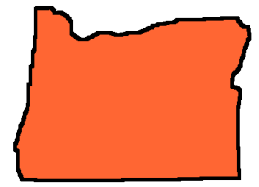


Willamette Freethinker



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

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

From the Editor: Born in the USA

A child is born.

As a baby, it has no reasoning skills, no language. It just has NEEDS. Instinctively, it cries, and — hopefully — its needs are met. It is fed, cleaned, held, loved. It doesn't know HOW or WHY; good things just seem to happen magically. Life is good!

After a while, it starts to recognize patterns. Certain faces, certain sounds. Eventually, it comes to understand a handful of words, and with effort, reproduce them. Communication is possible. Language...

With language, the child can make its wants and needs better understood. It can demand — and the large beings it's beginning to know as "mommy" and/or "daddy" can be induced to make things happen. Food, or Toy, or Bed — things the child cannot make happen by itself, it can CAUSE to happen, by means of language. Life is good...

The child grows older. It starts to understand "family". Maybe, when it gets frustrated, it thinks about running away — but it's starting to realize just how much it depends on "Mom" and "Dad". Good things don't just happen by magic, parents MAKE them happen. Except... Santa Claus! Once a year, a magical being at the North Pole brings presents! Magic is still real, even if it isn't EVERYWHERE...

Older still. Santa doesn't make sense. The world's too big to travel all in one night. And besides, why would elves make toys that clearly say LEGO on the box? Santa ISN'T real; the adults have been lying. Under pressure, they will finally admit it. [But don't tell your younger sister — let her keep believing, for awhile longer.]

But you start paying attention to that boring place your parents have been dragging you to once a week — "church". Mom and Dad say that God is magic; he made EVERYTHING. Even us! And this isn't a lie; not like Santa. After all, look at all the grownups in church!

Teenager! The opposite sex is starting to look good. Parents aren't magic; they aren't even superhuman! They're just PEOPLE, who have been controlling you your whole life. Well, enough of that! You're not a kid anymore!

Young Adult. Establishing yourself. Re-evaluating everything you've been taught, from your new perspective. It's great to be on your own, but... on some level, you miss the days when life was simple. When Mom and Dad were the ultimate authorities. They told you clearly what The Answers were. They knew everything.

Now there's just God. God isn't as straightforward and obvious as your parents were. Many people disagree about what God wants. Sometimes, deep down, you're not even sure there IS a God. But you don't think about it very much. Everybody says God is real, so you just go with the flow...

It's nice to still have someone big and powerful looking over you. You've believed in magic your whole life, but little by little, it's been taken away. The world isn't magic. Your parents weren't magic. Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny... none of those things turned out to be real.

But God is real! Everyone says so. Imagine if your parents had been lying about that, too...

Reed Byers
Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Mar 21 st	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Apr 18 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, May 16 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:

Universal Health Care

Polarization characterizes political discussion in the United States these days. For example, most Republicans in the US Senate, perhaps miffed at being out of power for a change, have been voting as a block to oppose everything President Obama proposes. Is this adult behavior? Do they have the best interests of our country and their constituents in mind? Are they thinking independently? Open and thoughtful discussion of ideas and issues is often replaced by “name-calling” or “labeling,” rather than by debate on their merits. Suggestions for reform are often dismissed by labeling the proposals as “socialism,” “tax-and-spend,” and so forth, rather than by rational analysis of the substance of the proposal. Yet citizens of this country, or of any political entity, need to decide what they want from government. And then they need to be willing to pay for it.

The US is a wealthy country. It unfortunately (at least in my view) *squanders* much of this wealth. This was particularly true under the recent Bush Administration, but certainly didn't start there. For example, we spend a disproportionate amount of our nation's resources on building an ever-greater military and in attacking countries that do not threaten us. Our economy is basically on a perpetual war footing.

The distribution of wealth among our citizens is growing ever more unbalanced. With more and more people being paid low wages, if they're employed at all (with so much manufacturing going overseas), we have ever more executives being given fabulous compensation packages (which include much more than their salaries). Our imports greatly exceed our exports with many countries, including China. (Indeed, I would argue that the main US exports during the Bush Administration were dollars and jobs.) Is this trend sustainable? Is it in our best interests?

Consider executive (and sports-star, rock-star, and film-star) compensation of one million dollars a year. At 52 weeks per year, that is \$19,230.77 per week; at 5 days per workweek, it is \$3846.15 per day; at 8 hours per workday, they're getting \$480.77 per hour. And many such privileged people earn *far* more. In contrast, the federal minimum wage is presently \$6.55 per hour.

I recently was referred to a medical specialist at the local clinic. For that consultation, which lasted all of fifteen minutes or so, I was billed by the clinic well over five hundred dollars. That's more than \$2,000 per hour! (Why so high? I thought medicine was a caring profession. Maybe I'm confused about what they care for.) Now a construction worker, for instance, might be earning \$20 per hour (again, if he is working at all), which, at 40 hours per week, is \$800. If he were given a raise to \$200 per hour, he would earn the same in 4 hours. But if he earned \$2000 per hour, he would have to work only 0.4 hours, or 24

minutes, to earn that weekly wage! A person making the federal minimum wage would have to work 305.54 hours, or about 38 days, (assuming no tax or other deductions) just to pay for one hour of my physician's time.

Medical costs are going up faster than general inflation. Unfortunately, many people are being priced out of the medical market: they can't afford to pay such high rates if they are underinsured or have no insurance. People may skip their prescriptions, not seek medical care until a condition is critical, and even die for lack of timely medical care. This in a nation that is awash in resources. (One recent candidate for the presidency owns so many houses that he couldn't even say just how many he owned!)

So back to the question of what we want from government. And how to pay for it. Of course there is wide disagreement over what individual citizens want, and seemingly no one wants to pay anything, but a consensus needs to be reached. I want a well-trained military that is adequate to *defend* our country. But we need to stop attacking countries unnecessarily, and we need to try negotiation and dialog with others when we have disagreements. Military options should *not* be our first choice, as it was in Viet Nam (my generation) and Iraq (my son's generation). (Years ago, the US changed the name of the *War Department* to the *Defense Department*. We should change the use of our military correspondingly.)

Universal medical care is another service I would like to receive from government. The present system of private providers and hospitals (often religiously-affiliated with restrictions on services provided), with private medical insurance available to many (but not all), is inefficient and inequitable. Insurance companies add greatly to the cost of medical care, largely because they are costly to run. Yet they add nothing to medical care – in an economic sense, they produce nothing. They are middlemen. Hence, they are a parasite on our economy. They also add to the cost of medical care because they reduce the incentive to hold medical costs in check. How many well-insured people get upset about the cost of their medical care, if “insurance will take care of it”?

Per *Wikipedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_health_care), “**Universal health care** is health care coverage that is extended to all eligible residents of a governmental region and often covers medical, dental, and mental health care. These programs vary in their structure and funding mechanisms. Typically, most costs are met via **single-payer health care system** or **national health insurance**. Universal health care is implemented in most wealthy, industrialized countries, with the exception of the United States. It is also provided in many developing countries and is the trend worldwide.”

Gregory Paul, in Daily Kos (<http://www.dailykos.com/>), 12/17/08, wrote:

Universal health care systems are much more effective and efficient — they cost only half as much per person while delivering longer lifespans and lower juvenile mortality rates. The American arrangement is an outright scandal that wastes literally a trillion dollars each year, costing every person an extra \$3000 per annum, or a quarter million over a lifetime, for no good purpose, and bankrupts millions while leaving a third of the population uninsured or underinsured.

Nor can corporations afford the current arrangement; they would be much better off paying into a universal system than into insurance companies that blow a third of the take on overhead. In other words adopting a universal health care would not, as most assume, increase the national financial burden — it is the thing that more than anything else the country can do to reduce personal, commercial and national expenditures and debt loads by the colossal amounts needed to save the economy.

Because the current system is becoming ever more unsustainable (unless reformed it will absorb a crushing fifth of the economy in the next few years), the US will have to join the rest of the 1st world and implement a dramatically lower cost and more efficacious comprehensive system (something that the Obama plan does not do because, like the McCain alternative, it is not sufficiently universal to bring down costs.)

My View

I favor a single-payer health care system for the US which, like the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain, eliminates insurance entirely and funds health care directly from taxation. To my mind, this is the simplest, most democratic, compassionate, and cost-effective system possible.

It's time America took care of its own.

John Dearing
President of CSS

In the end, all your knees will bow to Jesus Christ whether you want to or not.

— Kevin Tebedo,
Director of *Colorado for Family Values*, to an audience composed of various religions

Vatican Backs Excommunications Stemming from an Abortion

by Agence France-Presse, *New York Times*, 3/8/2009

ROME (Agence France-Presse) — A senior Vatican cleric on Saturday defended the excommunication of the mother and doctors of a 9-year-old girl who had an abortion in Brazil after being raped. The child was pregnant with twins.

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, head of the Roman Catholic Church's Congregation for Bishops, told *La Stampa*, an Italian daily newspaper, that the case was sad, but that "the real problem is that the twins conceived were two innocent persons, who had the right to live and could not be eliminated."

The regional archbishop, José Cardoso Sobrinho, excommunicated the mother for authorizing the operation. He also excommunicated the doctors, who carried out the operation for fear that the 80-pound girl would not survive a full-term pregnancy.

"God's law is above any human law," Archbishop Cardoso said Thursday.

The girl's stepfather, whom she accused of sexual abuse, has been jailed.

The case has incited fierce debate in Brazil. Abortion is illegal there, but exceptions are allowed in cases of rape and when the mother's life would be endangered by giving birth.

One of the doctors involved, Rivaldo Albuquerque, told Globo television that he would keep going to Mass, regardless of the archbishop's order.

The girl, who was not identified because she is a minor, was found last week to be four months pregnant after being taken to the hospital for stomach pains.

You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step toward the diminution of war, every step toward better treatment of the colored races, or every mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized churches of the world. I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world.

— Bertrand Russell,
Why I am Not a Christian, 1927

You are Friends with an Atheist

by David Swanson, *AfterDowningStreet.org*, 3/13/2009

[Editor's note: *Horrors!*]

If you live in the United States, you are almost certainly friends with at least one atheist, agnostic, nonbeliever, skeptic, or unaffiliated humanist, whether you know it or not. And your friend almost certainly endures prejudice and unequal treatment, whether you know it or not. And your friend is roughly as decent, good, loyal, honest, courageous, and generous as your other friends, and you know it.

The March 2009 American Religious Identification Survey from Trinity College and the March 7, 2009, National Journal article on "Rise of the Godless" present a wealth of data. Let's look at the survey first:

When asked for their religious affiliation, 15 percent of Americans say none, but only 0.7 percent say atheist and 0.9 percent agnostic. However, when asked if they believe in God, 2.3 percent say "There is no such thing," making most of them atheists who do not like or understand the label "atheist," 4.3 percent say "There is no way to know," making most of them agnostics who don't like or understand the label "agnostic" (or, in another interpretation, atheists not quite comfortable in atheism), another 5.7 percent say "I'm not sure," making them also agnostics or atheists-lite, another 6.1 percent refuse to answer, and 12.1 percent say "there is a higher power but no personal God" making them either atheists of theists depending on whether you conceive of a "non-personal God." This leaves 69.5 percent who say "There is definitely a personal God." Chances are that all your friends are not in that 69.5 percent. Chances are that at least one of your friends is in the 18.4 percent who do not profess belief in a God or a "higher power." Chances are, in fact, that at least one of your friends is in the 12.3 percent who openly say (at least to pollsters) that they doubt or disbelieve. These people are pretty evenly spread around the United States and are not all congregated in some godless metropolis far from your unenlightened region of the country. While acceptance of atheism clearly varies drastically from place to place, its existence does not.

Most of the other data that the survey provides adds to our knowledge about that 15 percent who profess no religious affiliation, a group that, no doubt, has great overlap with the 18.4 percent who don't speak up for God or a higher power. While 52 percent of Americans are female, only 40 percent of those with no religious affiliation are female, so you are a little more likely to have a male atheist friend than a female one. Your atheist friend is also significantly more likely to be young than old. According to another pollster cited in the *National Journal*, 25 percent of Americans aged 18 to 29 profess no religious affiliation. Your atheist friend is a little more likely than

your Christian friends to be neither married nor divorced. Your atheist friend could belong to any racial or ethnic group but is a little more likely to be of Asian heritage than a randomly selected person. Your atheist friend, if over 24 years old, is also slightly more likely than the norm to have graduated from college.

Those who get along without God are not lynched or stoned in this country, but neither do they have equal rights or acceptance. They encounter prejudice and cruelty on a personal level often. They pay taxes that support "faith based" programs and discriminatory organizations, as well as proselytization in the military, they see religion and religious based pseudo-science imposed on their children in public schools, and the stigma attached to their free-mindedness restricts their participation in public life. There are probably 20 atheists in Congress, but only one who admits it, and he won't use the word. President Obama's parents were both atheists, whether or not they used that word for it, and he got along fine without religion but would not have gone far in politics had he not adopted it.

There is a parallel in the campaign for equal rights for atheists with the campaign for equal rights for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people, but it is inexact. The more atheists can come out of the closet, the more they will be accepted, and the more they will then be willing to come out of the closet, etc. But, unlike the myth of gay proselytization, there really is a significant danger/promise that in opening society to atheism, more people will be converted to atheism who were never atheists before. From a broad view of society this would likely be a good thing. Less religious nations than ours tend to be more charitable, less violent, less accepting of suffering at home or abroad, and less prone to war. But from the point of view of the religious proselytizer, there is a danger here that is more real than the danger the "gay agenda." A closer analogy is the danger that accepting African Americans might lead to your child marrying one. Fortunately, fewer and fewer Americans view that as a danger. But check out this statistic: A 2003 survey asked Americans what group they would not want their child to marry a member of. Twenty-seven percent said African-American, 34 percent said Muslim, and 48 percent said atheist.

The strange thing is that while there are more non-theists now in the United States than gays, Hispanics, Jews, and perhaps African Americans, there is less of a movement on their behalf. One problem is, of course, the greater stigma and prejudice. Another is that atheists look exactly like everyone else. But a movement is growing, and the relatively newly formed Secular Coalition for America

(continued on page 7)

Darwin@200

**A Conference by the Northwest Freethought Alliance
Portland State University, Smith Hall, March 27-29, 2009**

EMAIL: nfaconference@earthlink.net

WEB: <http://www.nfaconference.org/>

The Northwest Freethought Alliance, supported by the Humanists of Greater Portland, is coordinating the efforts of three dozen freethought and other groups in the Northwest, including member organizations of the Northwest Freethought Coalition (NWFC), in planning and hosting a regional conference.

Keynote speakers

- **Dr. David Domke**, author of "The God Strategy" and "God Willing? Political Fundamentalism in the White House" will be sharing ideas from his books and current events.
- **Dr. Bob Park**, author of "Superstition: Belief in the Age of Science" and "Voodoo Science: The Road from foolishness to Fraud", will share ideas from his research.
- **Roy Speckhardt** is the Executive Director of the American Humanist Association, and a board member of The Humanist Institute. He's also an advisory board member of the Secular Student Alliance and the Women's Law & Public Policy Fellowship Program.

Darwinian Evolution workshops

- **Debating Darwin deniers:** Jim Corbett, of the Humanists of North Puget Sound and Humanists of Washington, will show how to counter non-scientific statements/arguments, based on debates he's had with evolution deniers.
- **Reform at Victory:** Michele Ulriksen, author of "Reform at Victory: A Survivor's Story," will share her experiences of being shipped off to a fundamentalist Baptist reform school (boot camp) when she was 16.
- **Darwin's Black Box:** PSU professor Mitch Cruzan will talk about teaching Biology to non-Science majors and what beliefs about evolution college students bring to school with them.
- **Hope for Skeptics:** Jim Corbett presents his second workshop, one he's also giving at the AHA conference in Phoenix in June. This one is about creating hope in a life that agnostics believe stops at death.
- **Ten Myths about Evolution:** The co-authors of "Top 10 Myths About Evolution," Cameron McPherson Smith and Charles Sullivan, will share the core ideas of their book and reactions to it from a wide spectrum of readers.

Living a "reason-abled" life workshops

- **Natural Medicines/ Snake Oil Science:** Dr. Harriett Hall (the Skepdoc columnist from Skeptic magazine) will present two different programs on extending reason and science to our daily lives, mostly in the areas of OTC medicines and supplements.
- **Current AU Court Cases:** Steve Green, Professor of Law at Willamette University, who has often spoken at Americans United for the Separation of Church and State meetings, will review legal issues in current church/state cases.
- **The Neuro-physiology of Peak Experiences:** Dr. Josh Fost, author of "If Not God, Then What? Neuroscience, Aesthetics, and the Origins of the Transcendent", will share some of his research in the neurophysiology of religious (and other peak) experiences.
- **Invest the Change you Wish to Create in the World:** Mike Katcher, of Microcredit Enterprises, will talk about using very small loans, micro-credits, primarily to women entrepreneurs in the Third World to launch them on the road to economic self-sufficiency.

Lodging

There are many hotels in downtown Portland. We have arranged for a conference rate (\$89 a night, rather than the normal \$129) at University Place, the hotel nearest to the conference site. Let them know you are attending the Northwest Free-thought Conference. The phone number is (503) 221-0140.

Cost

- The conference costs \$125.00 for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The fees cover four meals (Saturday breakfast, lunch, and the banquet; Sunday breakfast), three snacks (Friday p.m. reception, and mid-morning and mid-afternoon on Saturday), and will allow full access to all sessions of the conference. Some scholarships are available. E-mail for details.
- Saturday only costs \$95.00, and includes three workshops, two keynotes, three meals and two snacks.

Registration

Visit the website above, or send an email to the address above, for more information.

The Culture Warriors Get Laid Off

by Frank Rich, *New York Times*, 3/15/2009

SOMEDAY we'll learn the whole story of why George W. Bush brushed off that intelligence briefing of Aug. 6, 2001, "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S." But surely a big distraction was the major speech he was readying for delivery on Aug. 9, his first prime-time address to the nation. The subject — which Bush hyped as "one of the most profound of our time" — was stem cells. For a presidency in thrall to a thriving religious right (and a presidency incapable of multi-tasking), nothing, not even terrorism, could be more urgent.

When Barack Obama ended the Bush stem-cell policy last week, there were no such overheated theatrics. No oversold prime-time address. No hysteria from politicians, the news media or the public. The family-values dinosaurs that once stalked the earth — Falwell, Robertson, Dobson and Reed — are now either dead, retired or disgraced.

Their less-famous successors pumped out their pro forma e-mail blasts, but to little avail. The Republican National Committee said nothing whatsoever about Obama's reversal of Bush stem-cell policy. That's quite a contrast to 2006, when the party's wild and crazy (and perhaps transitory) new chairman, Michael Steele, likened embryonic stem-cell research to Nazi medical experiments during his failed Senate campaign.

What has happened between 2001 and 2009 to so radically change the cultural climate? Here, at last, is one piece of good news in our global economic meltdown: Americans have less and less patience for the intrusive and divisive moral scolds who thrived in the bubbles of the Clinton and Bush years. Culture wars are a luxury the country — the G.O.P. included — can no longer afford.

Not only was Obama's stem-cell decree an anticlimactic blip in the news, but so was his earlier reversal of Bush restrictions on the use of federal money by organizations offering abortions overseas. When the administration tardily ends "don't ask, don't tell," you can bet that this action, too, will be greeted by more yawns than howls.

Once again, both the president and the country are following New Deal-era precedent. In the 1920s boom, the reigning moral crusade was Prohibition, and it packed so much political muscle that F.D.R. didn't oppose it. The Anti-Saloon League was the Moral Majority of its day, the vanguard of a powerful fundamentalist movement that pushed anti-evolution legislation as vehemently as it did its war on booze. (The Scopes "monkey trial" was in 1925.) But the political standing of this crowd crashed along with the stock market. Roosevelt shrewdly came down on the side of "the wets" in his presidential campaign, leaving Hoover to drown with "the dries."

Much as Obama repealed the Bush restrictions on abortion and stem-cell research shortly after pushing through his stimulus package, so F.D.R. jump-started the repeal of Prohibition by asking Congress to legalize beer and wine just days after his March 1933 inauguration and declaration of a bank holiday. As Michael A. Lerner writes in his fascinating 2007 book "Dry Manhattan," Roosevelt's stance reassured many Americans that they would have a president "who not only cared about their economic well-being" but who also understood their desire to be liberated from "the intrusion of the state into their private lives." Having lost plenty in the Depression, the public did not want to surrender any more freedoms to the noisy minority that had shut down the nation's saloons.

In our own hard times, the former moral "majority" has been downsized to more of a minority than ever. Polling shows that nearly 60 percent of Americans agree with ending Bush restrictions on stem-cell research (a *Washington Post/ABC News* survey in January); that 55 percent endorse either gay civil unions or same-sex marriage (*Newsweek*, December 2008); and that 75 percent believe openly gay Americans should serve in the military (*Post/ABC*, July 2008). Even the old indecency wars have subsided. When a federal court last year struck down the F.C.C. fine against CBS for Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" at the 2004

Super Bowl, few Americans either noticed or cared about the latest twist in what had once been a national cause célèbre.

It's not hard to see why Eric Cantor, the conservative House firebrand who is vehemently opposed to stem-cell research, was disinclined to linger on the subject when asked about it on CNN last Sunday. He instead accused the White House of acting on stem cells as a ploy to distract from the economy. "Let's take care of business first," he said. "People are out of jobs." (On this, he's joining us late, but better late than never.)

Even were the public still in the mood for fiery invective about family values, the G.O.P. has long since lost any authority to lead the charge. The current Democratic president and his family are exemplars of precisely the Eisenhower-era squareness — albeit refurbished by feminism — that the Republicans often preached but rarely practiced. Obama actually walks the walk. As the former Bush speechwriter David Frum recently wrote, the new president is an "apparently devoted husband and father" whose worst vice is "an occasional cigarette."

Frum was contrasting Obama to his own party's star attraction, Rush Limbaugh, whose "history of drug dependency" and "tangled marital history" make him "a

Here, at last, is one piece of good news in our global economic meltdown: Americans have less and less patience for the intrusive and divisive moral scolds who thrived in the bubbles of the Clinton and Bush years.

walking stereotype of self-indulgence." Indeed, the two top candidates for leader of the post-Bush G.O.P, Rush and Newt, have six marriages between them. The party that once declared war on unmarried welfare moms, homosexual "recruiters" and Bill Clinton's private life has been rebranded by Mark Foley, Larry Craig, David Vitter and the irrepressible Palins. Even before the economy tanked, Americans had more faith in medical researchers using discarded embryos to battle Parkinson's and Alzheimer's than in Washington politicians making ad hoc medical decisions for Terri Schiavo.

What's been revealing about watching conservatives debate their fate since their Election Day Waterloo is how, the occasional Frum excepted, so many of them don't want to confront the obsolescence of culture wars as a political crutch. They'd rather, like Cantor, just change the subject — much as they avoid talking about Bush and avoid reckoning with the doomed demographics of the G.O.P.'s old white male base. To recognize all these failings would be to confront why a once-national party can now be tucked into the Bible Belt.

The religious right is even more in denial than the Republicans. When Obama nominated Kathleen Sebelius, the Roman Catholic Kansas governor who supports abortion rights, as his secretary of health and human services, Tony Perkins, the leader of the Family Research Council, became nearly as apoplectic as the other Tony Perkins playing Norman Bates. "If Republicans won't take a stand now, when will they?" the godly Perkins thundered online. But Congressional Republicans ignored him, sending out (at most) tepid press releases of complaint, much as they did in response to Obama's stem-cell order. The two antiabortion Kansas Republicans in the Senate, Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts, both endorsed Sebelius.

Perkins is now praying that economic failure will be a stimulus for his family-values business. "As the economy goes downward," he has theorized, "I think people are going to be driven to religion." Wrong again. The latest American Religious Identification Survey, published last week, found that most faiths have lost ground since 1990 and that the fastest-growing religious choice is "None," up from 8 percent to 15 percent (which makes it larger than all denominations except Roman Catholics and Baptists). Another highly regarded poll, the General Social Survey, had an even more startling finding in its preliminary 2008 data released this month: Twice as many Americans have a "great deal" of confidence in the scientific community as do in organized religion. How the almighty has fallen: organized religion is in a dead heat with banks and financial institutions on the confidence scale.

This, too, is a replay of the Great Depression. "One might have expected that in such a crisis great numbers of these people would have turned to the consolations of and inspirations of religion," wrote Frederick Lewis Allen in "Since Yesterday," his history of the 1930s published in 1940. But that did not happen: "The long slow retreat of the churches into less and less significance in the life of

the country, and even in the lives of the majority of their members, continued almost unabated."

The new American faith, Allen wrote, was the "secular religion of social consciousness." It took the form of campaigns for economic and social justice — as exemplified by the New Deal and those movements that challenged it from both the left and the right. It's too early in our crisis and too early in the new administration to know whether this decade will so closely replicate the 1930s, but so far Obama has far more moral authority than any religious leader in America with the possible exception of his sometime ally, the Rev. Rick Warren.

History is cyclical, and it would be foolhardy to assume that the culture wars will never return. But after the humiliations of the Scopes trial and the repeal of Prohibition, it did take a good four decades for the religious right to begin its comeback in the 1970s. In our tough times, when any happy news can be counted as a miracle, a 40-year exodus for these ayatollahs can pass for an answer to America's prayers.

You are Friends... (continued from page 4)

(<http://secular.org>) is leading the way. Seventy-five percent of secularists who voted, voted for Obama, so alliances are likely with Democrats, as opposed to Republicans. But "likely" is an overstatement, of course. Democrats are not exactly known for their courageous stands on behalf of freethinking, although they do have a tradition of standing up for some types of minorities. There is also the problem of disagreements over and misinterpretations of the agenda shared by the godless. For example, the *National Journal* highlights the longing to clone human beings, something I have no longing for at all.

The *National Journal* describes a division in the movement between "Malcolm-X type militants... and Martin Luther King-type integrationists." This makes very little sense to me, except as a description of personality types found in any human population. There is a distinction between wanting to convert the religious to atheism and wanting to create acceptance for atheists. But I see another division that, I think, is more unique to this movement and more problematic for it. That is the division between those who want to push for social acceptance and civil rights for atheists, and those who want to put more of their energy into figuring out how to live without religion, talking to each other about it, creating substitutes for churches, and debating exactly how one can be moral without a mythical daddy figure to threaten and reward you for it. A lot of people who care deeply about civil rights, including atheists, have no sense of loss over religion, but a lot of other people have more need for direct community and reassurance than for lobbying Congress. Both approaches are needed. When you find out who your atheist friend is, you can offer to help.

Newspaper Letters

Corvallis Gazette-Times, 3/9/2009

Former Countrywide boss typifies corporate evil

Stanford Kurland. Know that name? Maybe not, because I haven't seen him in the G-T lately.

He is the ex-CEO of Countrywide who was greatly responsible for this economic disaster. He made tens of millions of dollars by pushing damaging toxic mortgages that left us all with a huge puddle of muck. They offered teaser rates to people who couldn't afford them, and then jacked up the interest rates beyond the homeowner's ability to respond.

He's no longer the CEO of Countrywide since Bank of America bought them out and is retiring the name. But he did take the money before he left: \$200 million. And he's using the millions from his friends and his \$200 million to buy up these mortgages at 38 cents on the dollar and now is making millions more processing them. The National Consumer Law Center says it's like an arsonist buying the property he burned down and reselling it. The simile doesn't do justice to such an injustice. But it does lend a touch of insight into the evil corruption of corporate America.

You have to love a country where the super-rich devise schemes to extract the last ounce of flesh from the victims they create. And the talking-head righties like Rush Limbaugh are vilifying Obama for his efforts to overcome this evil. Incidentally, is Limbaugh really the voice of the Republican Party? Whoa! Gotta ask my GOP friends

about that one. Tighten up your seatbelts. It's going to be a doozie of a ride.

Michael Beachley,
Corvallis

Corvallis Gazette-Times, 3/11/2009

Despite what columnist Joel Stein says, science is not boring

I'm not sure I understand Joel Stein's writing style (Column, March 2, "We'll all pick the science fictions we'll buy into."). I know I'm not supposed to take him very seriously, but sometimes I have disagreements with his logic.

Stein attempts to connect with ignorant readers by acknowledging that he hates science. I'm not insulted; I just think it's a foolish proposition in an otherwise clever opinion piece.

Yes, both the far right and liberals in general are ignorant, confused and suspicious about science. That's not because science is boring; it's because our culture is dysfunctional.

Science is the method we use to understand how the world works. Is the entire world boring? Is it a given that everybody hates the world? I could be provocative too, you know. Those who think science is boring (as if the whole world could be boring) are boring people.

Don Boucher,
(CSS member),
Corvallis

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