

THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprofit Organization
P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764 • 512.371.2911 • www.atheist-community.org

October 2003 - Volume 7.10



Center for Inquiry's DJ Grothe visits Austin, speaks on "Mind Siege" movement

by Jill Ford; photos by Paul Wilson

Over the weekend of October 18 - 19, the ACA had the privilege of welcoming a special guest, DJ Grothe from the Center for Inquiry International (CFI). DJ is the CFI's Director of Campus and Community Programs and is based at the organization's headquarters in Amherst, New York. In this capacity, DJ oversees the Campus Freethought Alliance, an umbrella organization for student freethought / atheist / secular humanist groups and regularly travels the country to meet with these groups, deliver lectures, and participate in debates on campus. He also works with various off-campus community groups affiliated with the CFI. DJ visited Austin to meet with a number of community groups including the ACA and University Atheists and Agnostics. He also gave a special lecture on the topic of "New Religious Threats to Academic Freedom" and appeared as a guest on "The Atheist Experience".



DJ Grothe speaks about religious threats to academic freedom - 10/19/03

The Center for Inquiry is a non-profit organization whose mission is "to defend science, reason, and freedom of inquiry in all areas of human endeavor". The CFI was founded in 1995 by philosopher and author Paul Kurtz and comprises two main affiliate organizations: the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and the Council for Secular Humanism. The CFI publishes several magazines including *Skeptical Inquirer*, *Free Inquiry*, and *Philo*. The organization helps to maintain a network of secular humanist societies and campus freethought groups (Campus Freethought Alliance). Among many other programs, the Center administers

- continued on page 2 -

Lecture Meeting News - Professor James Dee

On Sunday, November 2, Professor James Dee will speak on the topic "The Death of the Afterlife: How Fossils, Embryos, and Brains Falsify Promises of Heaven and Threats of Hell." (12:30 PM, Austin History Center, 9th and Guadalupe).

Dr. Dee is a retired professor emeritus of classics from the University of Illinois, Chicago and a visiting scholar at the University of Texas. In addition, he has had seven of his essays published in the Op-Ed section of the *Austin American-Statesman* over the past two years. Dr. Dee has given numerous presentations at scholarly and professional conferences and has had more than two dozen articles published on subjects such as Latin poetry, classical derivations of English vocabulary, and other topics.

Mark Your Calendar...

Friday, October 31, 6:00, Trick-or-Canning Food Drive and 7:00, Halloween Party, at the home of Russell and Virginia Glasser. Prior to the party, we will go "Trick-or-Canning" - knocking on doors, announcing we are from the Atheist Community of Austin, and asking for donations of non-perishable food items for the Capital Area Food Bank. Be sure to dress up for the occasion -you might win a door prize for best costume! For directions, contact Russell or Ginny: rglasser@apollowebworks.com or virginia@apollowebworks.com

Sunday, November 2, 12:30 PM, Lecture by Prof. James Dee, "The Death of the Afterlife: How Fossils, Embryos, and Brains Falsify Promises of Heaven and Threats of Hell." Austin History Center, Mayor's Room. 9th and Guadalupe.

Saturday, November 15, starting between 6:30 and 7:00 PM, First Monthly ACA Potluck Dinner at the home of Russell and Virginia Glasser. Please bring a favorite dish to share. For directions, contact Russell or Ginny: rglasser@apollowebworks.com or virginia@apollowebworks.com

Sunday, December 7, 12:30 PM, Lecture by Prof. Robert Solomon Topic to be announced. Austin History Center.

Center for Inquiry

(continued from page 1)

a network of Secular Organizations for Sobriety, an alternative to spirituality-based 12-step programs for people facing addiction. For more information, see www.centerforinquiry.net.

On October 18, the ACA board hosted a dinner meeting to learn more about the CFI and the organization's plans for possible expansion. The CFI has recently announced a four-year, \$26.26 million fundraising campaign called the "New Future Fund" to raise capital and endowment funds to expand the Center's influence and impact. The CFI currently operates regional branches in New York, California, Florida, Mexico, Peru, Germany, France, Russia, Nigeria, and Nepal. Austin is one of several cities under preliminary consideration for a new CFI branch. ACA co-chair Jeff Jones gave a presentation introducing the ACA and presenting the advantages of Austin as a desirable location for a CFI branch. Members of several Texas atheist / humanist groups attended the meeting and showed their support. These groups included Freethinkers Association of Central Texas, Metroplex Atheists, Houston Atheists, and Asimov Humanists.

On October 19, DJ Grothe spoke at the Austin History Center on the subject of new religious threats to academic freedom. The focus of his talk was the "Mind Siege" movement. *Mind Siege: The Battle for Truth in a New Millennium* is a bestselling book written by evangelists Tim LaHaye (author of the "Left Behind" series) and David Noebel and published in 2000. The book's premise is that secular humanism is a religion and that government institutions such as public schools are violating the Constitution by teaching from a secular perspective and not giving equal time to Christianity and other traditional religions. *Mind Siege* is a follow-up to LaHaye's 1980 book, *Battle for the Mind*, which galvanized the Christian movement against secular humanism. In fact, CFI's magazine *Free Inquiry* was founded in response to *Battle for the Mind*.

DJ screened and refuted portions of a "Mind Siege" training video which has been circulated to thousands of churches in



DJ Grothe presents Tim LaHaye's "Mind Siege" video and footage of CFI founder Paul Kurtz.



order to give what LaHaye refers to as "Christian foot-soldiers" "the ammunition to fight a very real and active enemy" (secular humanism). DJ pointed out that one of the reasons secular humanists have a hard time organizing a united front to oppose the religious right is that there is no such thing as an "humanist foot-soldier". Secular humanists tend to be too independent-minded to unquestioningly follow orders.

The "Mind Siege" video is startling in its misrepresentation of secular humanism as a "toxic faith" and a conspiracy dominating public education, government agencies and the mainstream media. It even goes to the extreme of comparing secular humanists to Nazis without offering any specifics. In one segment, David Noebel says, *"Evolution has led naturally to the destruction of the moral foundation of this country. If you believe that man is an animal, you expect him to behave like one.*

If you're thinking that this is a little exaggerated or even implausible, let me remind you of Germany's Third Reich."

The video then cuts to a shot of Hitler saluting his troops and then a "man on the street" interview with an unidentified man who says, *"If you take some secular humanist philosophies to their logical extension, they can be very dangerous. The idea that people who are not up to a certain par can be exterminated because they're not contributing to society - I think that's a very dangerous philosophy."*

LaHaye and Noebel then move on to their next point without even explaining the Nazi reference. A knowledgeable person can easily refute this sort of rhetoric, but the "Mind Siege" video is clearly directed at an audience that has limited knowledge of secular humanism and evolutionary theory.

DJ pointed out that it is important not to underestimate these "Christian foot-soldiers". Their movement is very large (est. 80 million evangelical Christians in the US), politically savvy and well-funded (for example, the Campus Crusade for Christ has an annual operating budget of nearly \$400 million). As atheists, we all need to work together to oppose these attacks on rationality and freedom of conscience.

The Art of Recreational Debating: Don't Quote Me On That

with your guide, *Russell Glasser*

At last I'm continuing my series on debating. In my last column, several months ago, I presented this quote for your review:

"We have staked the future of all our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."

— James Madison

When you read this quote, no doubt it was immediately obvious that this is the sort of thing that just gets lapped up by those "Christian Nation" kooks. They'll say, "See? There's another example of a devoutly religious founding father who said morality and law is based on the Bible."

Intrepid reader Todd Walker was up to the challenge and emailed me the right answer. For this I offered to buy him breakfast at the bagel shop, but unfortunately Todd moved away before he could take me up on the offer.

Of course we can't write off James Madison as a fringe radical who has no knowledge of US law. Fortunately, it turns out that this quote is completely bogus. You can use any of the methods I suggested in the last column: search Google for key phrases, search Usenet (groups.google.com), or search a trusted source if you know of one. Eventually you'll find out that Madison flat out never said this. The claim that he did was perpetrated by one David Barton, in a book called "The Myth of Separation," which you can read about on these pages:

<http://www.au.org/press/pr4401.htm>

<http://www.positiveatheism.org/writ/founding.htm>

Barton cited some older sources, but nobody has ever found the ORIGINAL source in which James Madison said anything resembling the above quote. And don't think they haven't been trying.

Now I'd like to say something about the general practice of quoting people. Like David Barton, a lot of religious zealots and creationists spend most of their time arguing by quotation. They paste a word-for-word quote that somebody said, and they base their arguments around the quote.

In this series I've tried to stress the importance of treating your beliefs as a science. If you read scientific papers, they rarely quote anyone. Sure, they refer to other people's work frequently. But what they usually do is sum up the content of other people's papers in their own words, and then they write a reference to the full paper at the end. Sort of like posting a hyperlink to the original article, or a transcript of the original interview, so that interested readers can easily look for themselves and verify that the summary is accurate.

There's nothing wrong with quoting people. Quotes can introduce or wrap up a post very nicely. I appreciate nice sound bites that concisely express deep thoughts. But as I've been saying in previous columns, quotes do not prove anything; ideas are what count. As you can easily see from the fake Madison quote, quotes can often be made lie more effectively than any other tactic. If you use a short quotation by itself to make an argument for you, you're just being lazy.

Why do people argue by quotation? Because reading an entire article or paper, or even watching a documentary about it, takes work. Understanding what the author is really trying to say takes work. On the other hand, quoting something takes no effort at all. Got a computer with an Internet connection? Just highlight, copy and paste, and your work is done. You don't have to think about where the quote came from. You don't even have to care. Your quote could come third, fourth, or fifth hand. It could have gone through a review, which got quoted in an article, which got cited in a book, which got reviewed again. The quote may be filtered through the agendas of dozens of middlemen. So what? It's all in a neat little package, and your thinking is done.

But if you really take ideas seriously, you should ALWAYS look for the original source, and read enough of it to get a flavor of what the author really means. Even if it's a quote you happen to agree with, that doesn't mean that it's genuine. If you don't do your homework, your opponent will do it for you, and then you'll look foolish. You'll look like you're only out to score points and aren't interested in the truth. I wish I could say that only theists partake in this sort of lazy argument, but I'm afraid atheists sometimes do it too.

And now I'll give you a quote that we all know and love from another great American, Thomas Jefferson.

"The Christian god can easily be pictured as virtually the same god as the many ancient gods of past

- continued on page 4 -

The Art of Recreational Debating: Don't Quote Me On That

(continued from page 3)

civilizations. The Christian god is a three headed monster; cruel, vengeful and capricious. If one wishes to know more of this raging, three headed beast-like god, one only needs to look at the caliber of people who say they serve him. They are always of two classes: fools and hypocrites.”

Your assignment is simple: find this quote. Name the source and the year. And to prove that you really found it, you have to include the sentence before and the sentence after the quoted passage. As before, the first person to email rglasser@apollowebworks.com with the correct answer will win breakfast at the bagel shop on me the next time I see you.

The ACA Files: Member Profile of the Month

Name: Tyler Maroney

ACA Member Since: 2003

ACA Activities: “Atheist Experience” crew, Godless Gamers, Happy Hour

Where From Originally: Shreveport, Louisiana

Occupation: Restaurant employee (this is where a college education will get you, kids!)

Hobbies/Interests: Reading, writing, movies, music, rollerblading, taking long walks, bowling, martial arts, web surfing, etc.

Little-Known Facts: “I attend a local Unitarian-Universalist church and have a strong interest in religion. I have no belief in a god or the supernatural and seriously doubt that I will ever encounter evidence or compelling arguments in favor of such things. Yet I can't help but be intrigued by the call to personal growth and contemplation that comprises spirituality. Yes, I know, I'm a weird atheist.

“I also own every Bloodhound Gang album, I lived at a hostel during my first month in Austin, and I can pick my nose with my tongue! Hey, I already said I was a weird atheist, okay? :)”



Regularly Scheduled ACA Events:

Saturdays:

“The Non-Prophets” Internet radio show airs biweekly from 2:00 - 3:30 PM at www.atheistnetwork.com. Archives can be played at www.atheist-community.org.

Sundays:

Bagel Shop Meetings take place every Sunday except the first Sunday of the month at 10:30 AM at the Hot Jumbo Bagelry (307 W. 5th Street).

Monthly Lecture Meetings take place the first Sunday of every month at 12:30 PM in the Mayor's Room of the Austin History Center, which is located at 9th Street and Guadalupe. Some members usually gather around 11:00 for a pre-lecture brunch at Dario's Mexican Food Restaurant, 1800 E. Sixth Street.

“The Atheist Experience” Live Call-in TV Show: 4:30 - 6:00 PM, on Austin Access Channel 10.

Mondays: Godless Gamers takes place at 7:00 PM at the home of Russell and Ginny Glasser. Contact Russell (rglasser@apollowebworks.com) for directions.

Tuesdays: “The Atheist Experience” is replayed from 4:30 - 6:00 PM on Austin Access Channel 10.

Thursdays: Atheist Happy Hour takes place at 7:30 PM at Antonio's Tex-Mex restaurant near the intersection of IH 35 and US 183.

E-Mail Discussion/Announcement Lists: Lists include a general discussion list, an “ask an atheist” list, a gamers' list, a social announcements list, and a singles' list www.atheist-community.org/email.htm

THE ATHEIST

A publication of the
Atheist Community of Austin.

Editor:
Jill Ford

Contributing Writers for This Issue:
Russell Glasser, Arlo Pignotti

Photos:
Paul Wilson

Articles, reports, and letters to the
editor are always welcomed.

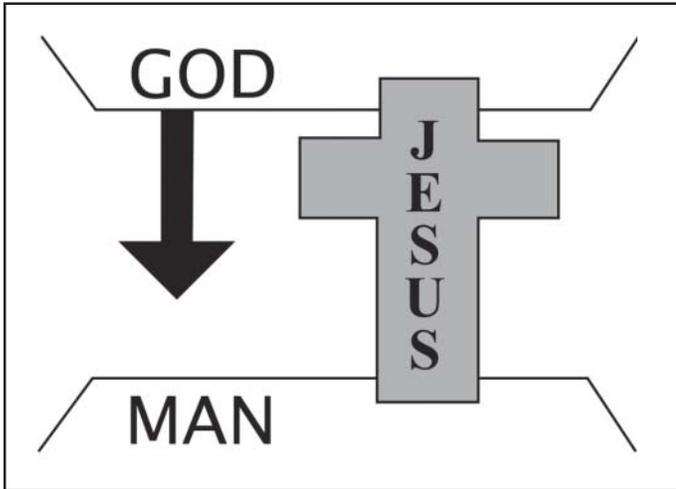
Please write to jillf@austin.rr.com.

Opinions expressed in *The Atheist* are those of
the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the
views of the Atheist Community of Austin.

Holy Paraphernalia Mania: Holy Pamphlet Paraphernalia

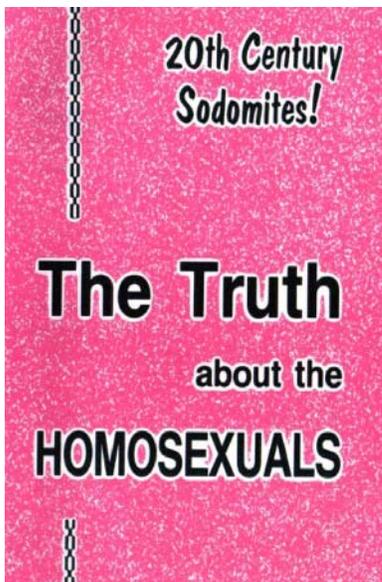
by Arlo Pignotti

I think we all have come across religious tracts in our lives. Little pamphlets that are often handed out by evangelists on street corners that we in turn throw away. Does this look familiar...?



Nine out of ten tracts have this simple schematic. Man on a flat earth and God in a flat up-side-down Heaven. It is your decision to reach god by climbing Jesus (much like a magic beanstalk) or just try to jump high enough to reach the taunting dangling black arrow.

Pamphlets like these are pretty dull, but think twice before you throw Christian pamphlets, booklets or tracts in the trash, because some can be quite entertaining. Like the booklet

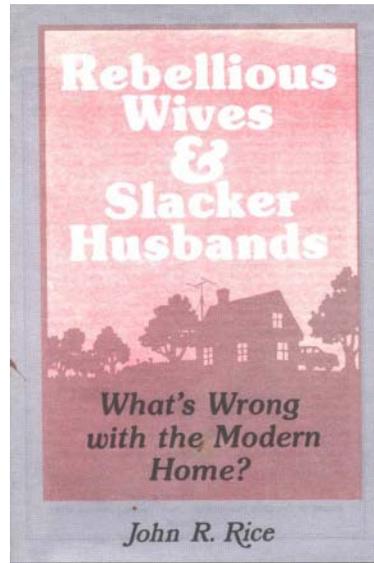


titled *20th Century Sodomites! The Truth about the Homosexuals*, by **Dr. Hugh F. Pyle!** Think about that name for a moment. You couldn't possibly make up a more appropriate name for a homophobic evangelist who was full of it!

If that's not enough, the booklet is printed, in hot pink, by "Sword of the Lord Publishers".

Here is an excerpt...

"Hairy-chested males in frilly dresses and blonde wigs, their faces adorned with makeup, ride tricycles in public and dance with other perverts in San Francisco discos." I know a few gay people, and I have yet to catch them exposing chest hair while riding tricycles in such costumes. This is indeed a huge F-ing pile. And so is this...



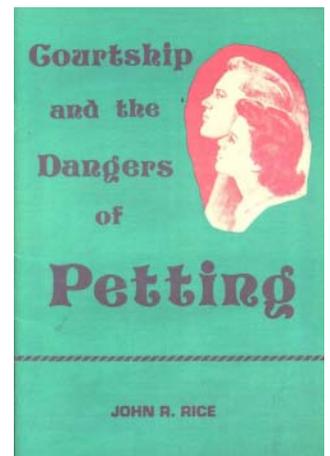
Rebellious Wives & Slacker Husbands [!] *What's Wrong with the Modern Home?* Let us learn how to solve all our problems in the home through spousal submission shall we? Here is how the pamphlet starts off...

"Should a wife obey her husband? Be in subjection to him? Should she submit to him as if he were God? Should a husband have authority over his wife as

a master does over a servant? Should women even reverence their husbands, obeying them and calling them Lord? **The Bible does command a woman to do all of this, as we will show from many Scriptures!**"

And no doubt they certainly do back it up with scripture. Some Atheists (myself included) print lists of horrible Bible quotes to demonstrate just how terrible the Bible and fundamentalist Christianity can be. Yet here are fundamentalists proudly showing off the very same scriptures in hopes of persuading people. It makes me think twice before pointing out such Bible passages, because it actually brings some people to Christianity! But this won't...

Courtship and the Dangers of Petting, also printed by *Sword of the Lord Publishers* teaches that not only should people abstain from necking and petting, but "factors that lead to necking and petting." So what



- continued on page 6 -

Holy Paraphernalia Mania: Holy Pamphlet Paraphernalia

(continued from page 5)

is left to do but to be just like the nice young Christian couple on the front cover, standing shoulder-to-shoulder looking up at God all day. This booklet also states that such acts as kissing on the neck before marriage is only appropriate between members of the same sex (giving reference to Acts 20:37). What would Hugh F. Pyle have to say about this!

Now since all these fundamentalist tracts now have us thinking about sex, that brings me to my most prized pamphlet on sex by our friends the Mormons. *Steps in Overcoming Masturbation*, by Mark E. Petersen, provides some very clever tips in overcoming the dreadful sin of masturbation. These are just a few...

“Avoid being alone as much as possible.” But being around others when aroused could lead to petting!

“Never stay in the bath more than five or six minutes.”

“If the temptation seems overpowering while you are in bed, GET OUT OF BED AND GO INTO THE KITCHEN AND FIX YOURSELF A SNACK, even if it is in the middle of the night, and even if you are not hungry, and despite your fears of gaining weight.”

“Eat as lightly as possible at night.” I guess we are to overlook that contradiction.

“Dress yourself for the night so securely that you cannot easily touch your vital parts.”

“Wear pajamas that are difficult to open, yet loose and not binding.” Isn't this a contradiction too?

“...reading at least one chapter of Scripture, preferably from one of the four Gospels in the New Testament, or the Book of Mormon...” because the Old Testament is too sexy.

“A Book of Mormon, firmly held in hand, even in bed at night has proven helpful in extreme cases.”

“In very severe cases it may be necessary to tie a hand to

the bed frame with a tie...”

“...if you are tempted to masturbate, think of having to bathe in a tub of worms, and eat several of them as you do the act.” Is he saying to think of eating the worms or is he saying to actually eat worms while thinking of bathing with them?!

“Never read about your problem. Keep it out of mind.” So I guess we should stop reading this tract!

But just one more...

“Make a pocket calendar for a month on a small card... If you have a lapse of self control, color the day black. Your goal will be to have ‘no black days’.”

I think I'm doing pretty good. Can't wait till Mark E. Petersen receives my calendar in the mail...

DECEMBER 2002						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

If anybody out there finds wild and wacky holy paraphernalia, don't forget to share. Write to me at pine@texas.net!