

The American
RATIONALIST

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THE ALTERNATIVE TO SUPERSTITION & NONSENSE

NOT FOR THE MASS MEDIA:

A Requiem for My Humanism Course, Kaz Dziamka, Editor

CRADLE TO GRAVE:

Thank You, Marge

QUOTELINE & COMMENTARIES:

Heaven's Gate, Bernard Katz

SEARCHLIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES:

Displaying The Decalogue, A. J. Mattill, Jr.

AT RANDOM:

Walter Hoops

BOOK REVIEW:

David Reed's "Blood On The Altar," Jerry Bergman

A Bad Moon On The Rise, Judith Hayes

Hell Bent, Richard F. Stratton

The Truth About Faith, Richard Schoenig

Nuts In The News, J.D. Bell

*Fix reason firmly in her seat....
Question with boldness even the existence of a god.
- Thomas Jefferson*

From The Editor: Kaz Dzimka

There is good news: According to Ms. Barbara Stocker, our Managing Editor, "we have turned the corner of decreasing subscriptions." The net gain for the last mailing was seven, and there were "lots of requests for samples."

As our stock of publishable submissions, some of them excellent, has steadily increased, Ms. Stocker and I have agreed to add four pages to the current issue, a permanent increase, we believe. Yet we still will not be able to begin publishing MLA research papers. (This is not necessarily bad news, as some readers have pointed out.)

Ms. Marjorie Mignacca's article "A Rationalist Looks at Death and Dying," in the Jan/Feb issue, struck a very sympathetic chord: all of the letters I have read are unanimously positive and most are enthusiastic. (You can read a sample on page 4.) In this issue, you will find a new AR column, "From Cradle to Grave," which will be co-edited by Ms. Mignacca.

Also in this issue, A.J. Mattill, Jr., Ph.D., opens his own AR column, "Searchlight on the Scriptures," with his characteristically meticulous dissection and critique of biblical nonsense, this time, of the so-called "Ten Commandments." Dr. A.J. Mattill, Jr., who holds degrees in Bible and theology, is perhaps one of America's leading authorities on biblical exegesis. He is the author of numerous articles and several books: *Luke and the Last Things*, *Jesus and the Last Things*, *Ingersoll Attacks the Bible*, and *The Seven Mighty Blows to Traditional Beliefs* (most of them published by The Flatwoods Free Press, Route 2, Box 49, Gordo, Alabama 35466-9517).

His article, "Displaying the Decalogue," has been inspired, says Dr. Mattill, by "the current controversy, especially in Alabama, over the Ten Commandments." Those of you who have followed the story will probably agree that Judge Roy Moore, Jerry Falwell, and others are impervious to reason, and that even the best designed argument—like Mattill's—will fall on their deaf ears. But the alternative—just ignoring them—is even worse.

Yet more good news: William Harwood, Ph.D., from Canada, has agreed to review books for AR. Dr. Harwood has authored *Mythology's Last Gods*, *Yahweh and Jesus* (Prometheus, 1992), a book that "will erase any vestige of respect," as one reviewer put it, "you may still have for the Judaeo-Christian tradition."

And there is some bad news: Our co-producer, Mr. Charles Klotzer from St. Louis, and I would like to apologize to all of AR readers for an embarrassing typo in our March/April issue. As Mr. Klotzer says in his letter, "[O]ur staff is very meticulous in checking all composition. The reason that this typo slipped by was that usually (for the past 20 or 30 years or so?) the masthead [has not been] set. Because of the [new front-page design] ... we did reset all—of which our proofreaders were not aware." Mr. Klotzer has promised to reprint a number of copies for redistribution mainly to our new subscribers and to various freethought organizations in the United States and abroad. We hope, however, that most of you remember that "errare humanum est," and that you will continue to look forward to the upcoming issues.

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All submissions are considered. Authors should provide a brief biographical statement, address, phone number, FAX number and/or e-mail address whenever possible. Manuscripts, photos, illustrations, and/or diskettes will be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. *The American Rationalist*, as a freethought publication, prints opinions that do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, or *The Rationalist Association*.

Typeface: 10 pitch (12-point) Courier monospace, or other clearly readable face. Do not use specialty typefaces.

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Page format: Double spaced. Indent first lines of paragraphs 3-5 spaces. No blank line after paragraphs. Print on one side of the page only with at least one-inch margins on all sides, justified left, ragged right.

A Requiem for My Humanism Course by Kaz Dziamka, Editor

In 1953, the late Sam Moskowitz taught the first course in science fiction at City College. In 1995, I taught at the Albuquerque TVI “The American Humanist Tradition,” a General Honors course that Annic Laurie Gaylor, editor of *Freethought Today*, has described as “undoubtedly the first course in secular humanism at a technical-vocational institute.” Moskowitz went on to become what Robert McG. Thomas Jr. in *The New York Times* called “the world’s foremost authority on science fiction and by far its most devoted fan.” After the initial success of my course, I have gone nowhere. And while Mr. Moskowitz is now happily surfing Elysian Fields, I am still confined in Yahweh’s reservation, struggling—mightily—to hang on to my job of teaching fifteen courses of Freshman English *per annum*, mostly to those students who don’t want to study English.

And no humanism course any more.

But I was once famous for fifteen minutes: In its February 20, 1996 issue, *The Albuquerque Journal* ran a front-page story about me and my humanism course, “Worldly Wisdom: Course Has Human Touch of Controversy,” written by Journal Staff Writer Steve Brewer. A local “free news and entertainment” weekly, *Alibi*, printed the feature “Academic Freedom?: Humanism Debate at TVI,” while the student paper *TVI Times* published a series of letters and editorials about the “controversy.” Students at TVI and the University of New Mexico (often total strangers in the *debonair* Nob Hill area where I sometimes hang out) used to ask me when I would teach my humanism course again and offered readiness to enroll.

Well, Hollywood is “not likely to come knocking” on my door, as Brewer said, even though “in many ways [my] story mirrors ‘Mr. Hollands’ Opus’ or ‘Dead Poets Society,’” even though, in 1995, I was indeed “brimming with enthusiasm,” ready to change the world, or at least Albuquerque, into a secular utopia of the First Amendment.

But every time I resubmitted my course proposal at TVI and UNM, I was rejected or ignored. The UNM American Studies Department, where I received my Ph.D. in 1987, has never responded. The General Honors Program has: A recent letter, for example, from the Director of the Program reads: “We wish to thank you for your proposal to teach a General Honors seminar for the Spring 1998 session. Your proposed course [“The American Humanist Tradition”] sounded fascinating, and under normal circumstances, we would have been happy to offer the course for our students. Unfortunately, however, due to budget constraints and an effort to balance our curriculum, we will not be able to accept your proposal for teaching in the Program....”

Alas! Circumstances at UNM are not likely to be normal. UNM pays a basketball instructor about \$100,000 to run its second-rate basketball program. The football coach, in charge of a third-rate team, also gets close to \$100,000. UNM would have to spend about \$3,000 to hire a guest lecturer like me to teach secular humanism. It won’t. (What would Thomas Jefferson say?)

Also rejected or ignored was my essay “Why We Need to Teach Secular Humanism,” my earnest plea for the addition

of secular humanism to the curricula of public schools. Neither *The Albuquerque Journal* nor many other local and other newspapers or magazines would publish it. Even *The Humanist*, *Free Inquiry*, and other humanist outlets did not bother to send me a no-thank-you note.

Clearly not for the mass media, that essay of mine!

I concluded, therefore, that nobody—not even the most famous and powerful humanist organizations in the USA—was interested in promoting “undoubtedly the first course in secular humanism at a technical-vocational institute” (although AHA published a brief ad in its newsletter). I must have missed an item in their humanist agenda. Or have written a lousy essay (although Ms. Gaylor did eventually publish it in *Freethought Today*.)

In all fairness, I must say that TVI has allowed for a unique opportunity to teach secular humanism to community college students. No other comparable college had apparently done that prior to 1995 or since: TVI seems quite ahead in this respect of other such technical schools in the country. Said Dr. Susan Murphy, my boss and Dean of the Arts and Sciences Department at TVI, in an *Albuquerque Journal* interview: “I think the course was a solid offering and a valued one. Students did enjoy it, and the content of the course was fascinating. Many students had a chance to explore a discipline, a philosophical view, that they might not’ve if we had not offered it.”

But the business of America is business, and the business of the Albuquerque TVI is to provide technical and vocational training to non-traditional students—often undereducated, underpaid, and sometimes desperate for a second chance or the last chance to find a job and take control of their lives. The business of TVI is not to teach secular humanism, a philosophical lifescape that challenges established religious dogmas and offers a realistic, scientific, nondogmatic reinterpretation of the purpose of human life. Such an education will open up your mind, but it will not open up a door to a well-paying job. In fact, you are likely to lose your job if you declare that you are a secular humanist—as I am now likely to lose mine at TVI.

No, courses in secular humanism should not be offered at technical schools; they should, however, be offered by, for instance, university departments of American Studies and Philosophy or by General Honors programs. In fact, such courses should be offered by all liberal arts colleges not yet controlled by religious establishments. Courses in secular humanism should also be a primary concern of the American Humanist Association and the Council for Secular Humanism, both of which have failed to respond. Perhaps they already knew that nothing could be done to help.

So this, then, is my dirge about a successful course that died. You can still taste its success if you look at the web site (<http://mongo.tvi.cc.nm.us/Humanism>), created in the flush of the initial enthusiasm by my dedicated students and colleagues at TVI and by me. We were a group of nonchalant scholars, engaging irreverently in Socratic debates, treading where angels fear to tread, fancying ourselves to be free, and getting a little bit giddy with that ultimate drug: freedom of

NOT FOR THE MASS MEDIA

the intellect.

Now when I look at the web site, which has not been updated for over a year, I am a little embarrassed: the files in their silent eloquence speak about my native, naive Polish-American Dream: a jejune belief in America, academic freedom, and the First Amendment; in the right to pursue happiness and in the right "to question with boldness even the existence of a god," as Jefferson said. I once escaped the horror in Poland of being trapped between two inhuman ideologies—Polish Catholicism and Russian Communism—only to discover that the American Dream [of financial success and intellectual freedom] is a delusion, a *fata morgana*, for many Americans and immigrants. That there has never been a genuine freedom of expression in America, or anywhere else for that matter, without a painful price to be paid. That universities and colleges are increasingly con-

cerned more with profit and political correctness than with intellectual freedom and love of knowledge. That those who speak against religious superstition "must not only be personally courageous," says Anne Nicol Gaylor, President of The Freedom From Religion Foundation, but financially uncaring, since religion's critics always risk social and economic reprisal."

Perhaps those who would teach secular humanism in the United States should consider teaching science fiction instead.

Or perhaps they are just stupid.

P.S. A few days after writing this article, I received a certified letter from TVI: "... this correspondence serves as notice that your current faculty contract will not be renewed or extended after August 31, 1997, and that you will not be offered a new contract for the 1997-98 academic year." End of the Dream! Amen.

GRADLE TO GRAVE

Thank You, Marge

I would like to thank all of you who have called or sent letters in response to my article, *A Rationalist Looks at Death and Dying*, in the Jan/Feb 1997 issue of *The American Rationalist*.

I have been pleasantly surprised by the amount of feedback it elicited, and deeply moved by the gentle, empathetic tone of your responses. I am equally impressed by our new editor's uncanny grasp of reader-interest, for it was Kaz who (when he first read my manuscript) prodded me to do a regular column focusing on death and dying issues. Judging from reader input already, he was right on target when he insisted that there's a definite need for a regular airing of our views on controversial topics.

Perhaps this, then, is my little boy's legacy—that we all work together in hopes of generating enough commentary, interest, action, and support to eventually move our government to a more humane approach regarding the terminally ill. I hope you will continue to let me hear from you. Please send mail in care of AR or Dr. Dziarnka for forwarding to me. (Friends may continue to mail submissions to my home address.) Clippings, mss submissions, or shorts pertaining to issues surrounding death and dying will be carefully considered for possible publication in future issues of AR.

Letters about Marge Mignacca's Jan/Feb Article

My congratulations to Marge M. in [the] *American Rationalist*. Her presentation is the best and briefest article I have read regarding choice in dying. She writes with a powerful pen and I treasure her presentation

(D. Reid, Florida)

I just received the Jan/Feb [issue] and the first article that

caught my eye and which I read immediately was Majorie Mignacca's article *A Rationalist Looks at Death and Dying*, ... [a] powerful argument in support of doctor-assisted death or euthanasia

(Andy Vena, Pennsylvania)

Hi Marge! Your article was so good—your best in my opinion. Very well written. I'd never thought about how easy it is to end the pain of a loved pet in comparison. I have wondered, since childhood, why true "believers" don't just try to hurry death along, if "afterlife" is so superior Such a good article and I'm definitely saving that!

(Gayle Scheitenlein, Arizona)

I have just received the Jan/Feb issue It is great, especially the essay on death and dying by Marjorie Mignacca. I suggest you send a copy of this issue to each member of the Supreme Court, Forst Street NE, Washington, D.C. 20543. This story may help the members understand why they should uphold the right of individuals to ask for physician aid in dying.... My heart aches for your and the little boy you lost so many years ago. No matter how long ago, there is still pain in your heart. I have been working for Death with Dignity more than twenty years, and have been a member of the Hemlock Society since it was formed in 1980. I have sat at the bedside of a number of people who had found the means to terminate their suffering; it was the last favor I could do for these dear people. I should like to keep in touch with you. Your essay in *The Rationalist* was magnificent. Keep up the good work.

(Roy R. Torcaso, Maryland)

Dear Marge, I certainly enjoyed your article on death and dying. You hit the bull's-eye with your usual unerring aim.

(Bernie Katz, AR senior writer)

A Bad Moon On The Rise by Judith Hayes

I don't much care for quibbling. As a matter of fact, I have ambivalent feelings about the value of π . I think it was Emerson who said that foolish consistency, a slavish attention to detail, was the hobgoblin of little minds. Of course, attention to detail can come in very handy when you're describing a bank robber or performing brain surgery.

But generally speaking, quibblers put me off. During casual conversation, those people who correct my "365 days in a year" with "365.242199 days" give me a headache. In the grand scheme of things, unless you are planning to launch a space probe into synchronous Earth orbit, who cares?

The growing excitement about the upcoming new millennium provides irresistibly inviting, fertile soil for quibblers. Since our modern Gregorian calendar recognizes no year "0," the quibble goes, then the year 2000 is not really the beginning of a new millennium at all. Rather, it is the last year of the current one. So there.

The late great Isaac Asimov was the first to bring this interesting tidbit to my attention. Like most of us, I had never really thought about it. But it is true that our calendar is based on the birth of Christ. And the year arbitrarily assigned to that supposed birth was called the year "1." Unlike a newborn baby, who is not considered to be "1" until having lived one full year, our newborn years get their new numbers right from the start. The year "1" had earned its name when it was a mere one second old.

Of course, it wouldn't matter how far back in

history you go to pick an arbitrary point to begin counting years. You'll be forced to give that first year a number—either "0" or "1." To refer to today as being the year 1997, though, is actually very misleading. It seems to be saying that human history is a scant couple of thousand years old, an absurd notion. Human history stretches back so very much further than that, but our calendar forces us, unconsciously, to underestimate our rich, extensive heritage. While it may never be possible to point to a precise date as the dawn of humankind, such a date, if it exists, would put today's date well into five digits, and probably into six. The current Chinese Lunar Year, 4695 (The Year of the Ox) is at least a more realistic stab than our puny 1997, but still doesn't begin to hint at our ancient origins.

However, today, aside from a few Hindu and Islamic observances here and there, the Gregorian calendar is now accepted worldwide. And it began not with the year "0" but with the year "1." Therefore, the new millennium won't actually begin until the year 2001.

Is this quibbling? Yes, indeed, it most certainly is, and on a grand scale, I might add. So, you are probably asking, why belabor this point? I'll tell you. If you haven't already noticed it yet, you soon will. The native drums are beating and the message being relayed and echoing throughout this (supposedly) civilized country is this: The year 2000 is approaching, and when it arrives, it will signal the beginning of the new millennium that was promised in the Bible. This

new millennium will herald one thousand years of peaceful holiness. Whether Jesus' Second Coming will inaugurate the thousand years or just finish it off is a matter of Christian debate. But the "end times," which immediately precede the new millennium, are currently upon us, so we are told. No point in taking out that 10-year term insurance policy now. Make it two years—tops.

If this sounds silly to you, it is nevertheless believed, fervently, by an alarming number of fundamentalists. Already, writers of letters to the editor are expressing gratitude at the "privilege" of being alive at a time that enables them to watch our sordid world come to its deserved end. James Watt, President Reagan's Secretary of the Interior, was not alone in his casual unconcern for the environment. If it's all going to end soon anyway, why worry about the rainforests or bother recycling those silly cola cans? This is a frightening line of thought which, if held by enough people, and followed to its logical conclusion, could have serious consequences.

For New Year's Eve, December 31, 1999, the ballrooms and cruise ships are already booked. As I write, if you want to be where the elite meet to eat, you're already out of luck. Waiting lists only. But why?

For all of our disclaimers to the contrary, we are a superstitious society. We don't like seat/floor/flight number 13, we don't walk under ladders (sensible, but that's not why we avoid it), and we don't like receipts with the number 666

on them. We fiercely insist on the right to call ourselves the world's

For all of our disclaimers to the contrary, we are a superstitious society.

Number One Superpower. the democratic leaders in science, industry and technology. Then we avidly devour the tabloids to glean every scary detail of the most recent UFO abductions. Psychic hot-lines are doing a booming business, and thousands of us are troubled by inner conflicts springing from our "past lives." And now we are facing the new millennium. Stand by.

Many fundamentalists are displaying clearly mixed feelings about current disasters. After the devastating New Year's floods in California (which prompted me to write this piece) the newspapers were sprinkled (sorry) with letters to the editor expressing not sympathy for the victims, but a smug assurance that these things are to be expected because we're in the End Times. The Televangelists are also hinting darkly at the "inevitable" bad times immediately ahead (including war) because of course this fulfills biblical prophecies about the End Times. End Times = Bad Times. And there is little doubt that this fatalistic fundamentalism showed itself in President Reagan's environmental laxness and his seeming relish at the idea of doing Star Wars with the "Evil Empire." (Remember that one?!) Were his thoughts focused on Armageddon? In hindsight, it seems eerily so.

This attitude is unsettling. I'd hate for one of those fundamentalists to be the pilot on a flight I'm on when engine trouble erupts. "Well, what the heck, the world's ending the day after tomorrow anyway. Might as well go out

A Bad Moon On The Rise

in a blaze of glory.” Whether or not this viewpoint mushrooms to the point that it affects public safety remains to be seen. But people do strange things when they’re resigned to (and possibly looking forward to) death. In the 14th century, for example, as the Black Plague decimated Europe, people threw “Plague Parties.” Figuring their own numbers were up soon, they danced till they dropped, shattered marriage vows with gleeful abandon, and drank themselves silly. Those who were not then stricken with plague may have awakened a couple days later vaguely wishing that they had been.

Now. What has all this to do with quibbling about dates? For once I am in favor of quibbling. Let’s quibble. It can’t hurt to inject a bit of (valid) confusion about dates into the madness that has already begun about the new millennium. Enough uncertainty about the precise date of the actual commencement of this new millennium is bound to diffuse, somewhat, the more strident fanaticism of the more ardent fundamentalists. Personally, I am looking forward to the novel experience of seeing the calendar flip over all four digits, and it will no doubt be fun for graduating classes to be able to refer to themselves as the Class of 00! But to a rationalist, these are just numbers on a piece of paper. Interesting, yes, but just arbitrary numbers. So when the hoopla intensifies in earnest, we can strike a blow for sanity

by asking, loudly and often, about “0s” and “1s”—not as they relate to computers, but how they are used to compute the birth of this much awaited millennium.

In the meantime, I wish you all, in advance, a happy, rational New Millennium, whenever it may begin!

Postscript—This article was completed around the first of March, 1997, a month before the tragic, senseless suicides of the San Diego 39. I claim no clairvoyance of any kind, and in fact would cite the San Diego craziness as no more than an opening salvo in the upcoming Millennium Madness. I seldom make predictions, but I believe there is much more of this lunacy to come. I was discussing this article with friends while I was writing it, and they pooh-poohed me for being an overreacting alarmist. But then they had never seen, as I had, sadly, the gleam of happiness in the eyes of a loved one at the thought that current disasters were good news, in that they were probably heralding the End Times. Nor had San Diego happened yet. Kaz and I felt it would be better not to update this article to include my observations on the San Diego suicides, since there is already an in-depth article about that topic in this very issue. My only personal note about the matter is that, candidly, I feel no sorrow at all for those people. If they were in the grip of some blissfully peaceful certainty about their afterlives, I can only say—what a great way to go! However, my heart goes out to their families.

QUOTELINE & COMMENTARIES

Heaven’s Gate by Bernard Katz

The tragic news about the suicide of 39 Heaven’s Gate cult members in California who thought they’d freed their immortal souls from their confining flesh bodies again demonstrates the evils of religion, much like the irrational results of the Dravidians and Jim Jones’ followers in Guyana.

As the millennium approaches we’ll have more of this. Christianity started out just like this cult, telling everyone to believe and act as though the end of the world was coming very soon. Now you know why the early Christians were happy to become martyrs, for they thought they’d soon be in heaven with their savior! This is Jesus’ worst prediction and accounts for his bizarre interim morality.

After listening closely to news commentators and their gurus, and even taking notes, I didn’t hear anyone mention that this theology, this overlay of syncretistic religious ideas with scientific and technical jargon is a form of the old time Gnosticism.

You must keep in mind that many Gnostics hated the God of the Old Testament, maintaining that it was Yahweh who brought all the pain and suffering into this world—as good an “argument from design” as I’ve ever heard! How did they know? Because the Hebrew Bible told them so! Therefore these Gnostics did all they could to thwart the God of the Jews. Since Yahweh’s first commandments, as told in Gene-

sis, were to be “fruitful and multiply,” they defied him by doing the opposite. I heard and read that the coroner found that some of the men and their leader had been castrated, proof that these cultists were playing out the scenarios of their ancient Gnostic models, that is, they chose *not* to be fruitful and multiply. Gnostics made heroes out of all the villains and villains out of all the heroes of the Hebrew Bible.

I also read and heard that Heaven’s Gate resembled Christianity, but the truth is that Christianity copied a good deal from the Gnostics, who preceded and competed with it! St. Paul in his Gnostic dark mood views the body itself as

corrupt and forever at war with the purity of spirit, and against his better judgment that it is better to marry than to burn! Jesus announces in Matthew 12.12 that “there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of

heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.”

In 2 Corinthians St. Paul talks about being transported one time to the third heaven. The Book of Revelation has more to say about heaven than all the rest of the Bible put together. And this was the main reason for the mass suicide, for each person to get rid of his evil, frustrating, flesh body in order to free his soul which will take up residence in an alien body on the UFO just behind the Hale-Bopp comet now flashing by.

Even the leader, Applewhite, claimed that he was possessed and controlled by an alien and that all he was doing was mouthing what the alien cult wanted him to. This is the same claim that Jesus made.

Heaven's Gate

Even the leader, Applewhite, claimed that he was possessed and controlled by an alien and that all he was doing was mouthing what the alien cult wanted him to. This is the same claim that Jesus made. Remember Jesus saying "the Father and I are one"? (John 10.30)

I heard one commentator say that there are 10,000 cults now using the Internet—another excuse we'll get, along with pornography, to restrict speech on the web! Has it occurred to anyone that the public schools should teach kids the evils of religion as an important reason to stay out of cults? I don't think this be done even if recommended because this would also tar-and-feather the traditional denominations. What we are stuck with because of the proliferation of religion may properly be called CONFUSIONISM!

Are We Rationalists Just Blowing Smoke?

How far can rationalism take us?

With all the rational arguments against drinking, fatness, drugs, religion, fascism, hate speech—you name it—there is now an aggressive assault on the evils of smoking.

Will all their huffing and puffing blow the smokers' houses down?

Not according to history.

Smoking has been around for a long time, and it won't be abolished by legislation.

Russia once whipped smokers.

Turkey beheaded them.

India slit their noses.

James I of England blasted tobacco way back in 1604: "A custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, stinking fume thereof nearest resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless."

Louis XIV, Napoleon and Hitler despised smoking and demonized tobacco.

The Massachusetts colony outlawed public smoking in the 1630s.

Connecticut required smokers to have permits in the 1940s.

Between 1893 and 1921, cigarette sales were banned in North Dakota, Washington, Iowa, Tennessee, Arkansas, Illinois, Utah, Kansas and Minnesota.

Now the government wants to ban smoking in buildings open to the public, raise tobacco taxes by huge percentages, and regulate tobacco as a drug.

Despite these efforts, about a billion people around the world continue to smoke. And while smoking has decreased with some groups in the U.S., it has increased overseas.

If the chief argument against smoking is that "it's not good for you," in all fairness why not extend the same argument to banning obesity, to demanding that all Americans exercise, to our not eating junk foods, and to prohibiting alcohol and caffeine in beverages—plus any number of other evils?

The reason is that we can't. Humans are motivated more by the heart than by the head. You simply cannot stamp out completely these irrationalities like we have smallpox.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not making the same plea that Moliere made in his *Don Juan*: "Aristotle and the

philosophers notwithstanding, there's nothing equal to tobacco. It's an honest man's habit and anyone who can live without it doesn't deserve to live at all."

Instead, I pose a corrective given by that belligerent agnostic and freethinker, David Hume, who wrote in his *Treatise of Human Nature*: "We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."

What we can do, however, is to keep working on achieving a more rational, a more sane society. But with the understanding that like the will-o'-the-wisp of the zero risk objective of the radical environmentalists, total banning is out of the question. We should not let that kind of smoke get into our eyes.

Quoteline

"There is only our natural world. There are no gods, no devils, no heavens or hell. By careful thinking and by using science we can try to understand our world and we can try to solve our problems. We are all citizens of the same world, and all people should work together to make a better world where all people can live together peacefully. And we want to protect the Earth both for ourselves and for all people in the future."

—As told to young campers in an article "Camp Quest '96: The Creation and Inauguration of the First Summer Camp for Children of Secular Humanist Families," by Vern Uchtman in *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1996/97

"I have not been at all impressed by the religious and philosophic lessons drawn from science by men like Millikan, Eddington, Coulter, A.H. Compton, E.G. Conklin, and the like. I respect, as everyone must, the great achievements of these distinguished workers in their special fields. But scientists do not always carry the scientific method into their views of manners, morals, or politics, of justice between nations or social classes, or of the reliability of mediums, etc. Neither are they scientific when they make their professional work a springboard from which to jump off into amateurish speculative flights in the fields of religion and philosophy."

—Morris R. Cohen, in his *Reason or Nature*

"I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the ordeal of meeting me is another matter."

—Winston Churchill, on his 75th birthday

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Displaying the Decalogue by A.J. Mattill, Jr.

Those who advocate displaying the decalogue in classrooms, courtrooms, and public parks affirm that the ten commandments are "a declaration of fundamental principles that are the cornerstones of a fair and just society. All of the ills which plague mankind are caused by not practicing the ten commandments, which are the foundation upon which our laws are based, and without which civilization would not exist. If the ten commandments were universally observed, all strife and injustice would vanish." In this paper I leave the constitutional issues to the courts, but I do raise some questions which grow out of a careful study of what "the Bible says," for the Bible is the ultimate authority for decalogue displayers.

I. JUST FOR STARTERS

Are we to believe those Christians who say that not only are the ten commandments binding upon all people today, but that Jesus affirmed the detailed validity of the Old Testament penal code and that the whole law stands inviolate until the universe as we know it passes away (Matthew 5:17-20- see also Deuteronomy 5:29)? Or are we to believe those Christians who claim that Jesus' death-brought an end to the law of Moses, all 613 commandments, including the ten commandments (Romans 6:14- 10:4 Galatians 5:18; Colossians 2:13-14)? If the latter are correct, then there is no need to display the decalogue, except perhaps in museums of religious antiquities. But if the former are correct, then it would be inadvisable to display the decalogue, for its application in today's world would lead to anything but a fair, just, and humane society, as we shall see. Or, as some Christians contend, are only ten of the 613 commandments in force today? If so, why the ten commandments and not the other 603 God gave to Moses?

Which one of the numerous English translations of the Hebrew text is to be displayed? After all, many Christians use only the King James Version and reject all other English translations as adulterations of God's Word. For example, should Exodus 20:17 be translated to read, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" (KJV)? Or should it read, "Don't want anyone's house, wife or husband" (Contemporary English Version)?

Which of the several different ways (Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) of numbering the ten commandments should be used? By combining these differing enumerations, I have come up with twelve "words" or commandments: **1.** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exodus 20:2). **2.** You shall have no other gods before me (20:3). **3.** You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments (20:4-6). **4.** You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain (20:7).

5. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day, wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it (20:8-11). **6.** Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you (20:12). **7.** You shall not kill (20:13). **8.** You shall not commit adultery (20:14). **9.** You shall not steal (20:15). **10.** You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (20:16). **11.** You shall not covet your neighbor's wife (20:17). **12.** You shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's (20:17).

The question about the enumeration of the commandments raises another question, namely, Are there really ten commandments, or are we arbitrarily imposing the number ten upon the commandments? After all, nowhere in the Bible has God, Moses, or anyone else attached a number to each commandment to make ten commandments, no more, no less.

II. THE OPTIONS

Which set of commandments should be displayed? Most people do not know that there are a number of options here.

1. The familiar set of Exodus 20:1-17 (quoted above). **2.** The set of Exodus 34:10-26, which contains three commandments in common with Exodus 20:1-17: *a.* You shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (34:14). *b.* You shall make for yourselves no metal images of gods (34:17). *c.* Six days you shall work, but on the seventh you shall rest (34:21). (For the full text of Exodus 34:10-26 see below.) **3.** The set of Leviticus 19:1-36, which contains a number of commandments similar to those of Exodus 20:1-17: *a.* Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father (19:3). *b.* You shall keep my Sabbaths (19:3). *c.* Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods (19:4). *d.* You shall not steal (19:11). *e.* You shall not deal falsely nor lie to one another (19:11). *f.* You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God (19:12). **4.** The set of Deuteronomy 5:6-21, which is almost the same as the set of Exodus 20:1-17 (see below for the differences). **5.** In Matthew 19:18-19, Jesus lists six commandments: *a.* Do not kill. *b.* Do not commit adultery. *c.* Do not steal. *d.* Do not bear false witness. *e.* Honor your father and mother. *f.* Love your neighbor as yourself. **6.** In Mark 10:19, Jesus lists six commandments: *a.* Do not kill. *b.* Do not commit adultery. *c.* Do not steal. *d.* Do not bear false witness. *e.* Do not defraud. *f.* Honor your father and mother. **7.** In Luke 18:20, Jesus lists five commandments: *a.* Do not commit adultery. *b.* Do not kill. *c.* Do not steal. *d.* Do not bear false witness. *e.* Honor your father and mother. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (taken from Leviticus 19:18) is found in these lists of commandments only in Matthew. "Do not defraud" is found only in Mark. Jesus, then, in these parallel passages, lists a total of seven commandments.

Displaying The Decalogue

If Jesus (whom decalogue displayers regard as the omniscient Lord and Savior) did not stress the sanctity of the ten commandments (no more, no less) when he had a golden opportunity to do so, why should decalogue displayers make an issue of them, even calling out the national guard to keep them from being removed from the courthouse wall?

Not only did Jesus not emphasize ten commandments, but in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) he bent three of the ten out of shape: those on swearing, killing, and adultery (see the discussion of these in Section VI).

III. WILL THE REAL SET OF TEN COMMANDMENTS PLEASE STAND UP?

As we asked above, which one of these various sets of commandments is the correct set to display? What does "the Bible say"? Which set does the Bible call "the ten commandments"? Only three times does the Bible use the expression, "the ten commandments" (literally, "the ten words"): **1.** Exodus 34:28—"And he [Moses] wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments." Here the ten commandments are those of Exodus 34:10-26. **2.** Deuteronomy 4:13—"And he [the Lord] declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments, and he wrote them upon two tablets of stone." Here the ten commandments are those of Deuteronomy 5:6-21. **3.** Deuteronomy 10:4—"And he [the Lord] wrote on the tablets, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the Lord spoke unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly, and the Lord gave them unto me." Here the Lord wrote the ten commandments upon the second set of stone tablets exactly the same as on the first set of Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

Thus the Bible never calls Exodus 20:1-17 the ten commandments. The Bible reserves that designation for Exodus 34:10-26 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

Hence if we are going to display the decalogue, should we not display either Exodus 34:10-26 or Deuteronomy 5:6-21? Let us look more closely at these two sets of commandments.

IV. THE RITUAL SET OF COMMANDMENTS (EXODUS 34:10-26)

Here "the ten words" are preceded by the Lord's proclamation that he will visit "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and children's children, to the third and fourth generation" (34:7). On the other hand, in Exodus 20:1-17 God's promise to punish great-grandchildren for the sins of their great-grandfathers is a part of the ten commandments (20:4-6). At least in this respect, the commandments of 34:10-26 are less offensive to thoughtful people than the commandments of 20:1-17.

Would it not, then, be better to display the decalogue of 34:10-26 rather than that of 20:1-17? To help answer this, let's look at "the Lord's commandments" in Exodus 34:10-26.

1. Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (34:11).

According to this verse and Deuteronomy 7:1-5, Israel was to put to death every person in the seven nations of Palestine, each nation being larger and more powerful than Israel. Exodus 12:37 informs us that Israel had 600,000 men, which translates into 3,000,000 men, women, and children. That

means that during the conquest Israel terminated the lives of 21,000,000 people (3,000,000 x 7).

Do decalogue displayers realize that by posting these commandments they are approving and glorifying ancient Israel's bloody wars of naked aggression? Just how will this approbation of brute conquest help to rid the world of strife and injustice? (See below on Exodus 20:12.)

2. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it be a snare in the midst of you (34:12).

3. You shall break down their altars, and break their pillars, and cut down their Asherim [sacred poles, symbolizing Asherah, the mother goddess of Canaanite religion], for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters play the harlot after their gods and make your sons play the harlot after their gods (34:13-16).

Do decalogue displayers really want to advertise the fact that they worship a God whose name is "Jealous" and who is so intolerant of other religions? How can any nation governed by the laws of "Jealous" practice freedom of religion?

And how about the expression, "play the harlot"? This figure of speech for Israel's unfaithfulness to Jehovah is used over and over in the Bible. Have decalogue displayers ever noted that it is only the unfaithfulness of women which is a disgraceful enough sin to serve as a biblical symbol of Israel's unfaithfulness? Unfaithful Israel is a harlot, not an adulterer, whoremonger or womanizer, because male unfaithfulness was not regarded as a serious enough matter to serve as a symbol of Israel's unfaithfulness to Jehovah. Do decalogue displayers want to offend women by continuing this double standard?

4. You shall make for yourself no molten gods (34:17).

5. The feast of unleavened bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt (34:18).

6. The firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it, you shall break its neck (34:20). In contemporary English, you can save the life of a first-born donkey, the basic means of transportation, by sacrificing a lamb; if you don't want that bloody job, you must break the donkey's neck. How many decalogue displayers want to be neck breakers or lamb slayers?

7. All the first-born of your sons you shall redeem (34:20).

8. Bring an offering every time you come to worship (34:20, CEV).

9. Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest (34:21).

10. Celebrate the harvest festival each spring when you start harvesting your wheat (34:22).

11. Celebrate the festival of shelters each autumn when you pick your fruit (34:22).

12. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel (34:23).

13. When you sacrifice an animal on the altar, don't offer bread made with yeast (34-25, CEV).

14. Don't save any part of the Passover meal for the next

Displaying The Decalogue

day (34:25) (CEV).

15. The first part of your harvest you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God (34:26).

16. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk (34:26).

How many of these sixteen commandments do the decalogue displayers even pretend to obey? How many decalogue displayers want to post this "decalogue" in classrooms and courtrooms? But why should it not be displayed, since "the Bible says" it is "the ten commandments"?

V. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DEUTERONOMY 5:6-21 AND EXODUS 20:1-17

The "ten words" of Deuteronomy 5:6-21 are quite similar to Exodus 20:1-17 and hence do not need to be quoted here in their entirety, but there are several important differences:

a. No work is to be done on the Sabbath in order that "your male slaves and female slaves may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (5:14-15), whereas according to Exodus 20:8-11, the Sabbath is to be observed for a theological reason (the people must rest on the seventh day of every week in imitation of a manlike God who rested on the seventh day of the creation week after the labors of creation). According to Deuteronomy 5:14-15 the people are to rest for a humanitarian reason (as former slaves in Egypt, the people should recognize what a boon a weekly day of rest would be to their slaves).

Would decalogue displayers want to display any set of commandments which approves of slavery? Is slavery "the cornerstone of a fair and just society"?

b. Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you in the land which the Lord your God gives you (5-16). A successful as well as a long life is promised, whereas in Exodus 20:12 only long life is promised.

c. Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, etc. (5:21). Here "wife" is mentioned before, instead of after, "house," as in Exodus 20:17. Thus the wife is no longer so obviously the property of her husband along with his house, slaves and oxen.

Would not Deuteronomy 5:21 with its higher degree of sensitivity to the status of women look better on the wall than Exodus 20:17, where the wife is obviously a piece of property?

In the light of our study, should we display one or both sets of commandments which the Bible (indeed, God himself, according to decalogue displayers) identifies as "the ten commandments" (Exodus 34:10-26; Deuteronomy 5:6-21)? Or should we display the set of Exodus 20:1-17, which the Jewish-Christian tradition (that is, mere human beings) calls "the ten commandments"? To help us answer these questions, let us now consider Exodus 20:1-17.

VI. THE TRADITIONAL TEN (EXODUS 20:1-17)

PREFACE. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (20:2).

Does anyone really believe that this Hebrew mythology about a tribal deity, Yahweh, who supposedly exerted himself

to free a band of Hebrew slaves, is the glue that holds civilization together?

1. You shall have no other gods before me (20:3).

Do decalogue displayers believe in and want to advertise the henotheism of this commandment rather than the monotheism of Christian theology? "Henotheism" means that the Hebrews were to worship only their God, Yahweh, but without denying the existence of "other gods." Monotheism is the belief that one and only one God exists.

Suppose that anyone (best friend, brother, sister, son, daughter, wife, husband) should say to you, "Let's worship other gods." What does the Bible require you to do? Obey the Lord's command to stone them to death. In fact, "you must be the first to throw the stones, and then others from the community will finish the job. Don't show any pity" (Deuteronomy 13:6-10). Recall that King Pekah of Israel massacred 120,000 Judeans because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers (2 Chronicles 28:5-6).

2. You shall not make yourself a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing mercy unto thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments (20:4-6).

What kind of a God is it who forbids the making of images and likenesses and then orders Moses to make a serpent image of brass to be worshipped (Numbers 21:9)?

How many decalogue displayers agree with orthodox Jews that this commandment forbids the taking of photographs, since photographs are "likenesses"? Do decalogue displayers want the courts to try people for taking pictures, going to movies, and watching videos and TV?

How many informed people today, including decalogue displayers, want to promote the prescientific world picture of a three-story, earth-centered universe, in which the flat earth floats upon the waters under the earth, and in which God sits in heaven above the earth? This same world picture is also given in "the ten words" of Deuteronomy 5:6-21, but is not found in "the ten words" of Exodus 34:10-26 nor in the commandments of Leviticus 19:1-36, Matthew 19:18-19, Mark 10:19, and Luke 18:20. Therefore, would it not be more nearly scientifically correct to display "the ten words" of Exodus 34:10-26?

Once again (see above on Exodus 34:13-16), how can worship of a jealous God be compatible with our freedom to worship the god or gods of our choice or no gods at all?

How can "a fair and just society" be based upon the laws of an unjust God who punishes the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the sinner (also see above on Exodus 34:7)? "Have you ever considered it odd? That a self-declared merciful God/Should punish a grandchild/For something his grand did? It's proclaimed in the Bible, by God." (Lawrence Perrine). Later on, the same Jehovah God reversed himself and declared that "a son is not to suffer because of his father's sins" (Ezekiel 18:20; Jeremiah 31:29-30). Would it not be less offensive to good sense to display the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel rather than those of Moses?

3. You shall not take the name of Jehovah your God in vain, for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless who takes his

Displaying The Decalogue

name in vain (20:7). God will punish anyone who misuses his holy name.

Does anyone, including decalogue displayers, expect the courts to punish everyone who misuses the name of God, whether in magic formulas, invocation of the dead, telling lies after swearing to tell the truth, or any irreverent use, such as cursing? What punishment should a judge mete out to those who exclaim, "Good God!" or "Golly, Gee!" or "Lordy, Lordy, look who's forty!" And how about the blatant forms of cursing, such as "God damn you!" Does such disrespect of the divine name deserve a hefty fine, or a stiff jail sentence, or both? Why not obey the Lord's commandment to stone to death anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord (Leviticus 24:15-16)?

Now hear Jesus: "Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn' ['Don't use the Lord's name to make a promise unless you are going to keep it.' CEV]. But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil [or the evil one]" (Matthew 5:33-37). So also James 5:12, "Above all else, don't take an oath" (CEV).

Here Jesus radically revised the old commandment against misusing the sacred name (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy, 5-11). He could have commanded his followers to exercise greater fidelity under oath by saying, "You shall not use the Lord's name to make a promise unless you are going to keep it." But instead of that, he outlawed oaths and swearing altogether and ordered his disciples never to take an oath of any kind on any occasion.

How, then, can Jesus' followers take an oath in court, saying, "I do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God"? Why don't all Christians do like the Quakers, who have the courage of their convictions to refuse all oaths, even in courts of law? How can decalogue displaying judges administer such oaths? Would they rather follow Moses than Jesus and James (James 5:12)? Do oath takers realize that, according to Jesus, they are in league with Satan, the evil one (Matthew 5:37)? Or did Jesus not mean Satan, the evil one, but evil? No one knows for sure whether to translate the words as "from evil" or as "from the evil one."

Like Moses (see above on Exodus 20:4-6), Jesus accepted the primitive world picture of a three-story universe (the earth is the footstool of God in heaven above) (see also Matthew 3:16-17; 4:8; 24:29; 26:64). Jesus also believed that Jerusalem is God's city, "the city of the great King."

Again we ask (see above on Exodus 20:4-6), how many decalogue devotees endorse such antiquated views?

4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave, or your female slave, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates, for in six days the Lord made heaven and

earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (20:8-11).

Which day is the Sabbath, Saturday (Jews and some Christians) or Sunday (most Christians)? Since most decalogue displayers believe that Sunday is the holy day of rest, will they please tell us where in the Bible their God repealed Saturday as the Sabbath? The answer, of course, is "nowhere." The Bible makes no bones about the fact that Saturday is the Sabbath forever (Exodus 31:16-17).

Why are we to observe the Sabbath? Is it because God rested on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:17)? Or is it so that the slaves of the Israelites may rest as well as their Israelite masters, since the Israelites were once slaves of the Egyptians (Deuteronomy 5:12-15; see above on Deuteronomy 5:14-15)? If we are to observe the Sabbath for both of these reasons, which reason did God write on the two tablets of stone with his finger (Exodus 31:18)?

What punishment do decalogue displayers recommend for those who do not keep the Sabbath day holy? Should everyone who works on the Sabbath be put to death, as the Lord commands (Exodus 31:12-17), even for kindling a fire (Exodus 35:1-3)? And how about death by stoning for anyone who picks up sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36)? Will decalogue displayers cast the first stones?

Do decalogue displayers believe in the six-day creation story upon which Sabbath rest is based? If so, should all those Jews, Christians, and others who do not believe in a six-day creation be hauled into court and punished as threats to the holy day?

5. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you (20:12).

Would decalogue displayers follow the Lord's commands to put to death everyone who hits, or even curses, his father or mother (Exodus 21:15-17; Leviticus 20:9)? Would decalogue displayers stone to death a disobedient, rebellious, and stubborn son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)? Should a child respect a father who sexually abuses her? Should children honor parents who walk off and leave them? How about "deadbeat dads"? (On the Lord's "gift" of Palestine to Israel, see above on Exodus 34:11.)

6. You shall not kill (20:13).

Does this commandment mean "kill" or "murder"? Since the Hebrew word used here means either to kill or to murder, how can we know which is meant? Does it apply to abortion? suicide? war? capital punishment? euthanasia? Does this commandment, like its counterpart in Buddhism, forbid the killing of animals? Whatever it may mean, it did not prevent Moses and the Levites from slaughtering about 3,000 of their own sons and brothers for worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 32:28), even though the people did not yet know the law against idolatry on the tablets Moses was bringing down the mountain. Would decalogue displayers go so far as to punish people on the basis of laws not yet in effect? Would that be "a fair and just society"?

Now hear Jesus: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment' [a killer shall be brought to trial before a properly constituted authority]. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother [without cause, according to other ancient manuscripts] shall be liable to judgment [will

Displaying The Decalogue

have to stand trial]; whoever insults [says Raca, 'you are spit, worthless'] his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:21-22).

Do decalogue displayers, following their Lord Jesus, want to burden the judicial system by bringing to trial everyone who is angry with someone else? And did Jesus say "angry," or "angry without cause"? No one knows with certainty because the ancient manuscripts themselves differ. Do decalogue devotees really want to take to court everyone who insults somebody else? What civilized judge would imprison or execute someone for getting angry with someone and calling him a fool? Should judges threaten an angry person with hell?

Or was Jesus not talking about earthly courts but about the tribunal of God in the last judgment when the omniscient Judge of all the earth will recall every fit of anger and every insulting word of everyone who ever lived? Who, in fact, knows what Jesus meant? Why should we bring this confusion over the commandments into the courtroom and classroom? Do believers honestly think that everyone who calls another person a fool is in danger of hell fire, even Jesus, who called the scribes and Pharisees "blind fools" (Matthew 23:17)? Shouldn't decalogue devotees wish that Jesus had never put his own spin on the commandments?

7. You shall not commit adultery (20:14). This command against adultery was really for the protection of the man, not of the woman. The man wanted his name and his property to go to his sons, but if another man had committed adultery with his wife, then his name and his property might go to someone else's son or sons. This commandment thus means, "My wife is my property and is taboo to all other men." That the wife is property is indicated by the tenth commandment, which lists the wife along with slaves, animals, and other property not to be coveted. See above on Deuteronomy 5:21.

Should courts today follow the Lord's commands to execute adulterers and adulteresses (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24)?

Are bigamy and polygamy adultery? May a man have wives, concubines, and secondary wives without committing adultery? Lamech had two (Genesis 4:19); Abraham, three (Genesis 16:1-3; 25:1); Jacob, four (Genesis 29:21-30:13); Esau, four (Genesis 28:9; 36:2-3); Gideon, many wives and concubines (Judges 8:30-31); Elkanah, two (1 Samuel 1: 1-2); Saul, an unspecified number of wives (2 Samuel 12:8); David, eight, plus many wives and concubines (1 Samuel 18:27; 2 Samuel 3:2-5- 5:13; 11:26-27 12:7-8); Solomon, 1,000 (1 Kings 11:1-4); Rehoboam, seventy-eight (2 Chronicles 11:21); Abijah, fourteen (2 Chronicles 13:21). Were these cases of adultery? Or is polygamy right and proper?

Are people who marry and divorce for any reason other than adultery and then remarry living in adultery (Matthew 5:31-32)? Is there any real difference between a person repeatedly divorcing and remarrying and a person who does not marry but lives with a series of partners? Now hear Jesus: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart [if you look at another woman and want her, you are already unfaithful in your thoughts, CEV]. If your right eye causes you to sin,

pluck it out and throw it away; ... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away," (Matthew 5:27-30).

If adulterous thoughts are as evil as adulterous actions, should every man who looks at a woman and wants to have sex with her, but controls his desires, be executed as an adulterer? Can thought police spy into a man's inner springs of action, detect the first inception of desire, and bring the culprit to justice? Is this teaching of Jesus that evil thoughts are as evil as evil actions the basis of our legal system and the cornerstone of civilization?

Did Jesus intend his commandments to apply only to his immediate disciples or to all people? Did he mean them for this present natural age or for the supernatural new age he expected to come in his generation (Matthew 24:34)? Or were only monks to practice Jesus' reformulated commandments, whereas ordinary Christians in the workaday world were to live according to Moses' decalogue? Did Jesus intend his radical reformulation of Moses' commands to take the place of Moses' commands or simply to intensify them? If the former, should not Jesus' commands be posted in classrooms, courtrooms, and parks rather than Moses' commands? But do even the most zealous decalogue displayers want to publicize Jesus' extreme demands for chastity and thereby trigger an epidemic of guilt-ridden men poking out their eyes and chopping off their hands?

8. You shall not steal (20:15).

If someone steals animals and cannot afford to replace them, must that person be sold as a slave to pay the owner of the animals, as the Lord commands in Exodus 22:14? Must thieves who get caught pay back seven times what was stolen and lose everything (Proverbs 6:31)?

9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (20:16).

Does this commandment refer only to speaking the truth in court regarding one's neighbor? Or does it include lies in general, gossip, calumny, and slander? If so, what should the penalty for gossip be? Or for telling a lie which saves someone's life? According to Deuteronomy 19:18-21, a man who makes a false accusation is to receive the same punishment as the accused would have received if found guilty, "whether it means losing an eye, a tooth, a hand, a foot, or even your life. The crime of telling lies in court must be punished. And when people hear what happens to witnesses who lie, everyone else who testifies in court will tell the truth." Do decalogue displayers want our legal system to be based upon "an eye for an eye," as was Israelite law?

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male slave, or his female slave, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's (20:17).

If covetousness is a universal passion which operates at all times, at all places, and upon all persons, should everyone be haled into court and tried for wanting something that belongs to someone else? Should "marriage busters" be tried for wanting and winning the spouse of another? (On the status of wives as property, see above on Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:21. On slavery, see above on Deuteronomy 5:14-15.)

VII. THE DEVIL'S DECALOGUE

1. Thou shalt not permit a witch to live (Exodus 22:18). 2. Thou shalt utterly destroy anyone who sacrifices to any god,

Displaying The Decalogue

except Yahweh (Exodus 22:20). **3.** Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk (Exodus 23:19). **4.** Thou shalt not wear clothes made of different kinds of material (Leviticus 19:19). **5.** Thou shalt stone to death anyone who blasphemeth the name of the Lord (Leviticus 24:16). **6.** Thou shalt stone to death anyone who worships other gods (Deuteronomy 17:2-7). **7.** Thou shalt not wear the clothing of the opposite sex (Deuteronomy 22:5). **8.** Thou shalt not charge interest on loans to another Israelite (Deuteronomy 23:19). **9.** Thou shalt cut off the hand of any woman who grabs the private parts of a man fighting her husband (Deuteronomy 25:12). **10.** Thou shalt not withhold discipline from a child, for if

you beat him with a rod he will not die (Proverbs 23:13).

VIII. THE BILL OF RIGHTS

Our examination of the Bible itself should make it plain that, contrary to decalogue displayers, the ten commandments and other biblical laws cannot be the basis of our judicial system today. To make the ten commandments apply today, we must reinterpret them so as to change their original meaning. But who can agree upon the best revised set of ten commandments to be displayed in classrooms, courtrooms, and public parks? Since we in the United States are governed by local, state, and federal laws in conformity with the constitution of the United States, why not display (if anything) the constitution, especially the Bill of Rights?

NUTS IN THE NEWS

by J.D. Bell

HOW ABOUT PUTTING WARNING LABELS ON THOSE THINGS?

Mario Garcia of Pawtucket, R.I. was charged with assault with a deadly weapon when he punctured his mother-in-law's esophagus by jamming two crucifixes down her throat in an attempted exorcism. He was screaming, "The devil is inside her," when the police arrived and found the woman on the front porch with blood flowing from her mouth. The family told police that the mother-in-law had been behaving strangely and was taken to a local hospital, but she was released with a recommendation of psychiatric care. When she returned home, Garcia attempted an exorcism on her son, who was depressed about his mother, but when the devil flew out of his mouth and into the mother-in-law, Garcia jammed crucifixes down her throat while his father-in-law, brother-in-law and three children gathered around and prayed.

MEANWHILE... Three South Korean men are facing murder charges in Los Angeles for battering the wife of one of them for 6 hours in an attempted exorcism. In their defense they are arguing they were merely exercising their freedom of religion.

MY CRYSTAL BALL TELLS ME SOMEONE IS GETTING RICH

Nearly half of the **20,000** pay-per-call services (900 numbers) available are "psychic" hotlines, the largest being "Dionne Warwick's Psychic Friends Network," which logs about 4 million minutes (at 4 dollars a minute) each month.

AND THESE PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE!

Jonathon Katz provides about 250,000 free readings a month on his Tarot, I Ching and biorhythm Web sites.

WHY NOT GIVE ASTROLOGERS ALL POLITICAL POWER?

India's new prime minister moved into his official residence a week earlier than planned on the advice of his astrologers, who advised that he take advantage of a favorable stellar configuration. The new minister, H.D. Deve Gowda, describes himself as a deeply religious man who makes major decisions only after consulting with his astrologers.

THAT JUST MIGHT BE WORTH THE TRIP

Ninety-five pilgrims died from exposure on their way to a cave high in the Kashmiri mountains that is said to contain a frozen manifestation of the sexual organ of the god, Shiva. Freezing rain and heavy snow had trapped some 70,000 Hindu pilgrims on the way to the 13,000-foot-high cave.

HOW UNLUCKY CAN YOU GET?

At two other shrines in India, devout Hindus, fearing the

approach of an astrologically unlucky day, gathered to pray for protection but instead found themselves caught up in stampedes. In Haridwar, on the banks of the Ganges, 21 people were trampled to death when worshipers stormed over a narrow bridge leading to a holy temple. At another "holy site", thirty-seven more people died when the crowd surged into a temple, some of them trampled and others impaled when a bamboo fence collapsed.

ANOTHER ASTROLOGICALLY UNLUCKY DAY

The Dutch Society of Skeptics recently checked the competence of 44 astrologers with a test consisting of two lists, one containing the place and date of birth of seven people and the other with extensive information about each of the seven individuals. The challenge: match them up. Needless to say, the astrologers failed completely. Half did not even get one correct answer and none correctly matched more than three. Though all the terms of the challenge were set by the astrologers, they complained that the test was unfair.

SOMEHOW I DON'T FEEL ANY SAFER

The National Park Service has allowed followers of cult-leader Sri Chinmoy to hang a bronze plaque containing a free-verse poem in the lobby of the Statue of Liberty which, they claim, will bring about world peace and harmony. The cult also claims to have contributed to world peace by setting records for continuous hand-clapping and underwater pogo-stick jumping. One follower pogo-jumped up and down Japan's Mount Fuji and then broke his own long-distance record by bouncing 13 miles around New York City. He wore out two heavy-duty pogo sticks and stopped only after being refused permission to hop up the Empire State Building's steps. The group claims about 6,000 active members in 50 countries and says that their 65-year-old spiritual leader can lift 7,000 pounds with just one arm, has written 13,000 songs and 1,120 books, and has drawn 5 million pictures of peace birds. The entire poem by Sri Chinmoy, entitled "America's Proudest Vision-Pride," reads as follows:

O Polestar Statue of Liberty!

Earth-heart's pinnacle-Divinity.

America's proudest Vision-pride—

Her Beauty's cosmos-fragrance-ride—

Freedom-smile bestower is your Soul.

World-peace-hunger's nectar-flooded Goal.

NUTS IN THE NEWS

DO CHRISTIANS ALWAYS RESOLVE PROBLEMS THIS WAY?

Neighbors say the trouble began 8 years ago when a second storefront church opened next door to an existing one in Brooklyn. Since then there have been accusations of slashed tires, hang-up phone calls, and parking in each others driveways. The differences were resolved, however, when the pastor of the Prince of Peace Disciples and his 3 sons confronted three members of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and accused them of firing gunshots at their building. The

pastor's sons then took out their guns and fired away, killing one of the parishioners and wounding the other two.

MORE CHRISTIANS RESOLVING PROBLEMS

A holy war was set off in Brazil when a Pentacostalist pastor, opposed to the "image-worship" of the nations 110,000 Catholics, displayed a statue of a black version of the Virgin Mary called Our Lady of Aparecida, and referred to it as "a horrible, disgraceful doll" while kicking and slapping it. Screaming, rock-throwing crowds surrounded the church of the Pentacostalist pastor while thousands of Catholics protested by carrying images of the saint through the streets.

Hell Bent by Richard F. Stratton

A recent innovation of the faithful seems to be feign surprise on hearing that someone is an atheist. "It *really* takes faith to be an atheist!" is a common reply. I have even heard that one on television. The implication, of course, is that you really have to have "faith" that you are not going to go to hell. "Conviction," of course, is the better word, but religionists have been attempting to place some sort of "faith" on us unbelievers for many decades now. It apparently is considered something of a triumph to be able to say that unbelievers have even more faith than believers.

Of course, our "faith" won't get us into heaven. I recently saw a snippet of a *Doogie Howser* rerun on television, and I left it on because the episode had Albert Einstein somehow communicating with Doogie and giving him the old Pascal's Wager argument for having a belief in God. That is, he stated that there was nothing to lose by believing in God, but there was everything to lose by not believing. The real Einstein would never have been so philosophically silly, of course, and he was in fact a non-believer and wrote an approving foreword to Homer Smith's *Man and his Gods*, a scholarly and atheistic work. But the point is that the implication is clear that the general belief is that atheists will be condemned to hell for the simple sin of disbelief.

Not too long ago, David Noelle, a Ph.D. candidate and local freethought leader, quoted columnist Barry Byrd. I nearly laughed out loud when I got to the part in which he quoted Byrd about Isaac Asimov no longer being an atheist because he now is in hell! Byrd was beside himself with glee. David wrote a little article on this manifestation of malevolence on the part of a religious individual. Being a nice man, David was frankly puzzled by the general tone of intolerance.

It must be terrible being a religionist and having people actually not believe in any supernatural, let alone your own particular brand of hogwash. Perhaps it is consoling to some of these religionists to think that the skeptics will some day pay for their arrogance by suffering eternal damnation. Such a belief doesn't speak very highly, however, of either the character or the intelligence of its adherents.

Consider, Dr. Isaac Asimov seems to have been regarded by everyone who knew him as a good man. He advocated kindness and understanding in place of intolerance and hate, and he contributed generously to charities. Further, many have referred to him as a natural resource because of all the invaluable books he wrote on topics ranging from science to Shakespeare. There has probably never been a writer so diverse. Andy Rooney called him the most intelligent man since Leonardo Da Vinci. But, since Isaac did not believe in

the supernatural, he is, in the eyes of Mr. Byrd and countless other religionists, condemned to perdition.

There are several points that escape our religious friends. The first is that there is no safe path if what they say is true. After all, there are millions of people of other beliefs who feel just as strongly that Mr. Byrd's prospects are not so great either because he doesn't believe in *their* religion. Christianity, after all, has never been more than a minority religion in the world. And if there really is a supernatural entity who is inclined to send anyone to eternal torture, can *anyone* really trust him, or it? After all, part of this entity's sadism might be to see what kind of hoops he can get his believers to jump through and then condemn them to damnation anyway. (That would be the final laugh!) Finally, any belief system which holds as its most deadly sin that of disbelief in the system must be held suspect. That very trait is a red flag that the belief system can't survive on its own merits.

In regard to David's comments about the general intolerant attitude toward people with no belief in the supernatural, the situation actually has improved just in my life time. It goes without saying, however, that there is room for much more progress! The great leader of British freethought, Chapman Cohen, once hypothesized that such irrational hatred had its roots in primitive cultures, in which one unbeliever could bring retribution upon the entire tribe. Perhaps that is at least a part of the explanation. Certainly, it is true that religion reviles the unbelievers above all others, and this is inculcated into the majority of people from the time they are quite young.

In actuality, it is this very intolerance of unbelievers which demonstrates that religious beliefs are simply primitive relics. Gods are obviously of human origin, and their childish traits make them blatantly human to those of us who are objective enough to perceive that. As just one example, why is it that any omnipotent and omniscient god craves such praise and adulation from his creatures? For being all powerful. God is pretty insecure! And he saves his most potent sadism for those who don't believe in him. Pardon me for laughing, but this is not only all too human—it is just plain childish!

Of course, all of this means that I am also headed for hell (a possibility I take as seriously as the spells a stone age witch doctor might put upon me), but at least I will have the company of the likes of Isaac Asimov and Mark Twain. Somehow I much prefer those prospects to the company of Barry Byrd and others of his ilk.

The Truth About Faith by Richard Schoenig

Introduction

The influence of religion on beliefs and behavior throughout the world is considerable and growing. In this country religion vigorously presses its positions in the public square on a multitude of moral and social issues such as abortion, birth control, sex education, divorce, pre- and extra-marital sex, homosexuality, euthanasia, teaching creationism, and women's roles. Religious views on these issues carry great weight with many people because they take religion very seriously and because they are quite certain that correct moral and social views come only from a religious source. As a result, religious believers often have suspicious and sometimes hostile attitudes toward non-believers. For instance, a number of states, including my own state of Texas, have provisions in their state constitutions prohibiting those who do not affirm the existence of a Supreme Being from holding public office.¹ The thinking here, I imagine, is that if true morality is derived only from religion, then non-believers are unlikely to have correct moral values regulating their behavior. Hence, they are more likely to behave immorally, and are more likely to be a danger to society. Given this kind of reasoning, there ought to have been no surprise when in 1988 American Atheist Press representative Robert Sherman asked then presidential candidate George Bush whether he recognized the equal citizenship and patriotism of Americans who are atheists, and Bush responded that he didn't think that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots.²

In this article I shall point out that faith, that is, belief in the absence of adequate evidence, is the ultimate justification for many religious doctrinal, moral, and social/political pronouncements. I further contend that faith has simply not received the critical attention it deserves, commensurate with its influence on personal belief and policy formation. To address this deficiency the article will examine the nature of faith and argue that there are serious problems with the claim that it can legitimately justify beliefs or behavior.

Religious Faith

As stated above "faith" in the present context is defined as "belief without adequate evidence." For Christianity faith is, in effect, the price of admission to heaven. By having faith Christians manifest their love and loyalty to God and their worthiness for receiving the gift of eternal salvation. The importance of faith is stressed time and again in biblical stories involving notables such as Abraham, Noah, Job, the Israelites, as well as certain New Testament figures such as the apostle Thomas. The Gospel of John records that after his resurrection Jesus appeared to the remaining apostles during Thomas's absence.³ When the others told Thomas that Jesus had appeared to them he was skeptical, for he had no tangible evidence for this remarkable claim. Jesus then appeared to the apostles again when Thomas was present, at which point, with the evidence in hand (literally!), the apostle believed. Jesus went on to rebuke Thomas for his lack of faith, and in contrast praised the many who believe on faith alone, that is, without having adequate evidence to support their beliefs.

The moral of this story is clear: in religious matters belief based on faith is more important, necessary, and worthy in the eyes of God than belief based on evidence and reasoning.

The primacy of faith in generating important true beliefs is a standard theme in Christian doctrinal history. St. Paul, the organizing genius of early Christianity, makes this point.

Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.⁴

A century and a half later Tertullian of Antioch, an early Church leader (c. 160-230), reaffirmed the anti-rationalist tenor of the priority of faith when, concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus, he said "I believe because it is absurd; it is certain because it is impossible!"⁵ The same glorification of faith and suspicion of reason were echoed 1300 years later by the great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, when he asserted the following:

*If all the smart alecks on earth were to pool their wits, they could not devise a ladder on which to ascend to heaven...he who would deal with the doctrines of the Christian faith (should) not pry, speculate, and ask how they may agree with reason, but, instead, merely determine whether Christ said it. If Christ did say it, then he should cling to it, whether it harmonizes with reason or not, and no matter how it may sound.*⁶

The situation today remains essentially unchanged. Faith continues to be believers' ultimate justification for religiously-related convictions. In conservative Christian circles (echoing Luther) this point is pugnaciously made on bumper stickers such as, "Christ said it. I believe it, and that settles it!"

Admittedly, sometimes Christians do argue in the public arena for some of their views using non-faith-based persuasion, but even here apodictic faith drives reason. The latter can, at best, give only supplementary support for the truths that faith has already revealed. For example, we may ask why most Christians continue to believe that homosexual activity is wrong even after all of the non-religious objections to it have long since been swept away. Answer: the Bible, held to be inerrant on the basis of faith, calls it an abomination. Why do many Catholics disregard the sound arguments establishing the reasonableness and compassion of certain forms of euthanasia? Answer: the Pope, believed by Catholics on the basis of faith to be the Vicar of Christ on earth, has affirmed God's disapproval of such procedures. How have the twisted racist views of certain Christians persisted and even flourished? Answer: faith-justified personal religious revelation convinces such individuals that "Aryans," Afrikaners, Anglo-Saxons, or whatever are God's new chosen people. Faith is a powerful rhetorical trump played subtly, frequently, and

⁴1 Cor. 1:22-25.

⁵Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, 7; *On the Flesh of Christ*, 5.

⁶Martin Luther, "Tenth Sermon on John 6," tr. Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, (St Louis, Mo., Concordia, 1959), vol. XXIII.

¹Article I-Bill Of Rights, Section 4, the Texas Constitution.

²*Free Inquiry*, Fall 1988, 16.

³John 20:19-29.

The Truth About Faith

with seeming impunity in personal and public domains by religious advocates.

Reason

Reason can be defined as the activity which requires one to hold all and only those beliefs for which there is adequate support. The phrase "adequate support," of course, requires specification. Logic, a branch of philosophy, has developed rules and procedures for ascertaining what does and does not constitute such support. The phrase "adequate support" is not hopelessly vague or subjective. Logic has for the most part given it a clear and useful understanding.

The importance of reason in human affairs needs little elaboration. It largely accounts for the survival and progress of our otherwise physically undistinguished species. Moreover, reason underwrites the civilizing activities of morality, science, education, language, and government. In short, reason is indispensable for human survival and prosperity.

Problems Associated With Faith

1. Faith Contradicts Reason

The 18th century French philosopher Denis Diderot summed up this problem for faith as follows: "If reason was bestowed on us by Heaven and the same can be said of faith, then Heaven has presented us with two incompatible and contradictory gifts."⁷

The contradictory directives of faith and reason are rooted in their contradictory definitions. Reason requires that one ought always to hold all and only those beliefs which have adequate support; while faith says one ought not always do that, but rather one must hold some, namely religious beliefs, in the absence of adequate support. Clearly, one cannot satisfy both directives. The inconsistency between the two directives creates some serious tensions for religious adherents. For example, orthodox Roman Catholics must accept the condemnation of artificial birth control on faith, even though reason informs them that such methods harm no one, can greatly enhance the physical and emotional well-being of women and men, can aid the formation of caring, functional families, and can be ameliorative in a world of finite and shrinking material resources. In the same vein, fundamentalists are required to accept on faith that the earth has had a relatively short history (say, thousands, instead of billions of years), that no significant biological evolution has taken place, and that a world-wide flood occurred in historical times which covered the entire planet, including the highest mountains. Yet, at least the educated fundamentalist can hardly be unaware of the veritable blizzard of scientific evidence which shows such beliefs to be rationally unsupported. Sometimes the inconsistency can literally be a matter of life or death as when Christian Science parents reject standard medical treatment for their seriously ill children in favor of healing by faith.

At this point, in order to make room for faith, a believer might ask the following question: Why must one always be reasonable? The non-believer could respond that the question, in effect, answers itself in that it presupposes the appropriate and unique use of reason for determining (1) whether any particular answer to the question is correct or not; and assuming, as the believer undoubtedly does, that we should

not always be reasonable, for determining (2) when it is correct to be reasonable and when not. The believer, in turn, could counter that reason is not, in fact, necessary for (1) or (2), that faith could be the appropriate decision mechanism. Clearly, the resolution of this dispute rests on whether faith can be justified as an alternative to reason for generating knowledge. Thus, it is to the examination of this question that we now turn our attention.

2. Faith Is Not A Path To Knowledge

Many religious people, such as the medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas, deny any serious conflict between faith and reason because they hold what has been called "the dual approach" to knowledge. That is, they claim that reason and faith both originate from God. As such, the two are different but consistent, and are equally valid paths to understanding.

Non-Believer's Response

The most obvious problem with the believer's dual-approach defense of faith is that there is no evidence showing that faith is a path to any knowledge whatsoever. To say that we can know that X is true through faith, is to say that, despite having insufficient evidence for X, we can nevertheless know that it is true simply by believing it to be so. This "believing makes it so" standard of knowledge, runs counter to our personal and our species' experience of how knowledge about the world has been gained. For example, we cannot know that our diabetes has been cured by consulting our faith. One way to see this more starkly is to replace the word "faith" in sentences with its proper definition, "belief without adequate support." If this is done, then a claim such as, "My faith assures me that God has a purpose for permitting 40,000 children to die of currently preventable causes every day," would be recast as "My belief without adequate support assures me that God has a purpose for permitting 40,000 children to die of currently preventable causes every day." The latter would more clearly portray the emperor's nakedness, that is, the epistemological emptiness of appealing to faith as a knowledge-generator.

One might try either a non-fiducial or a fiducial justification of the claim that faith is an alternative path to knowledge. However, neither justification can succeed. First, if one were able non-fiducially to demonstrate logically or empirically that fiducial beliefs are true, then one would have to acknowledge the priority of reason over faith, and thereby, in effect, show the dispensability of faith. We need not, we cannot, believe on faith what we can prove by reason. So, to the extent that Christian apologists could prove the truth of traditional fiducial claims such as the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus, or the inerrancy of the Bible, to that same extent they would diminish the need and importance of faith within Christianity. This point has been noted by many Christians, themselves, especially those in the fideist tradition going back to St. Paul. It receives perhaps its most passionate and eloquent expression in the 19th century writings of the Christian proto-existentialist, Søren Kierkegaard, as in the following passage.

Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast to the objective uncertainty, so as to

⁷Denis Diderot, *Addition aux Pensées philosophiques*, c.1762.

*remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.*⁸

Second, a fiducial justification of faith as knowledge-generating also will not work. One cannot cite faith itself as the legitimate reason for accepting faith as an alternate path to knowledge, as this would be patently question begging. The believer might counter that it is the non-believer who is in fact begging the question by requiring reasons to prove faith. For this assumes the hegemony of reason over faith—one of the points in contention between the believer and the non-believer. The non-believer, however, can respond by pointing out that the preference for using reason and not faith is not assumed but rather justified by facts which even religious people cannot deny, namely, the significant advances in human well-being, progress, and felicity made possible by reason over the last 400 years or so, and unmatched by faith.

In sum, we cannot justify that faith is an alternative path to knowledge by rational means, as this would destroy faith; nor can we justify faith's efficacy as a knowledge-generator by appealing to faith itself, as this would be question-begging. I conclude, therefore, that it cannot be justifiably shown that faith is a path to knowledge.

3. Faith Cannot Adjudicate Its Competing Claims

For example, Christians cannot objectively show that Muslims or Jews err when the latter deny on faith that which Christians hold by faith, for example, that God is a trinity. This endemic inability of faith to objectively adjudicate competing fiducial claims, together with the fact that there are so many such important competing claims, is a serious flaw for an activity that purports to be knowledge-generating. On the other hand, if there is a disagreement about, say, which of two pieces of chalk weighs more, reason provides an objective method for adjudicating the dispute, for instance, by putting both pieces on a balance; or, if reason cannot at a certain point decide which view is correct because of lack of conclusive evidence, then reason would require withholding judgement until conclusive evidence is had. Disputants with conflicting fiducial claims, however, simply deny the opposing view and remain intransigent in their own, regardless of the lack of evidence. This dogmatism can produce dangerous tensions which often erupt into violent altercations such as have been found today in places like Bosnia, Northern Ireland, the Middle East, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Since faith can neither prove the truth of its claims nor adjudicate competing fiducial claims, it unintentionally becomes the great equalizer of all knowledge claims asserted in its name. This is ironic in light of its apodictic pretensions. But knowledge is surely not advanced by equalizing competing beliefs. It is advanced by rigorously investigating the matter in question, and then carefully evaluating the answers obtained therefrom. If an answer does not have adequate support, it must not be accepted. If it does have adequate support, then it may provisionally become part of our understanding of reality, at least until supplanted by a better supported view. The epistemic engine generating the great human advancement over the past 400 years has not been

unsupported faith, but documented support for beliefs. This is precisely what is absent from faith, and why worldviews based on it are so frequently irreconcilable, faulty, and harmful.

4. Faith Cannot Be Justified By Strength Of Conviction

Some believers maintain that fiducial claims do have adequate support, but in terms of intensity of internal conviction rather than external evidence. For example, a Christian may claim to know that Jesus is divine on the basis of the internal subjective feeling of certainty he has about the divine nature of Jesus when praying, reading scripture, or witnessing to others etc. The certainty associated with fiducial claims is similar to the certainty one gets about, say, being in love by directly consulting one's internal feelings.

Non-Believer's Response

First of all, it is a faulty analogy to compare knowing by introspection that you're in love, and knowing by introspection that a faith-claim is true. To consult your internal feelings to determine something about those feelings is quite appropriate. In fact, that is precisely where reason would have you look for adequate evidence about something such as whether you are in love. However, it is inappropriate to consult internal feelings or reactions to get adequate evidence for the truth of things outside ourselves, such as whether God exists or whether using artificial birth control will send an unrepentant person to eternal damnation.

Second, there is no evidence whatsoever that strength of conviction has any plausible connection to the truth of what is believed. Simply believing something about the world around us strongly or even passionately is no indication that what is believed is true. Many patients in mental care facilities unfortunately bear not so mute testimony to this fact.

The short of it is that, despite believers' claims to the contrary, faith simply cannot compel nature to ratify fiducial dictates, no matter how deeply held. Nature has certain objective characteristics which reason, not faith, has the better track record of revealing to us. To the extent that we ignore this we detach ourselves from reality, sometimes dangerously.

5. Faith Is Not Found In Everyone

Believers sometimes charge that critiques of faith falter when they neglect the fact that virtually everyone has faith in something, whether it be the veracity of their spouse, the punctuality of the 5:53 evening train, or their own self-worth. Believers also claim that faith-critiques falter when they fail to acknowledge that even scientists believe in many things they haven't or can't see, such as electricity or the fact that meteors caused the bulk of the craters on the moon. Thus, believers feel that it is unfair to single out religious faith-claims for special criticism.

Non-Believer's Response

There are two salient ambiguities in this attempted defense of faith. The first concerns the word "faith" itself. Besides its use in a religious context as belief in the absence of adequate evidence, "faith" is also often used to indicate a sense of trust, but trust based on adequate support. One might say, "I have faith that the 2:53 train will be right on time." But here we are actually talking about a belief which, unlike religious faith-claims, is supported by past experience, in this case by the past record of the punctuality of this particular train. We can refer to this as "supported faith," as opposed to the "unsupported faith" characteristic of religious claims. Anyone can reasonably have supported faith in all sorts of things. Because everyone accepts supported faith does not establish

⁸Siren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, tr. David F. Swenson And Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 182.

The Truth About Faith

that everyone really accepts, or should accept, the legitimacy of unsupported faith as a knowledge-generator.

The second ambiguity resides in the word "see" or some similar external sense term. Believers fail to recognize that words like "see" are not always meant in their literal sense. To say that scientists can never see electricity, and that therefore their belief in it is faith-based is to miss the point. Scientists do, in fact, have rich and abundant indirect empirical evidence supporting the existence of, say, electricity, partly in the form of many successful predictions, involving precise, directly observed instrument readings, which would otherwise be unpredictable and unexplainable. These accurate, explainable predictions make belief in "unseen" scientific posits, like electricity, a matter of reason, and not faith.

Concluding Points

In the beginning of the article I mentioned the large and growing influence of religion on important matters of personal and public concern such as abortion, birth control, homosexuality, sex education, divorce, pre- and extra-marital sex, euthanasia, teaching creationism, and women's roles. I noted that religion's putative justification for its extensive involvement in these areas is the claim that faith is a legitimate source of knowledge, especially with regard to morality.

However, it has been my experience that even among college students who identify with Christianity or Judaism (both of which come standardly equipped with a putative objectively correct universal moral code), moral skepticism, the view that there are no provably correct universal moral standards, is rampant. A plausible explanation for this curious inconsistency is that the theistic students are aware that religious moral claims are ultimately fiducial claims, and that

the latter have no objective justification. Given these premises, it is not difficult for them to make the rather obvious inference that religious moral claims are not objective; whence comes the students' moral skepticism—another example of the law of unintended consequences.

Note that the foregoing reasoning does not necessarily preclude that some of the moral or social positions held by faith could be objectively justified by non-fiducial reasoning. However, my observation is that the moral skepticism of the students previously cited is so ingrained as to render that possibility nil to them. I think that the subjectivity of faith has actually poisoned the well with regard to the possibility of objective morality for many religious believers. Thus, faith-based religion, which portrays itself as the last bastion supporting moral objectivity, is not only not that at all, as the article has argued, but ironically may likely be a vehicle for undermining the whole idea of objective morality itself. In fact, it may even undermine the idea of the objective correctness of religion itself, as expressed in such oft heard student comments as "all religions are really the same," or "it doesn't matter which religion you follow, just as long as you believe in something."

Finally, in summary, I have argued that faith has the following serious deficiencies: (1) it contradicts reason; (2) it is not a path to knowledge; (3) it cannot objectively adjudicate its conflicting claims; (4) it cannot be justified on the basis of strength of internal conviction; and (5) it is not found in all people. Given that these deficiencies are as evident as they are serious, it is surprising that faith continues to enjoy a revered status as a source of justified beliefs. I caution that serious personal and public policy is too important to be entrusted simply to the unsupported conceits of faith, no matter how sincerely they may be held and proffered.

AT RANDOM: FREETHOUGHT NEWS FROM THE REALM OF LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

by Walter Hoops

In *The Inner Jefferson* subtitled *A Portrait of a Grieving Optimist*, Andrew Burnstein, who calls himself an independent scholar, reports that Jefferson did not express any enthusiasm about his early religious training. He shunned all mythical suggestions. God, to be acceptable to him was perceived as a "Workman-Creator" with no influence on public affairs. He believed that the prosperity of a country would be assured by the force of knowledge, scientific inquiry and man's moral sense and not by any deity. He fiercely rejected any dogmas and faith in miracles. In his library he listed the Bible under "History-Ancient" and under "Religion," Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, Hume and Locke's *Letters on Toleration*. Enlightenment is his common theme. He believed that literature should excite sympathetic emotions of virtue.

In the chapter "The Ten Best Sellers" according to the *Sunday New York Times* of January 7, 1973, described in Gore Vidal's *United States Essays 1952-1992* he starts with *Two from Galilee: A Love Story of Mary and Joseph* by Marjorie Holmes who had written other religious books. In the new book Mary is worried about her daughter who is "mad about Joseph" a carpenter's son who is "mad for her." When they

are together "the thing that was between them chimed and quivered and let discomfort to all. "Mary's flesh sang as she experienced the singing silence of God." "The Holy Spirit came upon her, invaded her body and her bowels stirred and her loins melted." In due time the young people married, went to Bethlehem where each night the great star stood over the stable entrance, now purple, now white. (If it was not for the authority of Gore Vidal, I would have a hard time to believe that such tripe could appear in 1973 in America's foremost daily newspaper.)

According to the American Bible Society, the world's 5 to 6 billion people speak 6703 different languages and about 300 million use unwritten ones. In the publicity about these facts, no mention is ever made of the Old Testament. The "Bible" is obviously restricted to the New Testament.

To prevent 5th and 6th graders from reading about the "Big Bang" theory in *Discovery Works*, a science textbook, the school superintendent in Marshall County, Kentucky, had the offending pages glued together with the explanation: We're not going to teach one theory and not teach another one. He does not consider it censorship.

**Blood on the Altar: Confessions of a Converted Jehovah's Witness Minister.
Review by Jerry Bergman**

Blood on the Altar: Confessions of a Converted Jehovah's Witness Minister. By: David A. Reed. Amherst, NY
Prometheus Books.

Which religion is the fastest growing denomination in the world, now claiming over ten million adherents? What religion according to their Dunn's report of a few years ago, sells multi-millions of books and had an income in the United States of over \$1.25 billion, yet pays no taxes on this income? Which religion is the second largest denomination in Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Italy and has a significant membership in USA, Britain, France, and Germany? Which religion practices teachings which resulted in the direct loss of tens of thousands of lives? Which religion for years forbid the use of vaccinations, once taught that the use of aluminum cooking utensils is actually a major cause of death including cancer and that germs do not cause disease, but disease is caused by other factors such as eating too many starches or the use of aluminum cooking ware?

The answer to all of these questions is Jehovah's Witnesses, a group which is fast becoming a major world denomination. They have grown enormously in countries of the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. Reed's book tells the story of the Watchtower and explains what attracts so many people to this religion. Reed explains why he, as a national Merit Scholar honor student at Harvard University, left college and ended up devoting his time and energy to pedaling Watchtower publications from door to door. Unlike many persons, Reed did not switch from one fundamentalist denomination to another, but was, both in high school and in college, a committed outspoken atheist — he selected Harvard because of its "reputation as a hot bed of liberal and even radical politics" (p. 102).

Reed tells a fascinating story, full of much psychological insight. It also is meticulously accurate—quite in contrast to many books written about the Watchtower. Only one who has lived and studied it extensively can fully understand the experience of being one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Although critical, the book is not mean spirited, but honestly tells a story which is very familiar to one who knows the literature about the sect. Many books on the Watchtower are extensive discussions of what many regard as minor points of theology. Although Reed touches on theology, his focus is on Watchtower history and the organization from a sociological standpoint. It is also a story of real people and emotions and why both so many people join and so many leave at enormous personal and social costs. Much of the focus of this story is on the tragedy of the Watchtower doctrine forbidding blood transfusions—a complex belief which allows certain blood fractions and forbids others according to a set of rules that defies logic. The Watchtower did not openly forbid blood transfusions until 1961 when it became a "disfellowshipping" offense. Previous to this, the Watchtower specifically ruled

one could not be disfellowshipped for taking a blood transfusion, and a few years earlier they even extolled and praised the modern miracle of blood transfusions. What caused them to change their stand has nothing to do with science, medicine or even theology but everything to do with the Watchtower's antagonism towards anything orthodox—orthodox science, (especially evolution), orthodox medicine, and even orthodox religion.

Reed now works full time researching the Watchtower organization, and his books have sold hundreds of thousands of copies. The reason he wrote this book is in part "as an active penance for my own share of responsibility" for the thousands of lives that have been lost because of Watchtower teaching on medicine and health. Unfortunately there exists today among the so-called liberal establishment a tendency to accept all denominations and religions as being as good as one another and politically incorrect to criticize any religion. This viewpoint is wrong—some sects and cults teach horribly irresponsible ideas which result in the death of thousands. The foolish ideas taught in the past, their repeated prophecy failures, the Watchtower hypocrisy, (they repeatedly—go back and forth on some issues), are all well documented by Reed. Certain behavior is approved; then the Watchtower changes its mind, and those who indulge in this behavior are disfellowshipped—then they change their mind again and it is again approved. Not uncommonly, Watchtower later will later go back to its first position.

Why people are trapped in organizations like the Watchtower is eloquently discussed by Reed. A major reason is their doctrine of disfellowshipping: one who voices criticism of the Watchtower is likely to be disfellowshipped, meaning shunned by family and friends alike. If most of your friends and relatives are Witnesses, being shunned means you're now a stranger in your own house, cut off from any meaningful communications from friends and relatives. Many people in this situation see suicide as the only way out. Others are forced to leave their family and begin life anew somewhere else, often cut off forever from family and friends.

For those interested in religion, this book is a must read. The Watchtower story is incredible testimony to the forces of sociology and psychology as well as the tragedy of ignorance. The Watchtower is slowly retreating on their blood transfusion doctrine, and how many years it will be before blood transfusions are approved one cannot say. The only question is how many people will die before the blood transfusion prohibition is reversed. Before the whole story is told, how many millions will have died because of the Watchtower's foolishness in prohibiting organ transplants and many other medical procedures such as vaccines can only be guessed at. This book should be in every public library.

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