

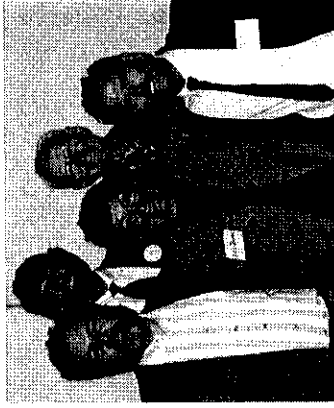
The motto of the Militias "For God and Country" is indicative of the influence Religion and Nationalism plays in the minds of fanatical adherents. Yet, our President, his administration and many "Genius" Congresspersons, instead of probing the roots of this despicable behavior, rushed to invoke the guidance of the alleged OMNIPOTENT, OMNISCIENT God of religion (who failed to protect even the innocent children) and to enact legislation which, if passed, can transform our country into another police state.

The question therefore is not WHY? but rather, WHERE are the rational brains? Can the members of our National Academy of Sciences and other scientific and intellectual institutions express an opinion?

Especially, how long will the local and national media cater to the irrationality of religion contributing to its perpetuation by providing free access through the Print, Radio and Television mediums?

Finally, can we, the species Homo sapiens, realize as Jean Paul Sartre stated, that, "Man is personally responsible for what he is and what he does; that there are no values external to man and no given human nature which he is obliged to fulfill; that man chooses his values and makes himself, and may therefore choose to be a different person?"

Christos Tzanetakos
President, Atheists of Florida, Inc.
Ft. Pierce



Alliance Board Members at the convention.
Front row, l to r, Howard Kreisner, Editor, *Secular Nation*; Co-Presidents Lee Baker, Atheists United and Christos Tzanetakos. Back left, Ed Golly, Secretary; John B. Massen, founder of the Alliance, San Mateo, CA.

Society awash in pseudoscience

Appeared in the Largo-Seminole Times, April 21, 1995.

The inanity of Xian attempts at argument has reached new heights in the letter from Fred H. Huebner entitled "Disbelievers can't criticize religion."

Apparently, by his reasoning, one must be a Nazi to criticize Hitler, a child molester to criticize child molesters, etc. This is the "takes one to know one" logic of a child, not the rational thought one hopes for from an adult.

Huebner must not have reached the final paragraph, since he accuses me of expounding on problems without offering solutions. I'll repeat it: "Hands that help are better than lips that pray." That's a solution; wasting time and energy on prayer is the problem.

Brent Yaciv
Seminole

Members

New members:

Sylvia Maiman-Berger
Robert P. Curry
Adrian G. Sarkis

Kris P. Bussell
Jennifer L. Swegan

Membership Renewal:

Anthony Schleifstien

Many recipients of our newsletter have not yet renewed their memberships. We like to continue to send our newsletter anyway, but our mailing list is getting too big to handle non-paying individuals. If you are delinquent, you may soon find your mailbox filled only with drab coupons and bills. The novelty alone of receiving an atheist newsletter should be worth the lousy 30 bucks. Besides that, it's a better conversation piece than, say, Rush Limbaugh's book or that silly thing Madonna came up with. Be sure you aren't left out—renew your membership today.

10 June 1995



P.O. Box 130753
Tampa, FL 33681-0753

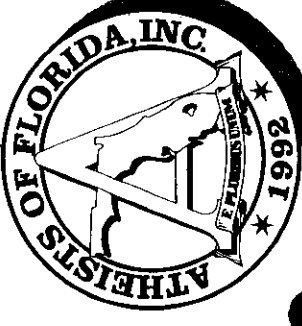
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REQUESTED

Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

Volume IV Number 4

June, 1995



Board renewals

THE THREE YEAR TERM of the eleven Board Member Directors will expire this year. All of the original Board Members who would like to run for another three year term need to submit a letter of intent to run for re-election along with any other member who would like to apply.

Current Directors and new members should submit a small biographical resume along with a short statement of their Atheistic convictions.

She really was Japanese

Our former Secretary and one of the three original incorporators of AOF, Inc., **Kyoko Brogdon** has moved back to Japan. She was one of the most dedicated members and a generous donor both to the organization and the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc.

Our fondest farewell and best wishes for her new endeavors.



Brogdon

Forum to resume

Arrangements have been made to resume the taping of the **Atheists of Florida Forum** at the WLRN studios beginning Friday, July 28th.

We are now preparing an article about Atheists of Florida to appear in the **SIGNAL**.

Again this year the programs will be hosted by AOF Chairman Dr. Albert Lyngzeitson. Some of the topics we are preparing for taping include:

- *Dogmatism: a threat to social liberty*
 - *Euthanasia*
 - *Religion and Homosexuality*
 - *Secular Weddings and Funerals*
 - *Zero population*
 - *Christian Coalition* (Use of the churches for distributing political literature and ballot sheets)
 - *Non-marital Sexuality* (Influence of religion)
 - *Death* (Can fear of death be overcome without religion?)
 - *Students Speak* (Discussion of Atheism with University students)
 - *Religion vs. the First Amendment* - Guest: Tampa's Joe Redner.
- We welcome any ideas you may have to include.

Scholarship fund

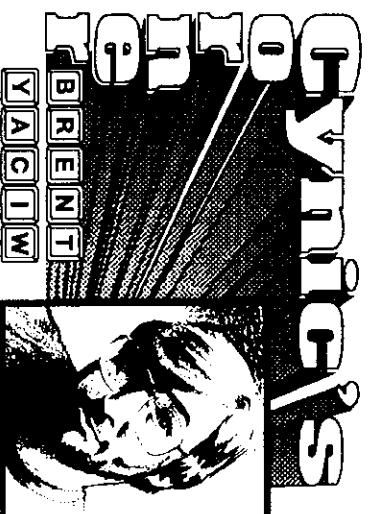
With the certificate of incorporation issued by the State of Florida as of February 6, 1995, an application form 1023 for Recognition of Exemption Under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code was filed May 12, 1995.

Any tax deductible donation to the scholarship fund would be appreciated.

A common practice at funerals is for friends to send sympathy cards with a statement that a donation was given to a charity which they support in the name and memory of the deceased. Atheist of Florida members may give consideration under similar circumstances to send a donation, in lieu of flowers, to the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund.

Or, Religionists Bend Truth and Insult Edison.

THE EASIEST WAY of telling a typical student from a true scholar is asking them what they did for spring break. Students will regale you with tales of beaches and beer, of debauchery and dissipation, of escape and excess. Scholars will tell you of the extracurricular educational opportunities they took advantage of the "free time" to pursue.



"Religion is Bunk"

So it was this past spring: my covivant and I headed for the exotic location of Fort Myers to visit the winter home of Thomas Alva Edison, and incidentally that of Henry Ford. I had always admired the straightforward approach Edison had: "Religion is Bunk" is one of his oft-quoted sayings. However, certain other references to Edison had given me pause, and I thought I might gain additional insight by visiting his home.

The visit caused me considerable distress. Upon our approach to his home, I noted the sign of the "Thomas A. Edison Congregational Church." Oh my: could this be yet another case of an out-of-context quote, a charge often leveled unfairly but, in at least one case I'm sure of, occasionally substantiated? I trod onward.

Circumstances led us to begin our explorations in the gift shop. I perused a biography, seeking and finding "religion" in the index. Oh dear: the quote was to the effect that "next to religion, music had done more than anything else to elevate the human spirit." Not promising.

The next applicable fact came from his experiments into radio waves. He had attempted to construct machines to prove that a "soul" existed in small electrical charges. Ironically, some of his friends construed him as a nut because he did *not* find such evidence, though his work eventually led to radio transmissions. Still, not a good sign.

Finally, we saw the desks of Edison and his wife, with little signs intoning that "one could learn a lot about a person from the things on their desk." If someone looked at my desk, they

would learn that I'm TOO DAMN BUSY, but that's another column! On his wife's desk, there was a silver cross and a prayer book; on Edison's, a picture of the "Last Supper." I left somewhat depressed, thinking one of my favorite scientists was sadly saddled with superstition.

Ever the Cynic

Still, I was skeptical. Knowing how the reputations of presidents and others have been distorted, I sought assistance in researching the question further. I hereby note appreciation to Pat Welsh, recently-joined member of both the AOF and the Humanists of the Sun-coast. He found several biographies that put the lie to attempts at painting Edison as obsessed with religion.

Edison was an atheist in the agnostic sense of the word (see *The American Rationalist*, Mar/Apr and Sept/Oct 1994 issues, if the preceding comment baffles you). In his later years, at the behest of his business partners who feared he would harm them financially, he toned down his acerbic comments on religion, but he did not attend church and showed no regard at all for organized religion. In 1910, his comments concerning the idea of god being simply a meaningless abstraction, religion as superstition, and prayer as a deplorable failure brought him attacks and censure from religionists nearly equal to those on his youthful favorite authors Darwin, Huxley, and Tyn-dal.

Edison did how to the churches in one respect: he felt that churches should be promulgators of morality, and that theology was a ruse obstructing man's evolution. He said churches should stop teaching fables and become true schools of ethics. Sounds mightily like a Unitarian-Universalist, but not a Xian.

In fact, Edison essentially adopted a UU approach in the mid-Twenties. He used the word "soul" to describe the "entities" he thought might exist after death: he used Xian terminology to describe a materialistic ideology; in short, he redefined the terms of religion to fit a scientific mold, much as

Seriously, though, although such development is alarming to those of us who respect critical thinking and rational thought, it should come as no surprise. After all, isn't it hip today to be "dumb or dumber"? Isn't the current popular fad an obsession with angels and finding one's guardian angel? Doesn't almost every major newspaper carry a daily astrology column? We as a society are, after all, awash in pseudoscience and other blatant forms of nonsense.

I am libertarian and for a long time I was a severe critic of the irrational, absurdly costly Cold War against atheist communism. I believe the core of this nonsense was generated by religious fascists. A great deal of harm came from the little dictator of the FBI who fed the fear campaign of Joe McCarthy. During their heyday these were front men for religion and they were two of the most dangerous men in the country. Damned few had guts enough to stand up to them!

Schisler's List

Those of us who know that using psychic consultants puts all of us on a slippery slope down into mysticism need to speak out. We need to seek out companies that use psychics and let them know how we feel. If we don't, who knows what the next hiring criterion will be - studying the entrails of sacrificed animals, maybe?

Greg Simpson
Clearwater, FL

As a recent participant at the Atheist Alliance convention I appreciated permission for me to observe both meetings of the Board. This provided a valuable opportunity to compare the quality of individuals making decisions for an organization which should become extremely important.

I first began writing an occasional article for atheistic publications in the late 1950s when I was a major in the U.S. Air Force. This resulted in promotions and my career being seriously curtailed. I met and supported Madalyn Murray in 1991. Shortly thereafter I became disillusioned with her effectiveness. I personally think her overall contribution to the promotion of atheism has been negative. Sometime before 1960 we visited Charles Smith who ran the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, and who published *The Truthseeker*. He discussed the idea of getting someone much younger to take over his operation, which was tempting to us. However, it would have been very difficult to do while supporting a young family. Instead, I retired from the U.S.A.F. in 1968 and flew for a non-scheduled airline for a while, until opening a real estate office at Canton, N.Y.

Religion and Nationalism

Charles Schisler
N. Palm Beach, FL

On Saturday April 29th, 1995 a most profound cartoon by Mike Smith appeared on your OPINION page. Against a black background, an Oklahoma rescue worker was holding in his arms the lifeless body of a toddler and with a plain "WHY?" the cartoonist captioned this shameful disaster.

Since then, many pages have been filled with reports and comments, but the "WHY?" remains unanswered.

Perhaps the blame can be traced directly to the apathy and cowardly evasion by the majority of the world intellectual community and its failure to express an open and honest opinion on the two most pernicious ideas pervading on our planet, Religion and Nationalism.

The forces of those two impostors, were and still are responsible for the division of our species and the countless terrorist acts, being those of Religious or Nationalistic wars, the bombings in Ireland, Lebanon, Israel, India, Africa and finally Oklahoma.

continued



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P.O. Box 530702

Miami, FL 33153-0102

Contact phone is (305) 936-0210.

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One Turnberry Place
19495 Biscayne Boulevard
Suite 700

Aventura, Florida 33180
305 933 6222 Dade
800 937 0335 Toll Free

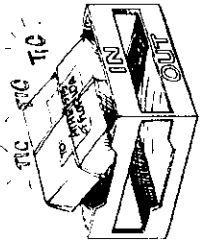
create itself, we know furthermore that a creative cause must be more complex than that which it is able to create. An entity more complex than the totality of existence is the most blatant and contradictory hoax imaginable! For these reasons alone, the intellectually honest **know with greater certainty than anything else, that god, as an ultimate creator cannot possibly exist.** Those who evade or reject this knowledge have been saddled with serious handicaps. The Universe *must* be infinite and it has always existed. The great Universe has been here, without Spooks, for all eternity. Full recognition of this simple, basic fact permits us to live rationally, unfettered by unnatural mystical dictatorships.

Great minds down through the ages have understood these principles but religious hit squads and book burners have destroyed their insights. In addition to impeding most of mankind's rational pursuits, growing fundamentalist cults and other mysticisms seriously undermine the intellectual and psychological health of our people. **Societies which encourage taboos against free and open criticism of any aspect of its culture will be at its mercy.** Such perversion is greatly magnified if that is the only fraudulent activity blindly granted tax

exemption and propogandized by government slogans! Having long received such misguided favoritism, religion is now nearly immune to the ridicule so appropriate to its irrational message. Centuries of censorship and bloodshed in the name of god have reinforced its control. But much of the responsibility for our crisis goes to those **fully able** to combat inherited superstitions, and yet who continue to display unconscionable cowardice in challenging pompously overrated, entrenched pre-scientific forces that are dedicated to destroy enlightened civilizations.

At all times, one can see examples of blind faith leading innocent young men to slaughter, and a nation's resources being wasted on holy wars, and preparation for them. Thinkers are horrified by *all* wars, in contrast to flag and Bible wavers led by half-wit demagogues! Until religion is systematically, *and openly*, critiqued, this potentially great country and this planet will continue to stagnate and decline. We must encourage everyone to rededicate to the struggle for freedom which our forefathers heroically began. To do otherwise is to delay, for centuries more, humanity's emancipation from the oppression of religion. **A**

Letters



Shoving religion down people's throats

Dear Editor,

I am thrilled to see Bill Maxwell's article, "Radical Christians Delude Themselves" in the *Sarasota Herald Tribune* recently.

I am a Jewish woman who supports the rights of Atheists as well as the total separation of church and state. Because of my viewpoints, I am often insulted, bullied, and harassed by people in the community. I have been told by "good Christians" that I am doomed to hell and a grave sinner for expressing the idea that people have a right to opinions other than the Christian right. I totally agree with Mr. Maxwell that most, if not all, Christians shove religion violently down people's throats. I wish that people in the community wouldn't be so intolerant of myself and other "Non-Believers". I wish people would stop trying to tell me what I can and cannot do in my own bedroom. If

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

MIAMI: No meeting for June.

TAMPA: Saturday, June 24, 10:00 to noon. Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Meeting Room B.

MANA-SOTA: Sunday, June 25, 1:30 to 3:30, Marie Selby Public Library, 1001 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota.

several recent scientists have in proposing a "god" that was responsible for the Big Bang, even though said "god" bears no resemblance whatsoever to that bible-god we all disdain.

However, he set the record straight a bit on his eightieth birthday in an interview, and more so a year later. He referred to the accusation that he believed we had an "immortality" as misconstrued; he said we frankly don't know, but that the odds seemed to be against it. A year later, commenting on statistics showing a failure of churches to gain converts, he noted that "people are drifting away from superstition and bunk; increase in scientific knowledge is responsible." In essence, he did refer to religion as bunk, though perhaps not in exactly those words. It might

simply be that we could not locate the exact quote, being limited in time and resources. At the very least, it would be inaccurate to claim the "Religion is Bunk" quote was taken out of context. If anything is being taken out of context, it is the allegations that Thomas Alva Edison would support a church named after him, or that he was a deeply religious man. It's always sad when religion defames a man who is unable to defend himself in death.

Note: Sources included [*Edison: A Biography*] by Matt Josephson and [*Thomas Alva Edison: An American Myth*] by Wyn Wachhorst. Thanks again to Pat Welsh for doing the research that made this column possible, and for restoring my confidence in this great genius of science. **A**

Top 10 Reasons Why You Should Watch the Christian Coalition:*

10. Using the Bible, faith and prayer aggressively for exclusive and therefore dangerous political gain is no joke! These people are very serious and well-organized...and in this for the long haul.
9. They are funded by vast, questionable resources.
8. They get around federal election laws and other democratic processes by hiding behind non-profit status.
7. They purposefully avoid telling you what they are against — talking a lot about economics, for example — so they can draw you into their ever-expanding web.
6. Their inflexible and intolerant beliefs are creating bitter divisiveness in communities all over America.
5. They have given new meaning to the words "bully pulpit" and "bipartisan," making a mockery of the Separation of State and Church.
4. Beliefs??? Their "Traditional Family Values" either exclude or discriminate against a whole lot of people who aren't like

them...and then they pretend to represent "mainstream America."

3. They are determined to infiltrate and control our political system on every level. Moreover, they aim to take over the Republican Party and now control it in 18 states! (Don't ever believe that this is just about "a place at the table!")
2. It's not just about politics as we used to know it. It's the imposition of a "cultural mandate" using narrow Biblical absolutes to control education, the arts, news and entertainment media, etc.— in other words everything!!

1. These organizations and individuals are working together in powerful and insidious ways to tie millions of well-meaning Americans into a massive campaign to push their right wing agenda on all of us!

*Collectively including not only The Christian Coalition but other organizations — American Family Association, Focus on the Family, Chalcedon, Free Congress Foundation, Coalition on Revival, Traditional Values Coalition, Concerned Women for America, et al — and individuals who use faith and prayer for exclusive political purposes (also referred to as the "religious right") **A**

Society awash in pseudoscience

Printed in Tampa Tribune April 26, 1995

According to a story in the April 12 business section, many companies, including some Fortune 500 firms, are using "psychic consultants" to screen job applicants. Perhaps this would explain why so many are still out of work today: Not only is it important for a job applicant to present a professional appearance, a nice resume and some job-related experience, now one should mentally project good "vibes" as well.

most Christians try to be loving like the bible says they should, then why hate homosexuals, anyone with AIDS, anyone that's different? Why do some Christians want to tell me I can't have an abortion if I need one? Why should I have Christian beliefs forced upon me by zealots? To me, people like that are just phonies and will be judged by each of our higher consciousness.

I feel, if there is a God, he watches over every one of us, and cares about each one of us the same. Maybe God will send a message to Right-Wing Christians and tell them "HEY, Everyone is just a human being!!! We have to treat each other with love, kindness, and respect.

Jennifer Eve Trieloff
Sarasota, FL

Prayer and vouchers...the same old attacks

With the "Second Hundred Days" now upon us, it's clear to see where the Contract is taking us.

You will recall that Ronald Reagan introduced a constitutional amendment during his administration intended to force prayer upon our secular public school system and it failed. Now, religious conservative pressure on the Republican Party is again forcing the issue.

Rep. Ernest Istook, R-OK, testifying at a House subcommittee hearing the first week of June, urged adoption of an amendment guaranteeing a right to religious expression in public. He was immediately challenged by several Democrats on the panel who said such an amendment was unnecessary and could be used to impose religious practices and beliefs. Thus begins a push for the amendment.

"Unfortunately, despite the freedoms enshrined in our Constitution, millions of Americans today believe their freedom of religion, and of religious expression, is endangered," Istook told the House Judiciary subcommittee on the Constitution. This in spite of the fact that we enjoy unprecedented religious freedoms in this country, with the unrestricted freedom to engage in any religion or even invent one's own, such as Scientology.

Istook cited the usual "elimination of classroom prayer" as the initial culprit expanding to the point where "...Now our courts are clogged with students begging to offer their own prayers at graduation."

Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., came to the rescue, telling Istook "we do not need a constitutional amendment to protect the right of a student to say a prayer" during free time. "What people are seeking is [to use] ... compulsory school attendance to expose children to religion."

Rep. Jose Serrano, D-N.Y., wanted to know what sort of prayer would result from the amendment. Serrano asked Istook if it would involve, for example, "a Jewish teacher having to pray to Jesus."

Istook said the prayers "would vary from day to day, from place to place, because there is a diversity" and would be "a community decision." Serrano's response was chilling: "That's also

the next civil war."

In the Senate, Joe Lieberman, D-CT, and Dan Coats, R-IN, have just introduced a voucher bill that would take \$30 million away from our public schools and hand it over to parochial and other private schools.

Calling their bill the "Low-Income School Choice Demonstration Act", it's really a fancy name for a "voucher bill."

- Facts about the bill: It...
- contains absolutely no state/church safeguards.
- funnels millions of tax dollars to private schools run by virtually any religious group.
- Supports denying admission to children who are from the "wrong" religion.
- Expands every year. In the first year, allocates \$30 million for 20 voucher "experiments." The second and future years, "such sums as necessary."

Right now, each of us needs to be heard by our state Senators. Graham and Mack. A postcard will do. It might read something like this:

Senator Bob Graham / Connie Mack:
I'm writing to urge you to oppose S 618, the so-called "Low-Income School Choice Demonstration Act." This act is unconstitutional and had public policy. I'm counting on you to do all you can to see that it is defeated.

Sincerely,
Your name and address.

Addresses:

Senator Bob Graham
101 E. Kennedy
Tampa, FL 33602
Senator Connie Mack
600 N. Westshore Blvd.
Tampa, FL 33609

School Committee Forbids Boy Scout Recruiting

North Adams, Mass. - The Boy Scouts have taught honor, respect and responsibility to young men in North Adams for nearly a century, but the local school committee recently banned scout recruiting in public schools. "It has effectively cut off our recruiting efforts," said a local scout leader.

School officials implemented the ban because the Boy Scouts, a private organization, don't allow outspoken homosexual members or leaders. The committee's ban came just months after similar action in neighboring Williamstown and Lanesboro schools.

to *willfully* distort reality to whims of a current cult. If a cult demands belief that certain book contains all the world's wisdom, it merely requires a simple manipulation of the mind to *order* it to that belief. If the cult demands acceptance of a certain belief, one can elect to believe it, by arbitrarily deciding to ignore all evidence contradicting it.

However, healthy individuals absolutely can not *coerce* their belief. A belief is an *autonomic* summation of pertinent evidence which relates to one's experience. The honest cannot deny death — or believe that earth's rotation is controllable by incantation laws — or believe that the Universe's immutable laws can be suspended by irrational quackery. The honest can not believe that religious faith is superior to empirical demonstration and reason.

What is confused with belief is *FEAR*! It is fear which prompts ritualistic cliches — not an intellectual assessment of belief! Religion causes serious psychological harm by bribing dishonest acceptance of uncritical, inhuman orthodoxy — suppressing one's most honorable and worthy sentiments, through fear of a Ghost, and its vindictive propagandists.



"Seems to be fading even faster, with these new 'dim bulbs'."

With the god question, it if often thought, naively, that it is best to play it safe: "If religious claims be true, I could gain by belief — if false, nothing lost." This demonstrates fear of an unstable, vicious tyrant. Even naively *assuming* the existence of a god, if god values intellectual honesty above all else (as do honorable humans) might not god reserve hell for all those *prostituting* their minds, merely for the deluded expectation of a heavenly payoff?

Compared to the relative trivia of 95 theses posted to that famous door on the castle

church, imagine the outcome if Martin Luther had instead simply posted this argument:

"The Universe is the totality of everything that exists in unending space. Whatever exists is part of the Universe. What is only imagined and not part of it, does not exist. The Universe is neither limited nor bounded. If bounded by *something* - that would, *itself*, be part of the Universe. Being the totality of existence, nothing, *including a cause*, can be *external* to the Universe."

Matter/energy didn't first appear as a result of the most recent astronomical Big Bang, some 15 billion years ago. Big Bangs are probably cyclical phenomena of immense proportion, explosively expanding to gravitation hesitation — and then contracting upon themselves to super-critical re-detonation, repeatedly. There may be as many Big Bangs in the Universe as stars in a galaxy! But whatever is — is part of the Universe. Matter/energy, the stuff of the Universe, is eternal. Nuclear bombs or Big Bangs convert mass to enormous energies: but total matter/energy remains intact neither created nor destroyed.

Our irrational culture has led many influential scientists to claim that even time and space did not exist until the Big Bang occurred. Unable to completely eradicate a childhood Creation myth, together with the Big Bang they construct compatible, esoteric theories of physics. Their fairy tales begin: *Once upon a time there was a time — when there was no time — in a place that had no space.* Contradictions cannot be tolerated in philosophy or science. Physics never determines logical principles. Quite the reverse! But matter/energy is eternal: space-time has *always* been a component of the Universe, existing in infinite extension for infinite time.

With this much time to play with fantastic amounts of matter/energy it would not be surprising if, just occasionally, random factors combined to allow life to emerge. Because only successful mutations survive, we could mistakenly imagine that an intellect rules, not realizing nature is a *nearly-complete* failure. Countless failures are extinct! Rather than being ruled by *another* entity, the Universe blunders onward, solely by its own immense nature!

That which might be thought to limit its extension would itself, necessarily also be a part of the Universe. Even the unending immensity of space is an integral part of the Universe. We therefore know that *the Universe is spatially infinite*.

Since the Universe is the totality of everything that exists in infinite space, we know that nothing, *including a cause*, can be external to it. Just as we know that nothing can

In 1992 the local United Way pulled \$22,000 in funding from the Scouts because they don't allow homosexuals. Most Boy Scout members join the organization after hearing about it at school. Without school recruitment, leaders say they will be forced to rely on other recruiting sites, such as churches, that don't reach every boy who might be interested in membership. In addition to its stand on homosexuality, Boy Scouts of America has been criticized for keeping the word "God" in its membership pledge. To encourage the North Adams school committee to reverse its ban, please write:

North Adams Superintendent of Schools
191 E. Main St.
North Adams, Mass. 01247.

We agree with the original sender, and then, on one point above: write to the school and congratulate them for taking the correct action! —Ed

Court bans Christ's picture from school

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A legal dispute over a portrait of Jesus Christ that hung in a Michigan high school for 30 years ended last month when the Supreme Court let stand rulings that forced removal of the picture.

The justices, acting without comment, refused to hear arguments by Bloomingdale, Mich., school officials that the portrait should be returned to a hallway wall because it offers no religious message and raises no church-state problem.

"It's absolutely absurd that a longstanding, landmark portrait depicting a famous teacher and a famous historical figure cannot be placed in a school system," lamented Thomas Hoke, Bloomingdale school superintendent.

Hoke called the court action "a very unfortunate outcome . . . It's regressive. It's shameful. I believe it's sending the wrong message, absolutely the wrong message, to children, to students, citizens and parents."

But Paul Denenfeld of the Michigan American Civil Liberties Union said, "Religious symbols that have nothing to do with studies, but rather simply endorse a particular faith, have no place in public schools that are attended by people of all faiths."

Denenfeld noted a federal appeals court's observation that the portrait is moving for all those brought up in the Christian faith.

"That is the problem," the appeals court ruled. "Christ is only central to Christianity, and his portrait has a proselytizing, affirming effect that some nonbelievers find deeply offensive."

The 2-by-3-foot portrait had hung without controversy since the 1960s until Eric Pensinger, who graduated in 1993, sued during his senior year. His lawsuit said the portrait's presence suggested that his school endorsed Christianity and that school officials considered something wrong with him for not being a Christian.

U.S. District Judge Benjamin Gibson ruled for Pensinger in 1993, and the portrait was covered while school officials appealed to the 6th Circuit court. It was removed after the appeals court upheld Gibson's ruling. The court also relied on the often-cited 1971 Lemon test that said any law or governmental policy is unlawful if it has a religious rather than secular purpose, promotes or advances religion or results in excessive entanglement with religion.

"The display here fails all three," the appeals court said in the case from Bloomingdale, a rural community near Kalamazoo.

A

Bible babble

Yuciw, engaged in correspondence with a Quaker, observed that among the multitude of things lacking in the Bible includes an introduction. His bid:

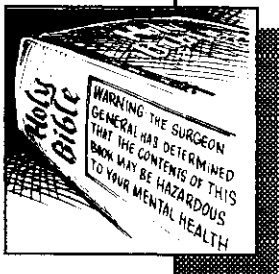
The following is a work of historical fiction. Though some names, dates, and events are based on actual history, there are obvious fabrications: stopping the sun, people rising from the dead, and similar literary devices not intended for rational inspection, but requiring a "suspension of disbelief" while maintaining a grip on reality.

Similarly, this book is filled with horrid atrocities, unethical actions, and casual sex, often on the part of a so-called "god" who is meant to personify a schizoid psychotic,

bestowing kindness on one hand while engaging in capricious cruelty on the other. Attempting to use this book as a "guide to life" is certain to result in irrational, probably psychotic behavior: the human mind is not capable of absorbing such irrationality without permanent damage.

It is especially important that this book be kept from the hands of children. Early exposure will likely result in complete inability to distinguish reality from fantasy.

We hope you enjoy this work in its proper context. Considering the age of the work and its recognized inconsistencies and inaccuracies, it is amazing that it continues to fulfill its two main purposes: to provide excuses for horrid sexist and racist behavior, and to fill the church coffers with cash. Read it and weep. **A**



Reversing America's Mediocrity

— by Charles Schisler

Insight

I have never understood why god has a desperate need for groveling sycophants.

THERE ARE INCREASING SIGNS OF deterioration of our once-great U.S.A. Complacent with past economic success, we are preoccupied with wasteful enjoyment of its wealth. Thinking its accumulation had been easy, today's generation seeks effortless "something-for-nothings" and entertains quack remedies rather than concentrating on solutions most likely to effect positive outcomes. Even our "educated" often choose magic, instead of scientific alternatives. We reject precision in speech and song, preferring contrived imitations of primitive lingo. Everywhere we are gearing down to the lowest common denominator in our society.

The most serious and obvious example of our mediocrity is the widespread toleration of and gravitation toward religion. Vast amounts of time and wealth are wasted on absurdities surrounding theism. Much of our self-imposed incompetence is the result of determined evasion of such issues.

Too many accept statements or values as truth because of desire to hide in conformity, or in subservience to authority. Questionable statements should be rejected or filed away for investigative challenge. The truly educated are sympathetic to skepticism and enjoy presenting novel ideas for astute analysis, fully expecting to provide justification for them.

Harangues to accept so-called holy books are warnings that hawked merchandise is of dubious value. If religion is noteworthy it must make sense in the process of humane, cooperative living—separate from the question of god's existence. It's obvious that the implicit ethical principles promoted by fundamentalism should be rejected by humane, logical minds. The primary message is to scare, with foolish, paranoid threats. I have never understood why god has a desper-

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ate need for groveling sycophants.

God-fearing religions, all Master-slave cults, require violations of ethics. True ethical principles evolve naturally, simply because equals demand *voluntary* and *mutually agreeable* relationships in a dedication to truth. While religion teaches the virtue of blind faith, intelligence easily recognizes it as the greatest evil! Religion teaches an inverse morality and ethics; absurd belief is rewarded — while skeptical questioning earns eternal punishment.

Let's compare current American politicians with our early leaders. Can anyone even *imagine* an official today in high public office, with the wisdom, statesmanship and courage of any of our founding fathers? George Washington informed the Baptists of Virginia that he hoped to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution with: "The government of the United States is in no sense founded upon the Christian religion."

John Adams wrote, "This would be the best of all worlds if there were no religion in it."

Our third, and arguably greatest president, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world and I do not find in our particular superstition (Christianity) one redeeming feature. They are all alike, founded upon fables and mythologies."

Washington urged James Madison, our fourth president, to draw up a Bill of Rights amending the Federal Constitution to contain the words, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..."

John Adams wrote, "Washington's sword would have been wielded in vain (if not) for the pen of Paine." Thomas Paine wrote, "Of all the systems of religion that ever were invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason and more contradictory in itself than this thing called Christianity...As for the book called the Bible, it is blasphemy to call it the work of God."

Do these utterances in any way resemble those of the gutless leaders we have more recently suffered under? In stark contrast, with what contemptible nonsense do recent leaders end every speech? **There is no modern, developed country in the world with leaders and the general populace more inundated by, and fearful of, religious claptrap! Is this now The Home of the Brave?**

Reason and evidence are criteria for autonomous individuals. They discriminate between objective reality and unexamined dogmas of the gullible, manipulated by professional con-artists down through the ages.

Apparently, the religious think it is possible

Atheists of Florida member Charles Schisler is retired from the U.S.A.F. and lives in North Palm Beach, FL. His letter on page 9 gives more of his background.