to help others. It’s also true that many agnostics and atheists do the same. There is no reason to believe that people need the threat of God’s wrath to prompt them to live moral and ethical lives.

A look at history shows many people have perished under the direction of religious leaders. On the other hand, atheism doesn’t prevent evil; the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union is a good example. There is no point trying to determine whether religious or non-religious people have caused more destruction and mayhem. The point is that both good and evil can be found among any group of people.

The intrusion of religion in politics and education appears to be creating a more militant brand of atheists. There’s been a rash of best-selling atheist books lately, including “The God Delusion” by Richard Dawkins and “Letter to a Christian Nation” by Sam Harris. Both writers think unquestioning acceptance of religious beliefs leads to bad policy.

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Dawkins cites the suicide bombers as a current example of how belief in a better life after death can encourage people to hurt themselves and others in anticipation of other-worldly glory.

I think Dawkins goes too far. After all, religion is a source of comfort and inspiration for many people. Many, if not most, atheists feel some people truly need religion to help them navigate the maze of life. And that’s OK. There has to be some middle ground between believing that religion is the root of much evil and believing only religious people can lead moral lives.

In the end, we should accept without prejudice the fact that many good and competent people find themselves unable to believe in God. This won’t happen until we realize that religion is not necessarily connected to moral or ethical behavior.

America's Unfaithful Faithful

by David Van Biema, *Time Magazine*, 2/25/2008

A major new survey presents perhaps the most detailed picture we've yet had of which religious groups Americans belong to. And its big message is: blink and they'll change. For the first time, a large-scale study has quantified what many experts suspect: there is a constant membership turnover among most American faiths. America's religious culture, which is best known for its high participation rates, may now be equally famous (or infamous) for what the new report dubs "churn."

The report, released today by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, is the first selection of data from a 35,000-person poll called the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. Says Pew Forum director Luis Lugo, Americans "not only change jobs, change where they live, and change spouses, but they change religions too. We totally knew it was happening, but this survey enabled us to document it clearly."

According to Pew, 28% of American adults have left the faith of their childhood for another one. And that does not even include those who switched from one Protestant denomination to another; if it did, the number would jump to 44%. Says Greg Smith, one of the main researchers for the "Landscape" data, churn applies across the board. "There's no group that is simply winning or simply losing," he says. "Nothing is static. Every group is simultaneously winning and losing."

For some groups, their relatively steady number of adherents over the years hides a remarkable amount of coming and going. Simply counting Catholics since 1972, for example, you would get the impression that its population had remained fairly static — at about 25% of adult Americans (the current number is 23.9%). But the Pew report shows that of all those raised Catholic, a third have left the church. (That means that roughly one out of every 10 people in America is a former Catholic, and that ex-Catholics are almost as numerous as the America's second biggest religious group, Southern Baptists.) But Catholicism has made up for the losses by adding converts (2.6% of the population) and, more significantly, enjoying an influx of new immigrants, mostly Hispanic.

An even more extreme example of what might be called "masked churn" is the relatively tiny Jehovah's Witnesses, with a turnover rate of about two-thirds. That means that two-thirds of the people who told Pew they were raised Jehovah's Witnesses no longer are — yet the group attracts roughly the same number of converts. Notes Lugo, "No wonder they have to keep on knocking on doors."

The single biggest "winner," in terms of number gained versus number lost, was not a religious group at all, but the "unaffiliated" category. About 16% of those polled defined their religious affiliation that way (including people who

regarded themselves as religious, along with atheists and agnostics); only 7% had been brought up that way. That's an impressive gain, but Lugo points out that churn is everywhere: even the unaffiliated group lost 50% of its original membership to one church or another.

The report does not speculate on the implications of its data. But Lugo suggests, "What it says is that this marketplace is highly competitive and that no one can sit on their laurels, because another group out there will make [its tenets] available" for potential converts to try out. While this dynamic "may be partly responsible for the religious vitality of the American people," he says, "it also suggests that there is an institutional loosening of ties," with less individual commitment to a given faith or denomination.

Lugo would not speculate on whether such a buyer's market might cause some groups to dilute their particular beliefs in order to compete. There are signs of that in such surveys as one done by the Willow Creek megachurch outside Chicago, which has been extremely successful in attracting tens of thousands of religious "seekers." An internal survey recently indicated much of its membership was "stalled" in their spiritual growth, Lugo allowed that "it does raise the question of, once you attract these folks, how do you root them within your own particular tradition when people are changing so quickly."

The Pew report has other interesting findings; the highest rates for marrying within one's own faith, for example, are among Hindus (90%) and Mormons (83%). The full report is accessible at the Pew Forum site (<http://pewforum.org/>).

Crime Watch

Corvallis Gazette-Times, 3/6/2008

Monday, March 3:

Suspicious activity: 9:11 a.m., 1900 block Northwest Ninth Street, Corvallis.

A man with a knife was spotted in the parking lot of an office supply business. The witness was sitting in a car in the parking lot when she saw a man get out of his car, walk over to another car and raise a large knife in the air.

When the man realized he was being watched, he returned to his vehicle and drove away. Police stopped the man as he was leaving. The man said he was driving by when he noticed a "Jesus fish" with "Darwin" written in the center of it on the back of a parked vehicle. The man said he considered this to be a demonic symbol and intended to pull it off of the car with the knife but decided to leave when he was spotted by the witness. Police warned the man about his behavior and took no further action.

Tolerance

by CSS member Michele Ulriksen

[Note from Michele: *I'm stirring up trouble again. This letter was published in The Commuter, LBCC's weekly student paper. I'm a student there. I've received some very positive comments from students and teachers about the piece, I am pleased to say!*]

After reading Davis LaMuerta's piece "Is There Anybody Out There" in last week's paper, I feel compelled to write about my feelings and experiences related to equality for LGBTQ individuals.

I grew up in a Christian household and witnessed much reservation from the church toward anyone who was different. After rebelling against this rigidity at age 16 (back in 1986), I was shipped off to a fundamentalist reform school.

The preacher told us regularly in chapel that "we should do to the gays what the Nazis did to the Jews." There were several lesbians at this school. It was crippling to watch the verbal abuse they were forced to endure. The preacher's hatred for gay people was fueled by one bible verse from the Old Testament, the book of Leviticus. You know the one, "man shall not lie with man." He quoted this scripture often. In fact, most adults I have met who have a problem with LGBTQ individuals end up referring to this bible verse as an excuse for their intolerant behavior. I pose this question to you:

If you have to follow that verse in Leviticus, shouldn't you have to follow other verses in the bible too? I'll provide three examples.

Take this verse in Deuteronomy, for example, "...but if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel, then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones, that she die..." Deuteronomy 22: 20-21. This means we must, as a society, stone all women to death who are not virgins on their wedding nights.

Here's another: "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them, then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of this city, and unto the gate of his place and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of this city shall stone him with stones, that he die..." Also, in Deuteronomy. I am certain that this means no teenager would make it into adulthood.

Lastly, Deuteronomy 13:7-11 says, "If your brother, the son of your father or of your mother, or your son or daughter, or the spouse whom you embrace, or your most intimate friend tries to seduce you saying let us serve other gods...you must not consent, you must not listen, you must

show him no pity, you must not spare him or conceal his guilt. No, you must kill him; your hand must strike the first blow in putting him to death. You must stone him to death since he has tried to divert you from Yahweh your God."

If we actually did these above mentioned things to one another, we would need a lot more prisons and the stench of death would fill the air constantly. This is why I find it alarming and unfortunate when I meet religious people who are staunchly opposed to supporting equality for LGBTQ people because of a verse in the Old Testament.

Obviously, my point here is to encourage people to think about their decision in allowing an archaic bible verse, written by men who were against equality, to shape your opinions about other human beings who are doing nothing to hurt you. I am not trying to be disrespectful, but if you read the first five books of the Old Testament, you will clearly see that equality is not supported, rather the opposite is encouraged.

I am well aware that there are a good number of Christians are tolerant. I applaud them for upholding the true teachings of Jesus, which were simple: love your neighbor, judge not, and feed the poor. Why can't everyone do this? Didn't we learn anything from Martin Luther King Jr.'s letter from Birmingham Jail?

I think fear and ignorance is to blame. People who are offended by LGBTQ individuals need to realize they are not really different from anyone else. They work, they pay taxes, they purchase property, they love their children, they are in long term relationships, they get college degrees, they contribute to the arts, they serve their country, they work tirelessly in social services and the medical field to help others, they care about the health and well being of their loved ones, etc.

Why does it matter who does what in the privacy of their own home? How does that affect your life? It doesn't. Why should it be up to the government, or any church group, or a preacher, whose name a person wants to put on their Advanced Directive to make end of life decisions on their behalf?

I have been married for fourteen years. My husband and I have a twelve year old daughter. We have been members of the Human Rights Campaign for years and we have LGBTQ people in our lives. We have never experienced any kind of negative repercussion within the fabric of our family because of this, nor have we known anyone else who has, so the argument that "these people" are a bad influence on "family values" is unfounded. It's just another form of racism initiated by right wing extremists to conjure up fear. It's shameful that my sixth grader can accept people who live differently, but some adults can't. What kind of example does that set for our children? Not a very tolerant one, I'm afraid.

Atheism Today

A letter by Cynthia Whitfield, *Eugene Register-Guard*, 2/11/2008

In a recent letter to the editor, a local man, self-identified as an atheist, bemoaned the fact that politics in this country are so intimately connected with religion. He was dismayed that not only the religious right, but liberal Democrats feel the need to go on record as church-going Christians.

Indeed, Americans tend to be more religious than Europeans. Only three to seven percent of Americans describe themselves as atheists, compared to 11.9% of people worldwide, not including atheist religions such as Buddhism. Interestingly, a whopping 32% of the French are atheists, and more than 30% agnostics. In some countries the exact number of atheists is hard to pinpoint, researchers say, because some people are afraid to identify themselves as atheists because of perceived social stigma.

Americans are uneasy with atheists. A recent national survey conducted by the University of Minnesota shows most Americans distrust atheists — rating atheists below recent immigrants, gays and other minority groups. Americans objected to their children marrying atheists more than any other minority group, and fifty-two percent of Americans said they would not vote for a well-qualified atheist for president.

Such attitudes are “a glaring exception to the rule of increasing social tolerance over the last 30 years,” according to Penny Edgell, associate sociological professor and the study’s lead researcher.

Maybe so, but it does explain why candidates want to assure Americans of their piousness. Considering the small number of admitted atheists, it’s not surprising that many atheists, unlike the RG letter writer, are afraid of “coming out of the closet.”

Although Oregon and Washington have the highest proportion of religiously unaffiliated and self-identified “non-religious” residents, only 1.2% of all Oregonians describe themselves as agnostics, and even fewer claim to be atheists.

Atheists say they’re often misunderstood. For example, some people claim atheism is a religion or implies a particular worldview. But that’s inaccurate. Theism is the belief in God, while atheism is the absence of belief in God. Period. As atheists are quick to point out, there are no rituals, traditions, or agreed-upon set of values to live by. Instead, they believe, sound morality naturally results from compassion and logical reasoning. The wonder of nature can be appreciated, but nothing is worshipped. Beyond that, atheists are a diverse group.

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supernatural power greater than themselves. It’s certainly true that many religious people volunteer their time, money and expertise to help others. It’s also true that many agnostics and atheists do the same. There is no reason to believe that people need the threat of God’s wrath to prompt them to live moral and ethical lives.

A look at history shows many people have perished under the direction of religious leaders. On the other hand, atheism doesn’t prevent evil — the administration of Stalin being a good example. There is no point trying to determine whether religious or non-religious people have caused more destruction and mayhem. The point is that both good and evil can be found among any group of people.

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In the end we should accept without prejudice the fact that many good and competent people find themselves unable to believe in God. This won’t happen until we realize that religion is not necessarily connected to moral or ethical behavior.

**Everything has a natural explanation.
The moon is not a god, but a great
rock — and the sun, a hot rock.**

— Anaxagoras, ca. 475 BC

Newspaper Letters

Corvallis Gazette-Times, 3/5/2008

How many jailed for illegal substances?

As a former drug counselor, I continue to wonder how many of the prison population are people incarcerated due to illegal substance issues.

During Prohibition, thousands of people became criminals overnight. Illegal breweries started, smuggling increased, violence increased, use of guns increased and the prison population increased while tax revenues decreased.

Making substances illegal creates crime and criminals.

People with substance abuse issues like cigarettes and alcohol have medical addiction problems, but because they are legal, regulated and taxed, they have all kinds of treatment options to utilize.

We are not arresting these people and locking them up in prisons, but if we made those substances illegal we certainly would be.

Many of those cigarette and alcohol addicts would turn to the illegal market; they would steal to get money for those substances, because once a substance is illegal the price skyrockets, and once the price rises people start carrying guns to protect their money and their stash.

A whole criminal black market would develop, and the war on drugs would escalate. It is patently absurd to allow the two most deadly drugs we know of (cigarettes and alcohol) to be legal, while criminalizing other drugs that are in many cases much less harmful.

Making all substances legal would allow us to control manufacturing and distribution, and to tax those substances to provide treatment programs. It would also reduce the prison population and the associated costs.

— William Switzer Corvallis

Corvallis Gazette-Times, 3/7/2008

Atheists, agnostics being marginalized

Like many people, I rely on the Internet for comprehensive national and world news. While the Gazette-Times relates national and world events, it is merely a thumbnail sketch. This is understandable. The main purpose of our daily newspaper should be reporting local and state news.

However, this is the second time I've noticed the last few lines of an Associated Press article deleted from the paper — probably because of space.

In the most recent instance, "Survey finds religious landscape in fluctuation" (Feb. 26), a few key facts have unfortunately been cut. For example, it would have been helpful for readers to learn "Jews accounted for 1.7 percent of the overall population," while Buddhists and Muslims each comprise less than 1 percent.

When comparing these numbers with "Atheists or agnostics account for 4 percent of the total population," one can readily see the minority group that has been marginalized.

— Robert Simms, Corvallis

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