

# THE ATHEIST

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

February '03 - Volume 7.2



## The atheists go to Washington: a travelogue (Part Two)

by Jeff Jones

*Part one recap: Seven members of the ACA traveled to Washington D. C. for the Godless American March on Washington. The members who attended the march were Jeff Dee, Vic Farrow, Kyle Lawson, Charlotte Lawson, Laura Sargent, Mary Sue Osborne, Surrena Schreiber and the author of this travelogue, Jeff Jones. Part one of this log included the experiences of Jeff Dee, Vic and myself as we traveled to Washington, met some friendly Yankee atheists, had a great seafood dinner on the banks of the Potomac with said Yankees, the actual gathering for the march and the march itself up until the point where I encountered a rabid (well he looked rabid as he was literally foaming at the mouth) Christian protester.*

Giving wide berth to the spewing preacher, I rejoined the march. An unusual thing about marches down the National Mall is that you have to cross a couple of streets and they just don't stop traffic for you. The marchers cross the streets just as any other pedestrians would, with the traffic lights. This tends to break up the marchers into sections and I ended up in the trailing group, separated from my fellow ACA members. The exhilaration that we felt as we began this march was only increased as we reached the site of the rally. In the shadow of the United States Capitol building, a breathtaking sight in and of itself, was set up a large stage, complete with a 20-foot-wide live video screen along with several information tents and a sound and camera platform filled with equipment. In front of this stage gathered 2,500 or so atheist Americans come to claim their birthright.

As I had become separated from my fellow ACA members I started moving through the crowd looking for a familiar face or two. I soon found Laura, Charlotte, Mary Sue and Surrena minding the ACA banner and enjoying the bright, sunny day while waiting for the rally to start. It didn't take long to

find the rest of the ACA contingent who were scattered throughout the crowd and so we all found our places. We didn't have long to wait.

I'll not go too much into detail about the content of the speeches as they can be heard in their entirety at the American Atheist website or the C-SPAN video can be checked out of the ACA library (we purchased two copies). I highly recommend that everyone try to watch this video as it is a wonderful chronicle of the day's events. I will, however, touch briefly on some of the outstanding moments of the rally.



*"A bar full of partying atheists"*

The rally began with a rousing call to action by Ellen Johnson of the organizers of the March, American Atheists. It would be, I think, impossible to overstate the absolutely wonderful job that American Atheists did in organizing and running the March on Washington and they richly deserve the sincere gratitude of community-minded atheists all across the country. I know many have had disagreements of philosophy and tactics with American Atheists in the past but there can be little doubt that they pulled off the March on Washington in spectacular fashion.

In her speech Ms. Johnson said that we came to Washington not to complain about our plight but to give notice that the godless members of American society would no longer remain spectators in the political process. She said *"This is a class in Activism 101. This is a lesson in how the squeaky wheel gets the grease. If we are tired of sitting at the back of the proverbial bus then we have to get up if we want to get to the front."* She extolled us to go out and become active in community politics, to speak out on the issues affecting nonbelievers in America and throughout the world, and most importantly she encouraged us to organize

### THE ATHEIST

A publication of the  
Atheist Community of Austin.

Editor:  
Jill Ford

Contributing Writers for This Issue:  
Jeff Jones, Bobbie Kirkhart, Arlo Pignotti

Cartoonist:  
Phil Amador

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

Please write to [jillf@austin.rr.com](mailto: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.

*(continued on page 3)*

## Furr's closes - new lecture meeting location

People attending ACA's January 5 lecture meeting at Furr's Cafeteria arrived to find that Furr's had permanently and unexpectedly closed. The meeting was moved to the mall's food court, and local activist Thomas Van Orden spoke as planned about his lawsuit vs. the State of Texas over the Ten Commandments monument at the state capitol.

The February 2nd lecture meeting is scheduled to take place at the Austin History Center, located at 9th and Guadalupe, in the Mayor's Room. Please check the ACA website and watch for e-mail announcements regarding the location and subject of the March 2 lecture meeting.

## AAI to give annual "Dawkins Award" at April convention

by *Bobbie Kirkhart*

World-renowned scientist and atheist advocate Richard Dawkins has authorized the Atheist Alliance International to present an annual award in his name to an atheist who has made outstanding contributions to the cause of rationalism. Dr. Dawkins will personally present the award at this year's AAI annual convention, to be held in Tampa, Florida, April 18-20. He is gifting the recipient with a complete collection of his books, autographed to the honoree.

Dr. Dawkins, Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science, at Oxford University, is the author of 18 books, including The Selfish Gene, The Blind Watchmaker, Unweaving the Rainbow, and Climbing Mount Improbable. His books are known not only for their flawless interpretation and development of scientific information, but also for an eloquence of writing style unusual in technical material. Since he once taught at the University of California, Dr. Dawkins is familiar with the religiosity of American society and is very concerned about U.S. issues of church-state separation.

Other notable atheists will be present at this AAI convention. Among them will be "The Amazing" James Randi (famed magician and nemesis of faith healers and psychics), Darrell Lambert (the Seattle Boy Scout who was disqualified from the Eagle Scout rank he had earned because he would not deny his atheism), and Michael Newdow (the atheist who brought a case before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals seeking removal of the phrase "Under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance).

For more information about the Tampa convention, go to [www.atheistalliance.org/florida/conventionflyer.htm](http://www.atheistalliance.org/florida/conventionflyer.htm), call Atheists of Florida at (813) 835-1500, or the Alliance toll-free at (866) HERETIC.

- *The Atheist Community of Austin is an affiliate organization of Atheist Alliance International.*

## The ACA Files: Member Profile of the Month

**Name:** Vic Farrow

**ACA Member Since:** 1998

**ACA Activities:** Co-chair of the board and co-host of "The Non-Prophets" Internet radio show (currently on hiatus). Past producer of "The Atheist Experience" TV show.

**Where From Originally:** A native Texan, Vic was born in Houston and has also lived in San Antonio.

**Occupation:** Apartment complex maintenance

**Hobbies/Interests:** Mountain biking, playing guitar, playing X-Box games, drinking beer, and sleep!

**Little-Known Facts:** 1. Drove and fired a tank when he was serving in the National Guard. 2. Would like to be emperor of the world. 3. Was a second-grade choirboy!



## Regularly Scheduled ACA Events:

### 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. Since Furr's Cafeteria has closed, a new permanent time and location have not yet been determined. Please watch for e-mail announcements or see [www.atheist-community.org](http://www.atheist-community.org).

**"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 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:** See [www.atheist-community.org/email.htm](http://www.atheist-community.org/email.htm)

**Radio Show: "The Non-Prophets"** Internet Radio Show has gone on hiatus. You can still access the archives at [www.atheist-community.org](http://www.atheist-community.org)

## The atheists go to Washington: a travelogue

(continued from page 1)

and join together locally, nationally and worldwide to further the cause of secular justice and reason. It was a very good speech and a great beginning to the rally.

Ellen Johnson was followed onstage by well-known atheist Michael Newdow. Mr. Newdow is, of course, the father who filed suit in California which led the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals to declare it unconstitutional to force teachers to require students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance due to the religious nature of the phrase “under god”. Mr. Newdow gave a somewhat controversial speech suggesting that atheism should be considered a religion by legal definition. Although I don’t agree with some of what Mr. Newdow said it was a treat to listen to this articulate and thoughtful man who has been vilified so much by both the American public and the press.

One of the more emotionally moving speeches given during the rally was the wrenching talk by dissident writer and feminist Taslima Nasrin. Ms. Nasrin is an exiled Bengali woman who cannot return to her native Bangladesh because she is under a death sentence imposed by fundamentalist Islamic leaders. Ms. Nasrin has written eloquently about the plight of women in Islamic countries and for this she is in exile from her country and her family. Many of us in the United States have felt the barbs of discrimination for our lack of belief but to hear the words of this remarkably courageous woman tells us that it could get a lot worse if we are not ever vigilant against the incursion of religion into our government.

On a much lighter note was the hilarious and blasphemous sermon of Pastor Deacon Fred of the fictitious and satirical Landover Baptist Church. Pastor Fred condemned us all to hell and worse for our various transgressions including believing in the theory of evolution instead of the “Talking Snake Theory” of creation. However, Pastor Fred did not hold back his righteous ire from his fellow believers. Instead, he admonished what he called “*namby, pamby sissy Christians who pick and choose what parts of the bible they believe*”. Pastor Fred suggests these folks instead “... *take WHOLE BIBLE IN CONTEXT – that way we could be stoning disobedient children in the public square, and burning witches like the True Christians who founded this country did.*” Pastor Fred closed in prayer, of course, giving thanks to god for not flinging his body into the sadistic Hell that god created before reminding Jesus of his request for a brand new Lexus. Amen.

Pastor Fred’s sermon was just too much to bear for one of the Christian protesters who, taking his bullhorn in hand in violation

of the law, began to attempt to disrupt the rally. After being asked to stop by rally security and refusing the police came and took his bullhorn away. He strongly objected to this saying that “they have no right to blaspheme my lord”. The police told him that we had a permit to do just that and that if he couldn’t control himself then he would have to leave. I have no idea what transpired with this person afterwards but we heard no more amplified sound from the fundy gallery after that.



*Strength in numbers: atheist veterans*

In a day filled with inspirational speeches and moving moments, one event stands out to all who were there. We have all heard the fallacious statement that “there are no atheists in foxholes”, often used by theists to malign the depth of atheist rationality. One would hope that this ridiculous belief would have been put to bed decades ago but anyone who has ever debated religion with a variety of theists can tell you it is still alive and well. To answer this theistic claim, Kathleen Johnson, Founder of the Military Atheists & Freethinkers, came to Washington to speak and to show that there are, in fact, thousands of atheists who serve in the military and face death in defense of our country. During her stirring speech she asked any veterans of the military to come up on stage and be recognized. I’m not sure what she expected but what happened next was one of the single most uplifting moments I have ever experienced. Veterans of all ages, races and genders started coming up on stage. They came until the stage was totally filled and then they started to file into the space immediately in front of the stage. They came in numbers I don’t think anyone expected except perhaps for Kathleen Johnson who knows firsthand how many atheists there are in the military. For the rest of us, even those of us who have never served in the military, it was a moment of pride and joy to have been a witness to this remarkable moment. The next time a theist tells you there are no atheists in foxholes tell them you know a film that shows plenty of them.

The speeches lasted for about four hours when the rally was called to a close with a slideshow showing many of the organizers of the March as well as prominent atheists and freethinkers throughout history, a fittingly upbeat end to an inspirational day.

I cannot imagine anyone who attended this historic event did not leave the rally without the feelings of community and a renewed determination that we felt. There was a feeling of having been part of something important. A feeling that we could

(continued on page 4)

## The atheists go to Washington: a travelogue

(continued from page 3)

accomplish great things as long as we remembered the importance of organizing and banding together with like-minded groups to protect our rights and the Constitution of the United States from those who would subvert it for theistic gain. We had come to Washington to insist that we be noticed and to give notice. It was the first time that godless Americans had gathered in such numbers to hold the government accountable but it was obvious that it would not be the last. I, personally, am very proud to have been part of it and I would venture my fellow ACA members who attended would say the same.

We left the National Mall via the Metro and most of the ACA crowd headed down to the area surrounding the official march hotel. There we found a very good Italian restaurant and had another fantastic dinner while we discussed the day's events. There was a general mood of good cheer in the air as small groups of atheists crowded into the place to eat and enjoy the experience. As mentioned in part one of this travelogue one of the most enjoyable aspects of the Washington trip was the experience of bumping into atheists everywhere we went. I could really get used to that.

From the restaurant it was a very short walk to the official bar of the Godless Americans March on Washington. This place was a small neighborhood bar that was absolutely packed full of partying atheists. It was there we ran into Reggie, aka "The Infidel Guy", who runs [www.atheistnetwork.com](http://www.atheistnetwork.com) which, of course, was the host of the on-hiatus ACA-sponsored Internet radio show "The Non-Prophets". We chatted with Reggie and folks from all over the country about the march and just about everything else. The overall consensus was that the entire event was a fantastic success and we were all looking forward to the next similar event that we all vowed to attend. Not a discouraging or critical word was heard except for disdain and ridicule directed toward the Christian protesters at the rally who so eloquently damned the lot of us to hell. For a bunch of hell bound folks we had one heck of a great time.

As the night wore on one thing became apparent to me. I am simply not as young as I used to be. I was absolutely exhausted and Jeff Dee and Vic echoed the sentiment so we said our reluctant goodbyes and walked the few blocks to the Metro station. It was in this Metro station, while waiting for the train to take us back to the hotel that we had one of the most pleasurable and encouraging experiences of the entire weekend. It was here that we met a very nice woman

from Florida and her remarkable nine-year-old daughter Savannah.

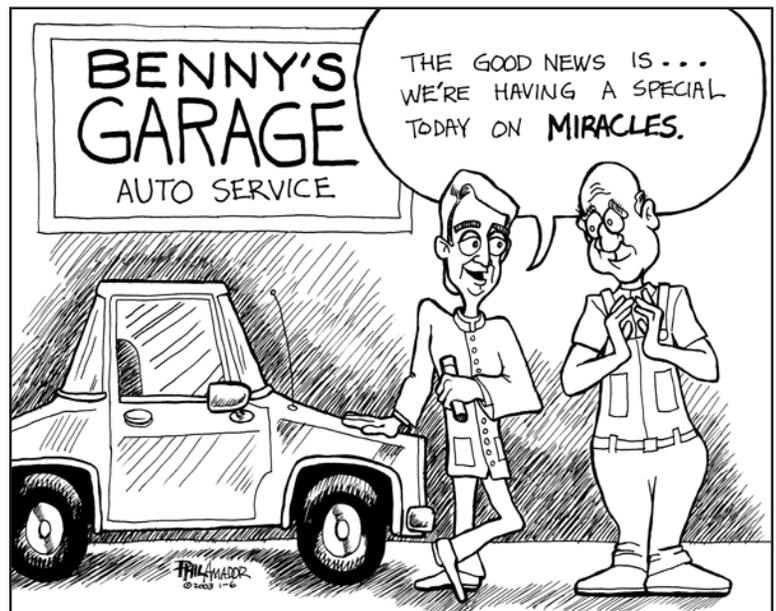
Savannah and her mother had been in Washington D.C. for several days visiting the museums and seeing the many sights of our nation's capitol. The main reason for their visit however, was the Godless Americans March on Washington. Savannah spoke with excitement about their week in Washington, the march and the rally as her proud mother looked on. This nine-year-old girl was amazingly intelligent, very literate and very enthusiastic about her future as an atheist in the United States. Now, having said that, it was obvious that she was under no delusions as to the battles ahead. In fact, she seemed primed to fight these battles herself. She told us that she wanted to go to an Ivy League school to become an attorney so she could do pro bono work for atheists and atheistic causes. We were all charmed by this little girl and felt that if this was the future of atheism in our country we were in fine hands. Meeting Savannah was the right way to end an important and historical weekend. We all know what our past has been, we took part in changing our present and we looked into the eyes of our future. It was all we hoped it would be.



*Savannah and her mother*

## Benny Hinn Branches Out

By Phil Amador



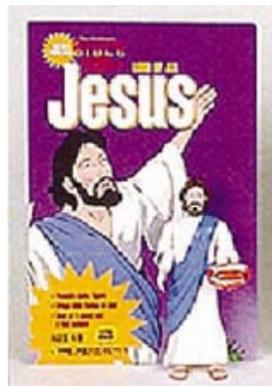
## Holy Paraphernalia Mania!

by Arlo J. Pignotti

About two years ago I dared to enter an environment completely revolting to Atheists. It was a fundamentalist Christian shop in Texas called “The Shepherd’s Shop”. Into the sparkling gleaming white store I went where Christian rock music loudly blasted away for all of their open hours, enough that it took a few moments to gather my senses. But only to realize I was standing in the focal point of senselessness.

When I maneuvered around the eerily happy glossy-eyed smiling shop attendants (they may have been robots, but I don’t think holy paraphernalia technology has made it to that point yet) I made it to what was a treasure-trove of toys, T-shirts, books, videos, music, foods and tracts that I had a duty to share with my fellow Freethinkers. Not to share the message of Jesus Christ, but to share the travesty and silliness that surrounded this kitsch unseen by most non-theists.

It all started with the original “Jesus Action figure”. Who would have thought there was a Jesus action figure? Who would have thought that an Atheist would buy one? But I showed it to my friends, both believers and non-believers and everybody had to have one. It seems like a joke, this little white Jesus with attachments like plastic loaves, fishes and every variety of cross to hang him on (sold separately). I later discovered there is a Christian toy company that produces in addition to its pale plastic Jesus an



“African heritage” model. So you can choose what race Jesus was. But all Christian shops I entered had only white Jesuses all over the place, which I guess should come as no surprise.



**JESUS**  
African  
Heritage  
Series



**JESUS**  
Caucasian  
Heritage  
Series

There are spoofs of Jesus action figures sold today, but believe



**JOB**

me, there are (as pictured in this article) the originals that are actually made for Christian kids. There are many biblical action figures. My personal favorite is the Job action figure that is all bloodied up with scratches and boils covering him from head to toe.



And it gets worse. Behold the latest in Christian action figure technology...

Bible Man! A Christian superhero that surpasses Christ by far. Forget a skinny Christ with a mere robe and sandals. Kids want a purple fundamentalist Batman who carries a light saber in one hand and Bible in the other. Using sword (or Bible) you can pretend to beat sinners to a bloody pulp to meet their creator, who no doubt is eager to damn them to Hell for all eternity! Yaay! What fun! I would have had a much more exciting childhood if I had been raised with such Christian values!

For the adults you have spiritual T-shirts like this one titled “Lord’s Gym”.



I modeled this shirt for my second Holy Paraphernalia presentation at this year’s convention. This lovely number features a big muscular Christ doing pushups with the cross on his back! Underneath that it says “Bench press this!” I think he looks more like Zeus than Christ with all those muscles. Isn’t that the most blasphemous thing you have ever seen? But it’s sold in most Christian stores and I saw one or two people wearing these every day when I used to go to a Texas gym.

And on the back of course is the Christian seal of approval...



...blood and gore. A common trademark of this blood cult. You may also quite often find shirts that are just the hand alone with blood spewing and running all over the back of the person wearing the shirt. I was an assistant teacher/tutor for a Texas public elementary school for two years and have seen children (ages 5-7) wearing this shirt. I can’t even begin to speculate what this image does to a mind that has not yet reached the age of reason. A mind that we know certainly has no understanding of the theology their parents push on them and their peers... because the parents themselves probably have no idea what there this is all about. I guess no believer does or they would not believe it.

I can’t decide which is worse. The “Lord’s Gym” or the “He ain’t comin’ back to preach” shirt which shows Christ wielding a sword as depicted in Revelations.



(continued on page 6)

## Holy Paraphernalia Mania! *(continued from page 5)*

Shirts sold at Christian family stores range from anything as simple as a T-shirt showing a puddle of blood with the caption “The Answer” to a thought provoking shirt displaying rusty nails and crumpled up duck tape with the caption “Duck tape didn’t work, so God used nails”. Things that make you say “hmm”... or at least “uh?”

The worst in paraphernalia this year is of the post September 11<sup>th</sup> category. It is enough to make any Freethinker in this country weep. Most of the 911 holy paraphernalia was too sick for me to even bear to present. Flyers blow around in the streets with high resolution photos of the World Trade Center disaster accompanied by the words “Why you need Jesus!”. And posters put up in subways by the Scientologists advertising their cure to the fear of terrorism using Dianetics. I must say that these things invoke enough anger in me that they are something I cannot laugh at.

But there was one piece of post-9/11 so-called patriotic merchandise that was actually ridiculous enough to leave me rolling on the floor. Rolling on the floor puking! It is a George W. Bush mosaic poster (You know, the large pictures made from tiny smaller pictures). But it was not Bush’s face alone to do me damage. Up close you see it is actually tiny pictures of Jesus Christ being crucified all over Bush’s face! The bottom of this poster reads “Finally we have a Christian president...” As if the United States has never had a Christian president before! Hmm... What about Clinton?! Are they saying George Bush senior was not a Christian?! How about Ronald Reagan?!!!

Yes, holy paraphernalia mania can bring out many emotions in Atheists. I also find myself reading Christian novels like “If God Loves Me, Why Can’t I Get My Locker Open?” (for teens with big questions) and Fundamentalist scare videos like “Judgement: The Supreme Court VS. The Supreme Being” (starring Mr. T)! Yep... I pity the fool who don’t repent in the name of Christ. And of course nothing could stop me from raving to the Pope’s recent techno album “Abba Pater” (some critics call it the worst Abba album ever). Then I can chow on some “Bible Bars” (I could devote an entire article to Christian junk food alone, and I’m sure I will) and wash it down with a can of “Holy Cross” Savior Soda, belching hymnals till the cows come home.

You do not always have to pay these stores money for holy paraphernalia thanks to religious tracts! It is a little preview to get you hooked. Oh how I love religious tracts. All I have to do is walk around just about any city and in half an hour I am handed a tract or two free of charge. Most Atheists throw these things away, but fundamentalist tracts are freaking hilarious if you give them a chance. When I used to work

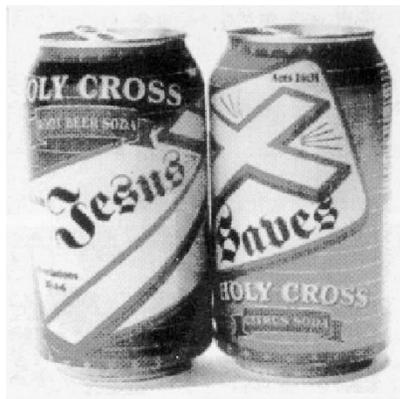
at a print shop, I used to see for myself all the churches that print countless pamphlets and flyers. And boy have I learned that Christianity is a great waste of paper!

Some Christian tracts can be quite dynamic. In a grocery store an elderly woman once handed me a rock tied to a tract with string! It said, “I am your little Prayer Rock and this is what I’ll do... Put me under your pillow and WHACK! I will hit you in the head. That way you will remember your nightly prayers. And then dump me on the floor and BAM! I’ll stub your toe to remind you of your morning prayers.” The rock attached to this tract was just a tiny little pebble. I don’t think it could do enough physical damage to my cranium at night to make me a Christian. But I tried it anyway and it was more like a princess and the pea thing. But I didn’t pass the test because till this day I have not uttered a single prayer. I wonder if the rock is one of those stones that are supposed to come from Israel. You know... the dirt and pebbles that televangelists mail you as a “Free Love Gift” if you send them \$500 or more. You know they aren’t really from Israel, because after all the rocks those guys have given out, Israel would be gone.

But this reminds me of a great tip on how to acquire religious paraphernalia almost for free. Some churches will give a love gift for “A donation” and will not state the amount the donation has to be. This way they evade trouble with the IRS, being tax free. For these churches, send them one penny and they will have to send you the love gift! But prepare to be disappointed. So far I have only acquired a rock, a hair, two used sweaty prayer cloths and a piece of cloth supposedly cut from Jesus’ knapsack. If you are wondering about the hair, no I don’t know whose hair it was supposed to be, so I only pray to it every other week. What can I say? I’m a skeptic.

I have been gathering this stuff for a couple of years now and have hundreds of religious gadgets from all faiths. Not just Christianity... but in this issue I just couldn’t help myself. Using this collection I present the absurdity of **authentic** religious/superstitious paraphernalia marketed by religious people for religious people and have a fun time doing it. Yes, these things are utterly horrible, but since they are here, we must try to get the most of it. And that is to get a good laugh if we can at what was designed by religious fanatics who had straight faces when they came up with these demented ideas. It really is a phenomenon to be explored.

If anyone finds wacky holy paraphernalia, then please let me know about it by writing to my email address pine@texas.net. If I use it for an article or lecture, then I just might send you a “Free Love Gift” like a pebble from my garage driveway that comes with a little certificate that I fabricated saying “Actual rock from Bethlehem that Christ stubbed his toe on”.





**“Fanfare”**  
by Mike Ragusa  
Paper Collage (15.5” x 11.5”)  
*Reproduced with the artist’s permission*