The Truth Seeker
Family

Vol. 143

Founded by D.M. Bennett in 1873


DeRobigne Mortimer Bennett
Founder, Publisher, Editor
1873–1882

Eugene M. Macdonald
Publisher-Editor
1883–1909

George E. Macdonald
Publisher-Editor
1909–1937

James Hervey Johnson
Publisher-Editor
1964–1988

Bonnie Lange
Publisher-Editor
1988–2013

Mary Wicks Bennett
Publisher-Editor
1882–1883

Charles L. Smith
Publisher-Editor
1937–1964

Roderick Bradford
Publisher-Editor
2014–Present

A Woman Waits for Me

I wait for you—she contains all

Shall we or shall we not?—Shall we ever meet?

The month of the soul

A man’s soul is his life, not his body

The world is the conglomeration of the spiritual

The world contains all

Soul’s meanings, proofs, proofs, proofs,

Soul’s ends, proofs, proofs, proofs, proofs,

Soul’s means, proofs, proofs, proofs,

Soul’s end, proofs, proofs, proofs.

Walt Whitman

To a Common prostitute.

Conceived—be at ease with me—I am

Walt Whitman, liberal and frank as Nature.

All this you exclude?—is not man

The world?—is there no man?

Oh, that the world were

the world. 

Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman
DEAR READER,

Following floods and extreme weather disasters, we often hear global-warming-denying politicians offer their "thoughts and prayers." Nearly a century and a half ago, it was the issue of praying for rain—and the censorship of D.M. Bennett’s opinion that prayer was useless—that precipitated the publication of the Truth Seeker.

In the summer of 1873, D.M. Bennett was a struggling seed farmer in Paris, Illinois. After a devastating drought, he was drawn into a debate carried in the local newspapers with two Paris pastors over the efficacy of prayer. Bennett—a former devout Christian who knew the Bible backward and forward—also disputed several Bible passages as well as the divine leadership of Moses.

After one of the newspapers refused to print his rejoinder, Bennett founded the Truth Seeker and reprinted the entire debate in the first four issues. Ironically, the Truth Seeker’s masthead contained a Bible verse: “Come now and let us reason together; Let us set aside prejudice and the effects of early education; Let us prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.”

In 1877, Reverend G.H. Humphrey accepted Bennett’s offer and challenged the editor to a debate. Had Bennett not printed his own periodical, it’s unlikely the discussion with Humphrey—and even Bennett’s own articles—would have occurred. During the discourse, the Presbyterian minister emphasized the immorality of freethinkers. Bennett responded with numerous accounts of the misdeeds of clerics. And although the debate was very antagonistic, the two became good friends.

During this strange election year, the regressive Republican party platform advocates that the Bible is “indispensable for the development of an educated citizenry” and a historical document that should be taught in public schools. We disagree, and dust off D.M. Bennett’s forceful article against using “the good book” in schools. “You can’t make it too strong,” he said when attacking the Bible. For years Bennett had been a “devout believer in the inspiration and absolute truth of the book,” his successor Eugene Macdonald wrote. “He was angry at the deception in favor of respect for the ‘religion of the people.’” The 19th century controversy surrounding the suppression of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass is brought to light in an excerpt from our Bennett biography. (We also present the two poems which caused the uproar.) And The Good Gray Poet recounts his conversations at Tammany Hall with a man who issue Thomas Paine.

This issue begins with Paul Krassner’s article about his friend Lenny Bruce, the courageous comedian who challenged D.M. Bennett’s favorite targets—religion and hypocrisy. The article was published recently in the Los Angeles Times to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the controversial satirist’s death. Although the Times chopped and censored Krassner’s writing, we print the entire piece.

Taking on the “most disturbing writing assignment” of his career, Thomas Larson covers the current crop of Christian propaganda films. Sarah Kermoan writes about “God’s little angel” turned fire-and-brimstone preacher Marjoe Gortner, the subject of her Academy Award-winning 1972 documentary film. Gary Benton debunks some of the misinformation written about Thomas Paine, the revolutionary Founding Father (whom the Truth Seeker has championed since 1873). Ray Jason, the “sea gypsy philosopher,” corresponds from aboard his floating monastery in the Caribbean. And across the pond, British atheist Barbara Smoker reports on the censorship in favor of the “religion of peace.” The 19th century controversy surrounding the suppression of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass is brought to light in an excerpt from our Bennett biography. (We also present the two poems which caused the uproar.) And The Good Gray Poet recounts his conversations at Tammany Hall with a man who issue Thomas Paine.

From the National Coalition Against Censorship, Josh Zuckerman reports on the rise of the Satanic Temple’s After School Satan Clubs in elementary schools across the country. D.M. Bennett didn’t believe in the devil ether, but he’d certainly applauded the organizer’s attempt to counter Christian evangelical indoctrination in public schools.

Roderick Bradford
August 3rd marked the 50th anniversary of controversial comedian Lenny Bruce’s death from an overdose of morphine, while his New York obscenity conviction at Café Au Go Go was still on appeal, and on this same day he received a foreclosure notice at his Los Angeles home.
B
ut it wasn't suicide. In the kitchen, a kettle of water was still boiling, and in his office, the electric typewriter was still humming. He had stopped typing in mid-word: "Conspiracy to interfere with the 4th Amendment coast"—constitutes what?

Lenny was a subscriber to my satirical magazine, The Realist, and in 1959 we met for the first time at the funky Hotel Attaboom in Times Square. He was amazed that I got away with publishing those profane words for which other periodicals used asterisks or dashes. He had been using euphemisms like frig and asked, "Are you telling me this is legal to sell on the newsstands?"

I replied, "The Supreme Court's definition of obscenity is that it has to be material which appeals to your prurient interest." He magically produced an unabridged dictionary from the suitcase on his bed, and looked up the word prurient. He closed the dictionary, clenching his jaw and nodding his head in affirmation of a new discovery: "So," he observed, "it's against the law to get you horny."

When we were about to leave the room, he stood in the doorway. "Did you steal anything?" he asked furtively. I took my watch out of my pocket since I didn't like to wear it on my wrist, and without saying a word I placed it on the bureau. Lenny picked up one loud staccato "Ha!" and kissed me on the forehead.

We developed a friendship integrated with stand-up comedy. Lenny had broken through traditional stereotypical jokes about airplane food, nagging wives, Chinese drivers, mothers-in-law. Instead he weaved his taboo-breaking targets—teachers', low salaries vs. show-business celebrities, religious leaders' hypocrisy, cruel abortion laws, racial injustice, the double standard between illegal and prescription drugs—into stream-of-consciousness vignettes.

In each succeeding performance, he would sculpt and re-sculpt his concept into a theatrical context, experimenting from show to show like a jazz-jargon musician. Audience laughter would turn into clapping for the creative process itself. "Please don't applaud," he requested. "It breaks my rhythm."

Lenny was intrigued by the implications of an item in The Realist, an actual statement by Adolf Eichmann that he would have been "not only a scoundrel, but a despicable pig" if he hadn't carried out Hitler's orders. Lenny wrote a piece for The Realist, "Letter From a Soldier's Wife"—namely, Mrs. Eichmann—pleading for compassion to spare her husband's life.

Lenny was writing an autobiography—How to Talk Dirty and Influence People—which Playboy planned to serialize, then publish as a book, and Hugh Hefner hired me as his editor. We met in Atlantic City. At a certain point he was acting paranoid and demanded that I take a lie-detector test. I was paranoid enough to take him literally.

I couldn't work with him if he didn't trust me. We got into an argument, and I left. He sent a telegram that sounded like we were on the verge of divorce—"WHY CAN'T IT BE THE WAY IT USED TO BE? I agreed to try again, and in 1962 I flew to Chicago. Lenny was performing at the Gate of Horn. He was asking the whole audience to take a lie-detector test.

With a German accent, he asked, "Do you people think yourselves better because you burned your enemies at long distance with missiles without ever seeing what you had done to them? Hiroshima on Wiedersehen. [German accent ends.]"

"If we would have lost the war, they would have strung Truman up by the balls, Jim. Are you kidding with that? Not what kid told kid told kid. They would just schlep out all those Japanese people, arrange a big sea battle, and hoisted him into the police wagon.

Then they arrested him for disorderly conduct, dragged him along by the seat of his pants and hoisted him into the police wagon.

"What are you doing here?" Lenny asked.

"I didn't want to show them my ID." "You schmuck."

Since he often talked on stage about his environment, and since police cars and courtrooms had become his environment, the content of Lenny's performances began to revolve more and more around the inequities of the legal system. "In the Halls of Justice," he declared, "the only justice is in the halls."

But he also said, "I love the law."

Instead of an unabridged dictionary, he now carried law books in his suitcase. His room was cluttered with tapes, transcripts, photostats, law journals, legal briefs. In less than two years, Lenny was arrested fifteen times. Once he was losing his ten-year-old daughter, Kitty, by pretending not to believe what she was telling him. "Daddy," she said, "you'd believe me if it was on tape."

Club owners were afraid to book him. He couldn't get a gig in six months. On a Christmas day, he was alone in his hotel room, and I brought him a $500 bill. With a large safety pin, he attached it to his denim jacket. When he finally got a booking in Monterey, he admitted, "I feel like it's taking me away from my work."

Lenny lived way up in the hills. His house was protected by barbed wire and a concrete gate, except that it was always open. He had a wall-to-wall one-way mirror in his living room, but when the sun was shining you could see into the room instead of out. He was occasionally hassled by police on his own property. One evening in October 1963, we were talking while he was shaving, when four officers suddenly appeared, loud and obnoxious. He asked them to leave as they didn't have a warrant.

One of the cops took out his gun. "Here's my search warrant," he said. Then Lenny and the cops had a discussion about the law, such as the rules of evidence, and after half an hour they left. Lenny tried to take it all in stride, but the encounter was depressing, and he changed his mind about going out that night.

When everything was quiet, we went outside and stood at the edge of his unused swimming pool. Dead leaves floated in the water. Lenny cupped his hands to his mouth. "All right, you dogs," he called out. "Back for the rich man!"—thereby setting off a chain reaction of barking dogs, a canine chorus echoing through Hollywood Hills.

We ordered some pizza, and he played some old tapes, ranging from a faith healer to patriotic World War II songs. "Goodbye, Mama, I'm off to Yokohama, the Land of Yama-Yama..."

Back at the Café Au Go Go arrest in New York, Lenny had told a fantasy tale about Eleanor Roosevelt, quoting her, "I've got the nicest tits that have ever been in this White House..."

The top of the police complaint was "Eleanor Roosevelt and the display of its."

At the trial, Lenny had acted as his own attorney. He obtained the legislative history of an Albany statute, and he discovered that back in 1931 there was an amendment proposed, which excluded from arrest in an indecent performance: stagehands, spectators, musicians, and—here was the fulcrum of his defense—actors. The law had been misapplied to him. Despite opposition by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, the amendment was tabled. Lenny admitted, "I love the law."

On October 13, 1965 (Lenny's 40th birthday), instead of surrendering to the authorities in New York, he filed suit at the U.S. District Court in San Francisco to keep out of prison, and he got himself officially declared a pauper. Two months before his death in 1966, Lenny wrote to me: "I'm still working on the bust of the government of New York State."

He included his doodle of the letter he didn't want to write. "Where the hell is the ACLU?"

"At a séance, Lenny's mother brought his microphone into his grave before the dirt was piled on. Lenny's problem had been that he wanted to talk on stage with the same freedom that he had in his living room. That problem doesn't happen to stand-up comedians anymore."

Lenny Bruce's headstone at Eden Memorial Park Cemetery in Mission Hills, Los Angeles County, California.
Indeed, the pageantry of his death has been shown in countless artistic scenes and life reenactments: from such flat statements as John 19:23—“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments”—to Matthias Grünewald’s 1516 “Isenheim Altarpiece,” picturing Christ’s agonial, emaciated, plaque-scarred and thorn-netted body, to the Good Friday crucifixion rite in the Philippines where penitents self-fagelate and are nailed to crosses and hoisted aloft, willingly, the bloodletting posted on YouTube.

It’s not just killing Jesus: it’s also the tribulations that lead up to and carry on after his death that demand telling. Driving his biography is the unsoppableness of the crucifixion (He should die so we might live), his outlaw ministry a preparation for his brutal death. Indeed, except for his divine birth and his sermonizing, how little we know of his early life and time on the cross. With scant biblical description, such is what artists have had to imagine as Joachim Karl once put it, “the sadomasochistic glorification of pain”—the nails puncturing his wrists and feet, the slumping excruciation of his limbs, the torment so pummeling as to provoke the questions, why would his Father forsake him and why, when he’s suspected all his life—he’ll be thus arrayed (prophesied in Isaiah), act so shocked as it happens? I’m sure such pain would make anyone delusional. But, conscious or not, his dying is purposeful, a fulfillment, an enactment. Indeed, his end has required a kind of maniacal penance by Christian scribe and priest, novitiate and snake handler, even the religious artist, all of whom have lionized Jesus’s dying millions of times, in unending repetitions, a finger glued to the playback button.

Why does this singular torture—certainly no worse than floods, wars, a Starvation in Auschwitz, sepsis death in the Civil War—continue and continue so viciously in our time? Simple. Filmmakers of recent vintage have re-deployed the “passion of the Christ” out of its tepid literary domain and into graphic panoramas of agony, intended, supposedly, for “mature audiences.” In the last two decades, moviemakers have flooded theaters and homes with a new level of uncensored bestial suffering that exploits the Christ story for ends obvious and unconscious. Perhaps the filmic élan is a hurriedly over-emotional Satanic trick: Christ imagining he has escaped his fate with marriage, sex and a few wives, old age, and easy living but no—he must be torn from his fantasy and hurled back on the cross where he realizes he is the apotheosis of self-deception.

And then—because no one ever thought, whether for aesthetic or moral reasons, to linger on the savagery and gruesomeness of the Nazarene’s final day—came Mel Gibson’s 2004 orgy of exequamation, The Passion According to Christ. This film set a new high (or low) for holy gore and buckets of spurring, dripping, flowing, and staining blood, often captured in slow motion, not to mention several added cups of Jewish treachery. (Vatican II declared that Jews were not responsible for Christ’s death. Gibson and other anti-Semitic directors disagree.) The Ur-Catholic Gibson attributes his drip-fest to a spirit of which one critic said, “The Last Temptation of Christ, an oddity but not an unbloodied one: the spikes nailed through his palms go all the way through the wood and poke out the other side. The film’s monte-interminus dream sequence emphasizes the fear, the doubt, and the dislike Christ has for his mission. It all culminates in a fi nal Satanic trick: Christ imagining he has escaped his fate with marriage, sex and a few wives, old age, and easy living but no—he must be torn from his fantasy and hurled back on the cross where he realizes he is the apotheosis of self-deception.

Why, oh why, oh why do Christians keep killing Jesus? Why, for nearly two millennia, has the non-violent Lamb of God and politically framed Son of Man been put to death, imaginatively speaking, in gospel, painting, frieze, sculpture, choral mass—and, of late, in HD movies—not to mention sermons that detail his torturous demise to millions of frightened children and unanimated adults? 
viewer noted that of the film’s 121 minutes, 101 bleed. Another reviewer said that Jesus is beaten “brutally and constantly” for half the movie. Watch it for yourself. Or not.

According to The Guardian, in the last five years there have been twenty-one Christian films, several of which build their melodrama on rumbling musi-
cic scores and besieged sack-clothed tribes to tell—no, to make spectacular vestry in image, sound, music, and special effects—fever-pitch. Their exploitations include a predictable nar-
ritative sameness—the more the same the better. We can’t beat Gibson but we can stay true to his obsession. Indicative of such adoration violence are two recent films: the 2014 Son of God, a re-
standaredization of the epic of Salome; and Last Days in the Desert, produced by Mark Burnett and part of the ten-hour miniseries, The Bible, with the Portug-
uese histrone Diogo Morgado as Jesus, and the 2015 Killing Jesus, based on the bestseller by Bill O’Reilly and Martin Du-
gard, with the suitably Arab Haaz Sleiman as Lord, in his thron-
fleet battle. These films/law/Crucifixion (perhaps a Clinton/Obama/Benghazi stand-in) political conspiracy.

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Tides aside, both films lengthen, Mel-Gibson-like, the rem-
scription, indeed, since

vantage point, perhaps, that uses his abject murder to disallow other

ning; Golgotha quaking; the tomb emptying; and the shroud,

coming; the dying moment, “It is finished”; the thunder crack-

ing; the soldiers mocking; the nails-in-hands pounding; the veils-
lounging on couches vs. the conniving, irony-less Jews, magis-

ters the holy man—he’s not one of us, the boy can go. Few of these family is

nurse his sick and dying mother. But the father can’t help but feel his

father, the self-styled Christ, ravaged by

teresting face-close as a hummingbird, as he promised, comes to

holy man.) Which means that any sense of self in Jesus of Naz-
areth goes untapped and undisclosed. Which may be the true

the most difficult human knot: the dynamics of a nuclear fam-

family we come from, the unlived lives our parents bequeath

But there has lived countless lifetimes, is terribly bored, claims to “have

why, why are crucifixion myths not found in other cul-

tures? No abject shame or torture worship with the deaths of

Galgamesh or Odysses or Buddha or Gautama or Mohammed? Why value the sadistic story over the complex, like the Vedas, the

trickster, like the Native American, the literary, like the Greeks? Is

sition, indeed, since

this something in the foundational psyche of Christians, a per-

version, perhaps, that uses his abject murder to disallow other

benign treatments or theological interpretations of his life?

...and then blame the Romans, the Jews, and the unsaved

Jesus’s one-dimensional “love God” character must end with

conundrums. Instead, directors present a stock-in-trade story:

—think back to my list of its violent tropes—is

along the way, filmmakers use this one-dimensionality to

for aiding people in psychological

sues the holy man—he’s not one of us, the boy can go. Few of these family is

en a perfect example: the boy's loathing of their arid home. After

son's fantasy about his dead initiation, coming to faith not just because parents “believe” but because

of religious teenagers read it once a week. Translation: there’s

that such “film reality” stamps a young mind

terring children into belief, enacting biblical prophecy, and

affirming the intrinsic condition that Christians need to give

more of their lives—if not their deaths as well—to the faith.

Consider the profits. Gibson’s Passion was made for $30 million and has earned $612 million. Other similar recent movies have been much less successful, though they are profit-

able. God of God, whose budget was $13 million, made $69 million. Typically, Christian-themed films

quadraple their expenses. Consider the reach. The minions produced by Mark Burnett, The Bible, ten one-hour episodes, was seen on the History Channel in 2013 by 100 million view-

ers. Via DVD, superstitles, and aggressive marketing, The Bible, Burnett claims, is being seen by billions of world people.

one in ten who see the series, he says, are inspired to read the Bible more than they have. Consider the gospel mission. Ac-

The Bible

LDAYS IN THE DESERT, a

Rodrigo Garcia, a Colombian, is the son of the novelist Ga-

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sound—to firm up their kids' indoctrination. Christianity has found a new Svengali in film and video. In fact, the literate sermon and the discursive interpretation of Bible stories has been decentered, if not replaced, in our society by pre-packaged Jesus videos on YouTube and hundreds of Christian family films like *Heaven Is For Real* whose audiences are huge.

There's a dark heart at work here: Christians exploiting Christians. What do I mean? Sin, original and otherwise, brands the human lot with collective shame—a bizarre idea—and, thus, by commandment, Christians bedevil one another to atone for Eve's seduction and Christ's sacrifice. This bedeviling has legs. While evil is readily blamed on others—Mao/Stalin/Hitler, Osama bin Laden, ISIS, Adam Lanza—it is also dispensed, in house, on and by Christians worldwide. Often it's self-centered on one's failures. Think of the hell Mother Theresa endured, believing God had abandoned her, a spiritual dryness of crushing sorrow, if we believe her letters. So, too, with the Pope and the atonement of his office. Despite his perch, he must call himself a hopeless sinner and spend much of his day begging for forgiveness or doing good deeds, which he hopes will absolve some of the stain. It's the mission of this stain to spread, no matter what. The devout Christian insists the impious Christian be ever chastened by the Nazarene's death. Isn't that the reason for the crucifix necklace? Such pain inflicted on Christ is re-inflicted on Christians, mild and harsh forms of self-flagellation, as acts of deserved punishment.

One element of that personal deserving, which we seldom talk about, is Christian martyrdom. True, Christians have not embraced suicide bombing as Jihadists have. But many accept martyrdom, when necessary, as one of life's final choices: to die for the (religious) cause. How else do we understand the deaths of Christ and his disciples and Catholic saints and the millions dead in the Crusades and every other war that has an Abrahamic God on its side? That belief which holds their deaths will not have been in vain.

Not dying in vain has meaning for a nation bent on, bent by, assassination—killing our political and moral leaders. Assassins and their targets are celebrated in death. I wonder whether such bullied martydom isn't based on the crucifixion's high profile in our culture. How easily the missionary task of Christianity finds a companion with political causes. Again, the killer and the victim get equal press. Acting on failed ideologies, assassins (James Earl Ray) sometimes kill the best among us (Martin Luther King Jr.) so that the rest of us feel soiled and guilty and complicit by the deed. Graphically killing Jesus at the movies is no different and may give to the sickest among us the idea that assassination/crucifixion is the best of the worst options available.

This writing assignment is by far the most disturbing I've ever done. Watching these Jesus-snuff films acidifies the gut more than the gut can tolerate. I can only conclude that humankind has a sadistic streak as robust as the compassionate traits I believe we also share—unconditional love, planetary stewardship, and social justice. If the reenactment of Christ's death proves anything, it's that by playing the tape over and over again, we sentence ourselves (at least, Christians do) to never moving on from its indignity. Why shouldn't we move on? Why shouldn't we call a halt? If we can attack religious terrorists in other countries, why isn't it possible to call out the Jesus-killing maven among us who bring similar, albeit psychological, terror on the populace? I think these films show us that Christianity justifies its origin solely on the abject suffering of one individual against the altruism of many communities. I have no hope for the latter's ascension, for a new myth. In fact, I sense because of the power of cinema we are more indelibly stained and cursed by the crucifixion than ever.
Receiving his sermons from heaven, delivering souls, healing the sick, he seemed like God’s little angel, or—as his father put it ingenuously—“a preaching machine.”

“WE’RE HERE TO MAKE A FILM about Brother Marjoe, praise the Lord,” the words sounded awkward—almost as if we were speaking in tongues. It felt bizarre to be calling strangers “Brother” and “Sister.” My co-directing partner Howard Smith and I had never spent much time in churches, let alone the revival tents and auditoriums of the Pentecostal faith. He was Jewish; I was technically Christian but my father, with a straight face, preferred to identify himself as a Druid. Yet there we were, in 1972, embarking on the Holy Roller circuit, navigating the Bible Belt, recording American evangelicals in their hyperemotion- al religious rites as if they were an obscure tribe in Pago-Pago. Our guide was a fire-and-brimstone minister named Marjoe Gortner. A charismaticly handsome man in his late 20s, he had been a Bible Belt star most of his life. His parents, his own reckoning. Receiving his sermons from heaven, delivering souls, healing the sick, he seemed like God’s little angel, or—as his father put it ingeniously—“a preaching machine.”

After a time, the act broke down. Marjoe’s father abscend- ed with the money, the prepubescent boy was too old to be a novelty anymore, and his rage surfaced. He left his mother and lived off the kindness of nonreligious strangers in California for the duration of his adolescence. Then he found himself drawn back to the flame—the spotlight, the adulation, and of course the cash—of the evangelical circuit. His audiences never knew that his belief in God was nil, and the host preachers had no idea that he had, in his other life, joined with legions of hippies.

When he reached his late 20s, Marjoe tried to make a break for once and for all. In 1970, he arrived in New York to become an actor. He thought it would help his career if he gained a little publicity. He approached my partner Howard Smith, hoping to interest him in his story. Howard had a syndicated FM radio show in which he interviewed celebrities. What he and I learned about Marjoe’s incredible story convinced us to make a documentary feature about him. In 1972, the film was finished in time for the Cannes Film Festival. Roger Ebert saw it at an out-of-competition screening in rented theater. “The real sleeper this year is Marjoe,” he wrote. “It generated the most electric response of anything at the festival.” Film audiences seemed entranced by Marjoe, who sang like a canary about the cynicism of the religion business and the chicanery of his fellow preachers—including himself. As another critic wrote, “It proves that not only is Elmer Gantry still alive and well, but that the reality is more absurdly repul- sive than the fiction.”

Shortly after, the movie opened across the northern United States. The press was unrelenting: nearly every major national publication—Time, NewswEEK, Life, Playboy, Rolling Stone, and Esquire—ran stories and photos of this brash young sellout. Folks in the Bible Belt, however, never got to see the film. The distributor was too afraid of the furious it would cause, so he refused to open it in any city south of Des Moines. But anyone watching the Oscars in 1973 couldn’t have missed it, because it won the Best Documentary Feature award for Howard and me. Flash forward 30 years. The evangelical sect has grown from this fringe cult to a huge, vibrant mass move- ment. It is in one’s face 24/7. According to a Barna research poll in 2001, four out of ten Americans reported that they consider themselves “born-again.” The president and his admin- istration have shown a keen interest in the evangelical agenda. I was working at Duart Labs in Manhattan, finishing up another documentary, a short about a street musician, Thoth, another galvanizing performer like Marjoe. This performer, however, sought spiritual deliverance through presenting a solo opera, singing all the voices while playing violin and dancing, and providing percussion with bells and whistles tied around his ankles. (This film would go on to win my second Academy Award in 2002.)

My Web site, sarahkernochan.com, had brought me increas- ing inquiries about the film, mainly because people seemed in- terested in evangelicals again. And I had nothing to tell them. Marjoe himself had withdrawn from the spotlight, asking me to refuse all interviews on his behalf. Joe Monge, who heads Duart’s video department, happened to mention that they’d been clearing out their vault of film ma- terials. Duart struck the original theatrical prints of Marjoe. I casually asked him to look and see if there was any remnant of the film in their archive. He returned with an inventory. They had nothing. Origi- nal 35mm blow-up, 16mm nega- tive, magnetic tape, mix, out-takes, TV spots, trailers. I was staggered. And re- solved on the spot to rescue the film.

At that point, I brought in Hol- lywood attorneys Alan Wertheimer and Darren Tra- nier. They helped me trace the ownership to a small company which had bought Marjoe as part of a larger film catalog. The prob- lem was: They were bankrupt. The catalog was in receivership, and nothing could be purchased from it because Sony Film Corp had a lien on the holdings of the company. On top of that, the company’s president was walled up in Florida and not talking to anyone.

It took two years. But the day came. I signed a single piece of paper making me the owner of this ancient documentary. Now what? As if—pardon my spiri- tuality—from God, an e-mail ar- rived on the same day, funneled through my Web site. A compa- ny called New Video, which dis- tributes mostly documentaries, and especially Oscar-winning ones, wanted to know who owned the rights to Marjoe. They wanted to put it out on DVD.

More invitations arrived. At the time of this writing, and thanks to my film rep Ira Deutchman at Emerging Pictures, the film is playing for a limited time at the IFC Center in New York and in theaters in Florida and Delaware.

What will Marjoe mean now, after all these years? I am hoping that the DVD will reach those parts of the country in which the film was never released. The Bible Belt especially. I hope people of other faiths will understand where the power of the evangelical movement has come from, understand the lure of the music and the preciousness of a life-altering spiritual ex- perience. I hope they will see, too, that this ecstatic union with Christ is also … sometimes … commandeered by ruthless and greed-fueled “servants of God”—the ministers who have, since the year Marjoe was made, erected a formidable enterprise sprawling over the media, corporate America, and the Belfagor, with no notion of stopping until the United States becomes one big mega-church. One preacher not profiting from this success will be Marjoe Gortner. Instead, he came clean. Will anyone listen again?

Marjoe is available for download on any online movie store including iTunes and Netflix.

Above MARJOE GORTNER c. 1970s.
Left MARJOE, THE “MIRACLE CHILD” AND “WORLD’S YOUNGEST MINISTER.”
PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN GORTNER

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Educated for Murder

By Barbara Smoker

On one occasion a single English non-Muslim student attended the debate. He came up to me afterwards and said: I didn’t realize it was as bad as this.

Needless to say, whenever a vote was taken at the end of the debate, the result was forgone conclusion. But some years later there was an exception to this. Six mild Mohammed cartoons had appeared in a Danish journal, and, though there was no adverse reaction to them for about four months, Islamic extremists then began publishing exaggerated versions of them in Muslim countries, provoking widespread outrage and murder. Consequently, the motion chosen for the Oxford University Union Debate of 25 May 2006 was “Free Speech should be moderated by respect for Religion.”

Although I was no longer deemed an Oxford representative of secularism, someone must have remembered me, as I was asked to be the secondary opposition speaker, supporting Flemming Rose, the Danish editor who had published the original Mohammed cartoons.

Since there was a seven-figure bounty on his head, security arrangements for the debate were heavy, everyone being searched on the way in. For the first time, I found myself on the winning side! We won by 129 votes to 59.

Had the word “religion” in the motion been replaced by any other abstract noun, we would have won by 188 to nil. Suppose the word had been “science,” the motion read: “Free Speech should be moderated by respect for Science.” No one would have voted for that, least of all a genuine scientist.

But religion is still given its unique privileged status, simply because it is the norm.

I had discussed the Danish cartoons with several moderate Muslims, and, while roundly condemning the violent reprints, they generally added: But people ought not to insult religion.

Why not? No one ever objects to the ridiculing of political views, which are open to free debate. In fact, true respect for religion would allow it to be opened up in the same way, rely on the truth emerging. But at present the Koran is shielded from honest scrutiny, which suggests that maybe it could not be respected.

Religion cannot, in all conscience, be intellectually respected if honesty is to prevail over hypocrisy, and giving it false respect is not just obsequious and dishonest: it could actually allow superstitions of the Dark Ages to triumph, destroying the whole range of social and individual freedoms courageously won over the past few centuries. So, for the sake of liberty and equality as well as truth, we must resist the furtherance of hypocritical respect. Far from agreeing to moderate free speech in favor of respect for religion, we should moderate respect for religion in favor of free speech.

We are told that Islam itself cannot be blamed for the crimes of extremists, but that is like saying that the horrors of the Inquisition had nothing to do with Christianity. The statement by Thomas Aquinas that “Unbelief is the greatest of sins” was incontrovertible at that time, hence the Inquisition, the Crusades, and the Christian burning of witches, heretics, and Jews—the flames being fanned by Christian faith.

Mohammed followed on from Jesus, and the Koran contains even more macabre denunciations of dis-belief than the Bible. Moreover, Islam has failed to moderate its mad practices to the extent that mainstream Christianity has done in the past couple of centuries.

Moderate Muslims blame misinterpretation of the Koran for all the tyranny and terrorism. If so, why did Allah, or his Prophet, lapse into such ambiguity? Islamic terrorists are certainly extremist, but they are orthodox, for the Koran clearly denigrates women and tells believers to wage jihad against heretics and infidels.

Muslims are told, we are sen-

sitive, and are really hurt when their religion is joked about. Don’t they credit their supposed creator god with any sense of humor? Didn’t it actually invent laughter? And is he too weak to withstand a joke without some humorless clerics rushing to his defense? Or is their own faith so weak that they fear its contamination?

Claiming to be ultra-sensitive and really hurt by mere words or pictures is, of course, a way of gaining privilege. Everyone else has to speak softly so as not to hurt you.

The word “appeasement” is rarely used except in the context of Neville Chamberlain’s attempted deal with Hitler in 1938, but what about the ongoing appeasement of Muslims in Britain?

Though of course care must be taken to avoid a native backlash against the mostly peaceable British Muslim community, it is indefensible that succeeding British governments have given Islamic criminals immunity from prosecution. For instance, in 1989 when, even on BBC television, imams were offering bibles for the murder of Salman Rushdie, they were never charged with incitement to murder.

I see that the University of Westminster, faced with the career of its alumnus Emwazi, has announced that in future its staff will attend student meetings to ensure their compliance with the law and good conduct, and that potentially contentious events will be permitted only if other speakers are inclusion-coupled to counter “radical” views.

Rohana Squire is a well-known British atheist author and speaker. This article first appeared in the May/July 2016 issue of the Australian Humanist, and is reprinted with permission from Council of Australian Humanist Societies Inc. www.humanist.org.au/australian-humanist/
The Truth about Thomas Paine

After Two Centuries of Lies, Slander, and Myths

By Gary Berton

Slander belongs to the class of dustantly vices. It always acts under cover. It puts insinuation in the place of evidence, and tries to impose by pretending to believe.

—THOMAS PAINÉ

The disinformation regarding Thomas Paine has become part of American folklore. In place of recognition for his role as a pre-eminent founder and ideological leader of the American Revolution, false myths have been used to characterize Paine. These derogatory characterizations were designed to diminish his legacy and influence in the America's good man... When subjected to these myths Paine becomes an object for pity, or the myths give cause to dismiss him, and his marginalization is subliminally justified.

The description of the Thomas Paine Award in Journalism from the 1990's, awarded by the Thomas Paine National Historical Association, reads in part, "Although vilified during his lifetime and tragically forgotten after his death, Thomas Paine was perhaps this country's greatest journalist." This is fundamentally wrong. And if the well-meaning TPNHA can succumb to the 200 years of faulty historiography, it is not surprising that many writers and historians still get it wrong as well.

The slanders and false portrayals of Paine have their roots in the propaganda of Paine's political foes, the ideological motivations of early historians, and the sloppy practices of historians since.

A British paper in summarizing these events had an objective view of matters: "Explaining the Federalists to their readers, they write, "The party known in general by the name of federalists, a name not very intelligible; but it may be better understood by us if we consider them as oligarchists, or men who wished that the whole influence of government should rest with themselves..." The defeat of Adams in 1800 "decided very strongly the feelings of the bulk of the people in the U. States and Thomas Paine was welcomed on the political stage..." [Reprinted in Norfolk Repository, May 20, 1806] The 1804 election saw Jefferson win in a landslide after Paine ran a series of essays in the papers exposing the Federalists once and for all. If Paine was so hated, it is difficult to explain where this landslide came from. (And why are there still monuments to Federalism in Pennsylvania?)

The source of all the slanderous portrayals of Paine is this political warfare, and it is important to understand that correcting the record on Paine is a political act, not a personal opinion. The ideas associated with Paine have suffered because the slanders taint his importance in the minds of many people. They place Paine as an outsider to the march of history, the march towards democracy, instead of democracy's leading advocate and champion.

The first biography of Paine was written by a British hack-writer. George Chalmers writing as Oldys, employed by a hack-writer, George Chalmers writing as Oldys, employed by a hack-writer, George Chalmers writing as Oldys, employed by a hack-writer, George Chalmers writing as Oldys, employed by a hack-writer, George Chalmers writing as Oldys, employed by a hack-writer, George Chalmers writing as Oldys, employed by a hack-writer, George Chalmers writing as Oldys, employed by a...
rather gratified the one and contributed to the other. His friend and himself seated themselves in the chaise, and drove towards the crowd, which separated so as to let them through, but endeavored to frighten the horse by the beating of the drum, swinging their hats, and hallowing. The horse betrayed a momentary terror, but immediately sprung forward, and carried his riders safe through.

“The whole of the degrading and disgraceful scene, it was pretended by the actors, proceeded from their zeal for the Christian Religion, and their hatred of Mr. Paine for his theological writings. A few observations, however, will convince every candid man, that Religion had no influence in the shameless riot, and that it arose from their hatred and fear of him for his political writings and principles. In the first place, most of the managers of this motley collection of black and white men, and boys, are the most irreligious persons in the place. Several of them have not for years been seen inside a place of worship in time of service; but are the most notorious tavern-hunters, card-players, grog-drinkers, and profane scorners in the place. But there is one circumstance, which fully proves, did nothing else combine to confirm the fact, that this persecution of Mr. Paine did not proceed from a hatred of his religious tenets; and that it did proceed from hatred of his political principles. When Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, who is considered by even the federalists themselves as great a deist or infidel as Thomas Paine, was passing through this place on his return from his unsuccessful embassy to France—He was, as in this famous city of Trenton, now bellowing over with zeal for the Christian Religion feasted, toasted, caressed, and honored with every mark the most exalted respect, esteem, and love. Why then did he not proceed from a hatred of Mr. Paine’s religious tenets, and proceed from hatred of his political principles? When Charles Pinckney was thus honored, caressed, feasted, and supported since Thomas Paine insulted, abused and loaded with execrations?—The answer is obvious—Mr. Pinckney was a lover of monarchial aristocratic powers and distinctions—Mr. Paine a friend to free and equal governments, such as ours now is.” (Trenton True American, March, 1803)

No overt attack occurred, a few goons were hired by political operatives to harass him to create press, which has since been gobbled up by historians who haven’t taken the time to research the readily available facts.

Filiby little atheist
To demonstrate the extent of the slander campaign against Paine, Teddy Roosevelt described Paine by the above adjectives. He took that image from a reactionary historian, Jared Sparks, in a book about the oligarch Gouverneur Morris from 1832. Teddy passed it along in ignorance.

The President of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association at the time, just after World War I, exchanged a series of letters with Roosevelt to get him to admit his error, to some success. [see all the letters on www.thomaspaine.org]

But simply put, he was neither dirty (as explained below), little (he was known to be at least 5’10 and athletic), nor atheistic (“I believe in one God and no more” from The Age of Reason). But the slander had a life of its own, and when people ask about my political legacy it is always a challenge. And after reciting that quote, they fall into the drinking myth.

Drinking
No accounts of Paine drinking to excess existed prior to Rights of Man, and the first slanderous biography by Chalmers did not even mention it, and he was throwing everything he could dig up or invent at Paine. Chalmers added it in later additions, and Aikens, (the publisher of Pennsylvania Magazine which Paine edited in 1776 and a Tory who had a falling out with Paine) then invented a story about Paine drinking to meet deadlines after this trope began. After The Age of Reason was published, the accounts of drinking accelerated. Paine admits drinking to excess in 1783 during the trying times of the Reign of Terror, but everyone who was not an enemy, including objective witnesses, always reported him to be temperate, and accounts of him being drunk are isolated accounts.

For his day. After falling ill from a stroke in 1806 he was prescribed brandy as a medicine, and he was known to drink more at times then. But it never marked his ability to function at a high level, which he needed to do, publishing several articles per week in The Freeman. He was in a state of wretchedness. His appearance by all accounts was neat, in the manner of a farmer or mechanic.

Far from failing in England before coming to America, Paine was an established figure with ties to many leading Whigs. His time at Lewes from 1768 to 1774 saw him as the only member of the local governing council. That would not have been possible were he in a state of wretchedness. His appearance by all accounts was neat, in the manner of a farmer or mechanic.

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officer during the trying times of the Retreat, who also served in the government (the only founder to do both during the revolution), and acted as a spy behind enemy lines.

In Philadelphia, he led a small cadre of fighters (with James Cannon, Timothy Matlack, David Rittenhouse, James Willson Peale, Thomas Young, and Benjamin Franklin) that led the struggle to overthrow the British government of Pennsylvania in May, 1776 and led the way for ratifying the Declaration in their public debates with the Tory Cato, organized citizens committees to counter the hoarding by merchants and to defend the rights of the militia men, and fought a political war with the oligarchs who took the position of leaders but who had Tory sympathies (the Deane Affair). This group also organized the Whig Society in various states which provided pressure on Congress from the left to repres the Tories and advance the military, political, and social revolution. Paine was no side-line pamphleteer.

Paine was humble in his lifestyle. A simple room or small cottage satisfied him. He had money enough for his time to live comfortably, but riches were never his goal. His refusal of all payments for his political and religious writings should be testament enough.

**Attacks from the church**

These attacks have been well-documented, and there is no need to repeat them here, or refute the silliness of them: the atheist attack (which, to many people would be a compliment, but still unwise); the pulpits preaching likening him to the devil (how only a drunk could profess his infidelity); how they tried to intimidate children with threats that Tom Paine would come after them, etc.

But one related issue needs to be exposed, and that is a myth that Franklin tried to dissuade Paine from publishing The Age of Reason in 1786 (the book was written in 1779, three years after Franklin died). To cover the obvious contradiction, the myth claims Paine started writing in 1757, concerning an early freethought essay to an unknown author. Nevertheless, whomever Franklin was writing to, Paine’s fellow founding father was indeed prescient when he wrote, “the Consequence of printing this Piece will be a great deal of Odium drawn upon yourself, Mischief to you—.”

**New slanders**

Recently, the beleaguered conservative historian class has taken to creating new slanders against Paine in reaction to the growing Paine Studies movement around the world led by TPNHA. The far-fetched attacks pose as erudite questions, and the likes of Jonathan Clark and others seek to undermine Paine’s legacy because they realize the essence of Paine’s philosophy is the foundation of all progressive movements. I do not hold that you shouldn’t criticize Paine—although he is the father of the representative system, the Westminster Parliament, was already operative in the Britain that Paine rejected with hatred.” Clark accuses Paine of offering no rights theory, that he only strove to be an English yeoman, and that he plagiarized sections of Rights of Man (which Paine freely used Lafayette and Jefferson in their accounts of incidents in the French Revolution which Conway pointed out as far back as 1894). [See “Burying Thomas Paine” at www.thomaspaine.org for a complete analysis of Clark.]

Another absurd book is Hazel Burgess’s Thomas Paine: A Collection of Unknown Writings, which except for some obvious letters housed in various museums and known to exist, example of the representative system, the Westminster Parlia- ment, was already operative in the Britain that Paine rejected with hatred.” Clark accuses Paine of offering no rights theo- ry, that he only strove to be an English yeoman, and that he plagiarized sections of Rights of Man (which Paine freely used Lafayette and Jefferson in their accounts of incidents in the
she reprints essays from other people using the pseudonym "Common Sense," and then dains Paine for hypocrisy! There were several writers throwing out that pen name during Paine’s lifetime, led by a Tory in Boston and one in London. Burgess even goes as far as suggesting Paine owned slaves, and then says there is no proof of this, but condemns him anyway. This is worse than “insinuation in place of evidence,” and goes beyond slander to the ridiculous.

Author of the Declaration of Independence
There are also myths about Paine that originate on the other side. One such claim is that he was the real author of the Declaration of Independence. As William Cobbett said, “Whoever wrote the Declaration, Paine was its author.” And in a political sense that is accurate, but Paine did not pen the words. He provided the philosophical and political world view in America which produced the Declaration by writing Common Sense, and the language and phrases used in the Declaration originated in that work, but the original version of the Declaration that Jefferson used to create the Rough Draft was not written by Paine. There is sufficient evidence from computer analysis that it was put together by committee, with Jefferson the lead “draftsman,” as Franklin described him. [See my article at www.thomaspaine.org for details on the role Common Sense played in the creation of the Declaration.]

Paine and slavery
There are also false claims to Paine’s authorship of “African Slavery in America.” Mariam Touba has written about Paine’s support of the abolitionist movement [in the Posts on www.thomaspaine.org], and his personal correspondence and his membership in the anti-slavery organization under Franklin in the 1780’s, show his concern about the remnants of colonialism existent in slavery and its undermining the rights of man. But Paine did not write on the subject extensively in public, and his position as “first abolitionist,” as Conway portrays him, is false. Anthony Bennett and Samuel Hopkins get that honor, Hopkins being the real author of “African Slavery in America.”

In summation, I can only add that “history means interpreta- tion” (E.H. Carr). Ideologically conservative historians have dismissed Thomas Paine, and interpreted any negative rumor against him as fact, and any achievement of Paine as simply someone’s interpretation, not reality. There is a point where the only valid history is one rooted in a complete unfolding of the truth. The implications of the truth may be debated, but facts are not up for interpretation.

Junius
The Letters of Junius by an anonymous writer in the 1760’s and 70’s in London which led the Whig crusade against the corrupt monarchy, has remained a mystery. Several writers have argued that Paine was the author, and over 40 books have been written arguing for another 30 different people as the author. There is some evidence that Paine had a hand in some of the letters, in particular the “Dedication to the English People” of the compiled letters by the author(s) in 1772, as well as several other letters in the collection. This evidence comes from the computer analysis being done at the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies at Iona College in New York. But basically, there were multiple authors, perhaps as many as 7, with Paine being a key one. So this myth actually has something to it. If this holds up in analysis, then the myth of Paine’s failure in England before coming to America can finally be buried with great prejudice. From other analysis of his works and new works being discovered, a pattern has emerged of Paine writing with others using the same pen name in a series of essays. Junius would just be another example.

Paine as Anarchist and Libertarian
Many academics and independent scholars describe Paine as having anarchist principles, at least libertarian (as we know it today) principles. But that is not accurate. Paine was certainly no anarchist—the entire thrust of all his writings on government was to create a strong, centralized, democratic government to insure rights for all and redistribute wealth. Government, in the hands of the people, was the tool for creating liberty, not its enemy as portrayed by anarchist and libertarian alike. Taking isolated phrases by Paine in his denunciation of monarchy and applying them to democratic government as championed by Paine is very sloppy historiography. Thus we are burdened repeatedly on the internet with the ignorance of ascribing the following quotes to Paine:

"The government that governs best governs least." (Thoreau borrowed it from the cover of the Democratic Review, 1837-1859, and it is not in the Paine corpus.)

"The duty of a patriot is to protect his country from its government." (Edward Abbey in his anarchist book in the 1970’s. Rick Perry used this in stump speeches and attributed it to Paine to try and gain some credibility.)

"Arms discourage and keep the insuder and plunderer in awe, and preserve order in the world as well as property... Horrid mischief would ensue were the law-abiding deprived of the use of them." (From “Thoughts on Defensive War” and used by the NRA repeatedly—but Paine did not write it. The article uses Christian phrases in its argument, and computer analysis rules out Paine as the author. See Chapter Two in New Directions in Thomas Paine Studies, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.)

Gary Berton is the Secretary of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association and Coordinator of the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies at Iona College in New Rochelle, New York.
THE BIBLE IN COMMON SCHOOLS

By D.M. Bennett

Among the many questions which have agitated the people of this country is: Shall the Jewish and Christian scriptures be retained as a book in our common schools?

A large percentage of the people of America, from various points of view, consisting of Catholics, Israelites, Quakers, Rationalists, skeptics, unbelievers, Spiritualists, Materialists, Theists, Pantheists, Atheists, advanced thinkers, moderate doubters, antitheologians, lovers of science, devotees of mental liberty, opposers of sectarian dogmas and creeds, and many who are registered as more or less heterodox, are not in favor of the Bible being placed in our common schools; while another large portion of the public, consisting mainly of members of the orthodox Protestant churches of the country, are not only in favor of the Bible being used as a school book by their own children, but also insist that the children of the unbelieving members of the community shall be compelled to acquiesce in its use whether they choose to or not.

This Christian portion of the community seem to be under the impression that it is a benefit or an honor to their God to keep his book, or his "great letter to mankind," prominently kept his book, or his "great letter to mankind," prominently
to respect. I raise my voice in earnest protest against the injustice of compelling me to pay allegiance to a kind of deity I can- not believe in, and of tamboozing and prescribing me if I cannot continuously do so.

It is the right and privilege of people who want chaplains and priests to talk to them and tell them about the great fact of total depravity—that man was made pure and perfect in the beginning, but that within the first twenty four hours or thereabouts, by a little lack of foresight and good management on the part of the creator and considerable trewdness and tart on the part of the possessor of this earth, a race of race was prompted with a race upright, faultless, happy people, and of its being a perfect paradise, was, in the language of printers, completely “knocked into pi,” the devil winning the first trick in the game, and being able to hold the best cards ever since—it is, I say, the right and privilege of peo- ple who want this kind of talk, to have it.

Instruction upon the consist- ency of one being three and three being one; of a son being as old as his father, and, in fact, being his own father, and all that sort of thing with which those who fre- quently listen to the teachings of this privileged class are suffi- ciently familiar—all the many beau- ties and consistencies which they hand out to the people—I do not object to their paying for them to the extent it is worth, but I do object to being made to pay for it my- self. I have no use for that kind of doctrine, and it is very much against my inclinations to help foot the bills incurred in the propagandism of such views. They possess no value to me, and I very much object to paying for them. Let those who want gaudy churches be willing to pay for them; let those who want splendid carriages pay for them; let those who vis- sionary of this world, diametrically opposed to the clearest mind of childhood is a clean, unwritten page, and nothing should be in- structed there save that which is true and useful; nothing should be writ- ten there that in after years must be eradicated at an expense of toll and sorrow.

We know well that the impressions received in childhood remain fixed in the mind till the close of life. The mind of childhood is a clean, unwritten page, and nothing should be instructed there save that which is true and useful; nothing should be written there that in after years must be eradicated at an expense of toll and sorrow.

Much has yet to be learned of the true system of early edu- cation; much that is mythical and mistaken, much that is un- certain and untrue, touching this most important thing is to be ad- duced and preserved without superstition, and everything that is misleading and harmful. The mind of childhood is a clean, unwritten page, and nothing should be instructed there save that which is true and useful; nothing should be written there that in after years must be eradicated at an expense of toll and sorrow.

It is the right and privilege of people who want chaplains and priests to talk to them and tell them about the great fact of total depravity—that man was made pure and perfect in the beginning, but that within the first twenty four hours or thereabouts, by a little lack of foresight and good management on the part of the creator and considerable trewdness and tart on the part of the possessor of this earth, a race of race was prompted with a race upright, faultless, happy people, and of its being a perfect paradise, was, in the language of printers, completely “knocked into pi,” the devil winning the first trick in the game, and being able to hold the best cards ever since—it is, I say, the right and privilege of peo- people who want this kind of talk, to have it.

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In late August of 1882, about two thousand Liberals attended the Sixth Annual Meeting of the New York Freethinkers’ Association held at Watkins Glen. A significant change had taken place since four years earlier when D.M. Bennett, W.S. Bell, and Josephine Tilton—“The Trinity”—were arrested for selling alleged “obscenity” in the upstate New York village. This time, Bennett reported, “Every person in the town treated us with respect, and a kindly spirit was generally manifested.” The editor welcomed the change and noted that even the mainstream press were fair in their reporting.
Bennett believed that faith in ancient creeds and supernaturalism would disappear when freethinkers were truthfully written about and the aversion of being an unbeliever was removed. And he predicted: "Thousands will be ready to declare that they long ago lost all faith in the dogmas of theology, and that they fully believe that the powers and forces of nature are quite sufficient to account for every result that has ever taken place."

Because of rainy weather, the meetings were held in the Opera House, which was packed with a thousand people. Some of the noted freethinkers in attendance were Mary E. Tillonson, the dress reformer; former cgerman and writer A.B. Bradford; and J.P. Mendum, director of the freethought publication the Boston Investigator. Also on hand was Amy Post, the abolitionist who posed bail for D.M. Bennett after his arrest in 1878. Matilda Joslyn Gage, the editor of the Ballot Box, spoke about women's rights and female suffrage. She asserted her equality and "called woman the greatest unpaid laborer of the world, and accused the church of being the great robber of her sex." Her complex discourse, Bennett reported, was executed with marked ability. Gage also provided an extensive account of the life and work of freethinker and atheist Ernestine L. Rose, one of the first women's rights activists in America.

During a banquet for D.M. Bennett at the Glen Park Hotel, about one hundred and twenty leading freethinkers enjoyed dinner and speeches by Theron Leland and the honoree. Le
dland, a pioneer stenographer and free speech advocate, detailed the editor's legal battles and touched briefly on the simmering Walt Whitman Leaves of Grass obscenity controversy. Leland declared that the publicity caused by morals crusader Anthony Comstock and his New York Society for the Prevention of Vice to issue another edition increased sales and made "two Leaves of Grass where only one grew before."  

**How Sunday Should Be Spent**

After all the excitement and celebrations on his behalf at Wat
tkins Glen, the editor found it hard to get back to work at his desk in the Truth Seeker office in New York City. While he continued to complete the fourth volume of his A Truth Seeker" around that time, he became entangled in the "abstemious Valleymen" controversy. On November 4, 1882—the day after D.M. Bennett's Sunday excursion and shared his experiences that day with readers in a reflective article. During the excursion they passed beneath the Brooklyn Bridge, which had been under construc

The soap baron's protégé, Anthony Comstock, also remained busy that autumn, devoting much of his efforts in the name of the Lord to going after gambling, lotteries, and the Long Island City pool halls. But gambling was not as sexy a cause for the repressed morals crusader as obscenity. According to Whitman's biographer, the "muse of literature" had "never got quite as much enjoyment of action out of argument against gamblers as he did in the pursuit of purveyors of obscene books and publications." In a November article titled "The American Review," Comstock complained that he had "neither money nor influential friends" when he began his life as a vice-hunter. But records reveal that Comstock's backers were social registry types including Samuel Colgate.

**Leaves of Grass**

In the fall of 1882 D.M. Bennett began showing signs of a seri

Bennett felt that his day of leisure with friends was infinitely better than attending church wearing a long hypocritical face and hearing the same old "claims of supernaturalism repeated."

constituted the entire city—and the world—the inauguration of "electric light" as the Times dubbed it, would eventually illu

The fall of 1882 D.M. Bennett began showing signs of a seri

Bennett refused to omit the allegedly offensive verses, then printed a letter by Whitman's friend William O'Connor, de

For the unjust imprisonment of D.M. Bennett."

The soap baron's protégé, Anthony Comstock, and all other enemies of liberty. Benjamin Roosevelt would become one of the most disdained political figures in the New York World. Although the publisher decided not to print a second edition. Ezra Heyman championed in the News section. (Thomas Edison was a prominent Paineite and long-time Truth Seeker subscriber whose inventions were often championed in the Truth Seeker.)

A few other opponents of freethought and the editor of the Truth Seeker were also active in autumn of 1882. On October 10 the City Reform Club was formed by a group of concerned and highly influential young men at the home of Theodore Roos
evelt. Their mission was to purify municipal politics. After writ

Bennett's monumental work came under scrutiny by Antho

The feisty publisher decided not to print a second edition. Ezra Heyman refused to omit the allegedly offensive verses, then printed a letter by Whitman's friend William O'Connor, de

For the unjust imprisonment of D.M. Bennett."
D.M. Bennett's seeming ly uncharacteristic reaction to Heywood's latest arrest caused astonishment and anger. Heywood expressed his displeasure in an open letter to Walt Whitman that he printed in his Word periodical. Heywood complained that since his release from Dedham Jail, he was "slowly becoming comparative ly 'respectable' again when lo suddenly I am of 'no reputation.'" He informed Whitman (and all those who read the Word) of Bennett's year-long prison sentence in Albany Penitentiary for "alleged-mailing" a contraceptive device which had also been advertised in the Truth Seeker with hope of driving the vice-hunter into a frenzy—and that it did!

D.M. Bennett believed Walt Whitman was an honest and earnest man. He did not feel, however, that everything written by the poet was desirable to spread over the land. About Whitman's poems, the editor wrote: "As a rule they are grand, and doubtless contain the genius of true poetry." A few of the poems, however, he felt should have been omitted from Leaves of Grass and could not be of "special benefit to anybody." Although Bennett did not wish to censure, he confessed that he wondered why Ezra Heywood mailed the matter. "We are in favor of free mails, the same as free thought," he argued, "but we are not in favor of sending indecent matter by mail, or any other way." "Mt. H. [who] has been indiscriminate," Bennett wrote.

He [Heywood] has seemed to us not a man with a coarse, animal nature, but naturally as free from such a tendency as one man in a thousand. We must say, however, that he chose to make himself conspicuous by mailing Walt Whitman's most objectionable poem, and by publishing some things which we most certainly would not publish. We could not see what good was to be gained by it, what principle of Liberalism is involved, or how the interests of any class of the community can thereby be served. There is no reason why any one should unnecessarily thrust his hand into the lion's mouth.

The Comstock Syringe, as it was provocatively dubbed, was a contraceptive device which had also been advertised in the Truth Seeker with hope of driving the vice-hunter into a frenzy—and that it did!

In 1882, Ezra Heywood's challenge to the latest assault on free speech and free mails became another divisive issue among freethinkers. The controversy—which had been mentioned by Theron Leland at the Watkins Glen Convention—continued into the fall. D.M. Bennett remained surprisingly aloof during the dispute. His non-response seemed overly cautious to some, and outright cowardly to others. But Heywood's arrest by Com stock on October 26 in Princeton, Massachusetts, drew the word of Bennett's when we did our best a few years ago to save us from Comstock's clutches. It is not a question of taste, but of liberty: no man who fails to see this and act accordingly can ever fairly call himself a Liberal again.
Ezra Heywood, its most outspoken proponent. "Heywood is certainly a jackass," Whitman scowled. And while the poet's sentiment toward Heywood was not expressed in print publicly during the controversy, D.M. Bennett's words were exposed in print for everyone to see and judge.

Initially, future Truth Seeker editor George Macdonald thought Bennett's remarks about Ezra Heywood were spiteful. While Macdonald was pondering what Bennett's motives might be, he overheard one of the Truth Seeker printers voice a comment which struck him as very insightful: "Achilles had his Achilles heel." Macdonald found wisdom in the printer's classical explanation. But he also blamed the editor's change of heart on the illness which he had been suffering from for several weeks. An affliction that was getting worse.

Despite his sickness, Bennett weighed in on the "pretty lively hornet's nest" he was blamed for stirring up in the November 25, 1882 issue of the Truth Seeker. He denied that he had "flopped over" or "turned a summersault" or was "guilty of cowardly conduct." He admitted that he still sold Cupid's yokes. But once again, he argued it was not obscene. If others wanted to circulate "indecent literature," that was their business, but not his intention. As to publishing indecent parts of the Bible as he had done for years, he maintained that since the "great engine of superstition and error" was in every home, Sunday school, and the hands of every man, woman, and child, "we claim a perfect right to do so." He did not, however, wish to harm Walt Whitman by pursuing the same course.

On Friday, December 1, D.M. Bennett went to the office to be a worthless fellow and suddenly quit, Bennett with his predictable disregard of self took off his jacket and finished the job. (Some believed that he was poisoned by the lead paint.) During the move, he began to hiccup uncontrollably. He was overheard saying to Dr. Foote and his son, "If you boys don't do something to stop this hiccups, I am gone."

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D.M. Bennett's malady became noticeable in October 1882, after he caught a cold while the Truth Seeker office was being moved from Science Hall, 141 Eighth street to a new location at 21 Clinton Place. After a painter he hired turned out to be a worthless fellow and suddenly quit, Bennett with his predictable disregard of self took off his jacket and finished the job. (Some believed that he was poisoned by the lead paint.) During the move, he began to hiccup uncontrollably. He was overheard saying to Dr. Foote and his son, "If you boys don't do something to stop this hiccups, I am gone."

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To a Common Prostitute

BE composed—be at ease with me—I am Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as Nature;
Not till the sun excludes you, do I exclude you,
Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you, do my words refuse to glisten and nuzzle for you.
My girl, I appoint with you an appointment, and I charge you that you make preparation to be worthy to meet me,
And I charge you that you be patient and perfect till I come.
Till then I salute you with a significant look that you do not forget me.

A Woman Waits for Me

A WOMAN waits for me—she contains all, nothing is lacking,
Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking, or if the moisture
of the right man were lacking.
Sex contains all,
Bodies, souls, meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies,
results, promulgations,
Songs, commands, health, pride, the maternal mystery, the
semiotic milk,
All hopes, benefactions, bestowals,
All the passions, loves, becomings, delights of earth,
All the governments, judgements, goals, follow'd persons of the earth.
These are contain'd in sex as parts of itself and
manifestations of itself.
Without shame the man I like knows and avows the
deliciousness of his sex,
Without shame the woman I like knows and avows her sex.
Now I will dismiss myself from impassive women,
I will go stay with her who waits for me, and with those
women that are warm-blooded sufficient for me,
I see that they understand me and do not deny me,
I see that they are worthy of me—I will be the robust
husband of those women.
They are not one jot less than I am,
They are tann'd in the face by shining suns and blowing
winds.
Their flesh has the old divine suppleness and strength,
They know how to swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run,
strike, retreat, advance, resist, defend themselves.
They are ultimate in their own right—they are calm, clear,
well-possess'd of themselves.
I draw you close to me, you women,
I cannot let you go, I would do you good,
I am for you, and you are for me, not only for our own
sake, but for others' sakes;
Envelop'd in you sleep greater heroes and heroines,
They are foundate of the touch of any man but me,
Is it 1 year, 2 months? I make my way,
I am stern, acrid, large, unsuadable—but I love you,
I do not hurt you any more than is necessary for you,
I pour the stuff to start sons and daughters fit for these
states—I press with slow rude muscles,
Diencephal affectionately—vision is on extremities,
I dare not withdraw till I deposit what has so long
accumulated within me.
Through you I drain the pent-up rivers of myself,
In you I wrap a thousand onward years,
On you I graft the grafts of the best-beloved of me
and America.
The drops I distil upon you shall grow fierce and athletic
girls, new artists, musician, and singers.
The babies I beget upon you are to be begetted in
their turn,
I shall demand perfect men and women out of my
love-spending,
I shall expect them to interpenetrate with others, as I and
you interpenetrate too,
I shall trust on the fulness of the giving showers I give now,
I shall look for loving crops from the kindled life, death
immortality, I plant so familiar now.
In Memory of Thomas Paine by Walt Whitman

Spoken at Lincoln Hall, Philadelphia
Sunday, January 28, 1877
for the 140th anniversary of Thomas Paine’s birthday.

Some thirty-five years ago, in New York city, at Tammany hall, of which place I was then a frequenter, I happen’d to become quite well acquainted with Thomas Paine’s perhaps most intimate chum, and certainly his later years’ very frequent companion, a remarkably fine old man, Col. Fellows, who may yet be remembered by some stray relics of that period and spot. If you will allow me, I will first give a description of the Colonel himself. He was tall, of military bearing, aged about 78. I should think, hair white as snow, clean-shaven on the face, dressed very neatly, a tail-coat of blue cloth with metal buttons, buff vest, pantaloons of drab color, and his neck, breast and wrists showing the whitest of linen. Under all circumstances, fine manners; a good but not profuse talker, his wits still fairly about him, balanced and live and undimmed as ever. He kept pretty fair health, though so old. For employment—for he was poor—he had a post as constable of some of the upper courts. I used to think him very picturesque on the fringe of a crowd holding a tall staff, with his erect form, and his superbar, bare, thick-hair’d, closely-cropped white head.

The judges and young lawyers, with whom he was ever a favorite, and the subject of respect, used to call him Aristides. It was the general opinion among them that if manly rectitude and the instincts of absolute justice remain’d vital anywhere about New York City Hall, or Tammany, they were to be found in Col. Fellows. He liked young men, and enjoy’d to sit and chat with them over a social glass of toddy, after his day’s work, (he on these occasions never drank but one glass,) and it was at reiterated meetings of this kind in old Tammany’s back parlor of those days, that he told me much of Thomas Paine. At one of our interviews he gave me a minute account of Paine’s sickness and death. In short, from those talks, I was and am satisfied that my old friend, with his mark’d advantages, had mentally, morally and emotionally gauged the author of “Common Sense,” and besides giving me a good portrait of his appearance and manners, had taken the true measure of his interior character.

Paine’s practical demeanor, and much of his theoretical belief, was a mixture of the French and English schools of a century ago, and the best of both. Like most old-fashion’d people, he drank a glass or two every day, but was no tippler, nor intemperate, let alone being a drunkard. He lived simply and economically, but quite well—was always cheery and courteous, perhaps occasionally a little blunt, having very positive opinions upon politics, religion, and so forth. That he labor’d well and wisely for the States in the trying period of their par-tition, and in the seeds of their character, there seems to me no question. I dare not say how much of what our Union is owning and enjoying to day—is independence—its ardent belief in, and substantial practice of, radical human rights—and the severance of its government from all ecclesiastical and superstitious dominion—I dare not say how much of all this is owing to Thomas Paine, but I am inclined to think a good portion of it decidedly is.

But I was not going either into an analysis or eulogium of the man. I wanted to carry you back a generation or two, and give you by indirection a moment’s glance—and also to ventilate a very earnest and I believe authentic opinion, nay conviction, of that time, the fruit of the interviews I have mention’d, and of questioning and cross-questioning, chanced’t by my best information since, that Thomas Paine had a noble personality, as exhibited in presence, face, voice, dress, manner, and what may be call’d his atmosphere and magnetism, especially the later years of his life. It is the general opinion, well and wisely for the States in the trying period of their partition, and in the seeds of their character, there seems to me no question. I dare not say how much of what our Union is owning and enjoying to day—is independence—its ardent belief in, and substantial practice of, radical human rights—and the severance of its government from all ecclesiastical and superstitious dominion—I dare not say how much of all this is owing to Thomas Paine, but I am inclined to think a good portion of it decidedly is.

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After continual general talk of Poe, W. said:

"I have seen Poe—met him: he impressed me very favorably: was dark, quiet, handsome—Southern from top to toe: languid, tired out, it is true, but altogether ingratiating."

Was that in New York? "Oh, yes: there we had only a brief visit: he was frankly conciliatory: I left him with no doubts left, if I ever had any." Poe was "curiously a victim of history—like Paine." "The disposition to parade, to magnify, his defects has grown in to a habit: every literary, every moralistic, jackanapes who comes along has to give him an additional kick. His weaknesses were obvious enough to anybody: but what do they amount to after all? Paine is defamed in the same way: poor Paine: rich Paine: they spare him nothing."

I said: "You should write about Paine." He nodded, "So I should, I don’t think there’s anybody living—anybody at all—(I don’t think there ever was anybody, living or dead)—more able than I am to depict, to picture, Paine, in the right way. I have told you of my old friend Colonel Fellows: he was an uncommon man both in what he looked like and in what he was: nobly formed, with thick white hair—white as milk: beard: striking characteristics everywhere."

He proceeded: "We had many talks together in the back room of the City Hall. The instant he saw I was interested in Paine he became communicative—frankly unbosomed himself. His Paine story amounted to a resurrection of Paine out of the horrible calumnies, infamies, under which orthodox hatred had buried him. Paine was old, alone, poor: it’s that, it’s what accrues from that, that his slanderers have made the most of: anything lower, meaner, more contemptible, I can’t imagine: to take an aged man—a man tired to death after a complicated life of toil, struggle, anxiety—weak, dragged down, at death’s door: poor: with perhaps habits that may come with such distress: then to pull him into the mud, distort everything he does and says: oh, it’s infamous! There seems to be this hyena disposition, some exceptional (thank God rare!) venom, in some men which is never satisfied except it is engaged in some work of vandalism. I can forgive anything but that."

This essay appears at the The Thomas Paine National Historical Association, website: http://thomaspaine.org.
A black-crowned night heron was clinging to my anchor chain, searching the quiet sea for a fish. As the sun eased its orange rim just above the horizon, the little bird looked up, and so did I. This sunrise held exceptional promise because of the cloud formations scattered about. There were immense walls of dense cumulus flanking a high ceiling of delicate cirrus. When the sun fully emerged from the sea, it transformed the sky into a magnificent, amber cathedral. Here was a radiant sanctuary worthy of Mother Ocean.

Spellbound by this magnificent panorama, I found myself searching for the best word to describe it, and then it came to me—HOLY! This led me to a rather startling revelation. I suddenly realized that my life had evolved to the point where my little sailing ship had become a one-person, floating monastery. I had become a seeker of the hallowed and enduring qualities that illuminate the human mystery.

But my quest is for the sacred without the profane—for Spirituality without Big Religion. My pursuit is to go beyond just the material facets of Life and embrace the truly transcendent aspects that give one's existence extra layers of meaning and richness. And for me, the foundation of that sanctity is Nature. How can one not revere the utterly amazing impossibility of our life here on Earth?

Looking up at the heavens last night, as my boat tugged gently at her anchor, what did I see? I saw thousands of other celestial bodies that are completely barren because they are either too cold or too hot or too dry. And yet we are blessed with a splendor of life-forms that is truly astonishing. They range from the miniature seahorse to the humpback whale—from the hummingbird to the condor—from the gecko to the hippo. And how can we not marvel at the wondrous biospheres where they live: jungles and deserts and prairies and mountains and oceans and glaciers. The mysterious fact that we are the one life-lush planet amidst all of these life-less planets, is a genuine miracle.

So, why do we invent invisible men in the sky to worship, when the abundance and diversity of Nature is far more worthy of our reverence? The answer is fairly straightforward. It is because we have very little choice. Most “believers” have it pounded into them when they are very young and know nothing of the world. They are essentially brainwashed when they are at their most defenseless. Children have established a bond of trust with their parents because they have taught them that fire burns and snakes bite and traffic is dangerous. So why would they not believe their parents when they indoctrinate them with religion?

(Continued on next page)
But these formative children only hear the "religion is good" side of the story. No one catalogs for them the long list of evils that religion is directly responsible for such as:

- Holy wars and Crusades
- Witch-hunts
- Claiming that innocent babies are born "soiled"
- Human sacrifice
- Suicide bombings
- Forcing unwanted children on already overburdened families
- Justification for slavery
- Fostering the terrifying myth of Hell
- Rejection of scientific discoveries
- Subordination of women to second class status
- Demonization of our natural and healthy sexuality

That probably seems like a mind-numbing list of horrors that can be directly laid at the doorstep of Big Religion, but they are all indisputably true—either historically or currently. And to make things even worse, religion is founded upon two beliefs that cannot even be proven: that there is a God and that there is a Heaven. This is a con man's dream. The claims cannot be verified—and yet the suckers will sign up for it—by the billions!

On the other hand, my type of spirituality, which is reverence for Nature and the Universe, and which is often called Pantheism, has never fostered any of the evils that institutional churches have repeatedly spawned down the centuries. So, the big question seems to be: How can our species ever grow into adulthood, if we continue to view the world through a veil of Iron Age superstitions?

And this brings us back to my little one-person, floating monastery. I have adopted what I perceive as the wisest aspects of the contemplative life. But I have rejected many of the restrictions of both the Western and Eastern styles of monasticism such as hierarchy, rigidity, conformity and surrender of self. Instead I embrace these characteristics of The Monk's Path: simplicity, reflection, silence, austerity, solitude, cleanliness, slowness, discipline, physical exertion and a simple diet.

This doesn't mean that I live like a hermit in a cave eating grubs and scorpions. I enjoy going to town for supplies and to visit with friends. And I am not always "out in the islas." Sometimes I am even in a marina for boat projects or internet essay research or even for some creature comforts. But I do abide by the main thrust of the monastic life, which is the exiling of oneself from the frenzy of the normal world in the hopes of gaining a better understanding of Life.

That quest for knowledge is one of the things that sets me at odds with the Big Churches. They do not want their members to be critical thinkers. They want their flocks to surrender their free will and their rational powers to the dogma that the priests or mullahs or rabbis impose upon them. They want control and obedience.

It took about an hour for that golden cathedral of clouds and sunlight to dissipate. I was amazed that the little night heron sat there as transfixed as I was for the entire time. They normally head for the dark shelter of the mangroves at first light. That glorious alignment of clouds and light was so magisterial that it mesmerized both of us.

Sadly, we humans have lost our awareness that we are still animals. But some of us have retained that ancestral memory in our core being. And so on that enchanted morning, a big animal and a little animal sat together in amazement. How lucky we were to dwell in a world of such miraculous beauty.

Ray Jason has enjoyed a contrary-to-ordinary life. After receiving his Political Science degree, he was drafted and served in Vietnam aboard an ammunition ship. This experience convinced him to avoid the "real world" as much as possible. He achieved this by spending the next 20 years juggling torches, knives and bowling balls on the streets of San Francisco—with considerable skill, prompting San Francisco’s Mayor to declare July 17, 1981 Ray Jason Day. He has spent his recent years as a sea gypsy—wandering the wide waters in search of adventure, serenity and philosophical insights. His website is theseagypsyphilosopher.blogspot.com
The Bible in Common Schools
(Continued from page 27)

which is found there for murder, wars, and bloodshed is quite sufficient to make it an unfit monitor to inexperienced and innocent minds.

27. The Bible exhibits great partiality toward different portions of the family man. It favors the Jewish nation, and shower-
ers favors and blessings upon them, while curses and im-
precations are poured upon the heads of gentiles. Palpable inequality.

28. It is a warm advocate of the barbarous custom of slaying innocent animals and offering them up as a propitiation,
in toto.

29. The teachings of the Bible are calculated to stifle and de-
struction providence, foresight, and enterprise. If some of its
teachings were carried out mankind would be little better
than a race of pitiful mendicants.

30. The Bible upholds and teaches the principles of punishing
the artless and simple minded and justice-loving children.

I have thus shown many reasons why the Bible is not fit-
ted for a school book for the use of children, but the catego-
ry might still be largely increased. There are numerous other
reasons why it should not be admitted into our schools, and
more especially why all children should not be required to read
it and all should not be compelled to pay for the expense.
Many of the points of objection that have been mentioned might be enlarged upon, and the strength
of the objection could be made still more apparent.

Think for a moment of the erroneous ideas that are taught in
the Bible, which the investigations and observations of sci-
entific men have proved to be wrong in toto. The cosmology
of the Bible, as I said, is utterly at fault. The age of this planet,
according to its teachings, is less than six thousand years, while
the clearest proofs are found that it must have existed for
millions of years. It speaks of the division of light from dark-
ness as though they were formerly blended together—true
ly an unscientific absurdity. It teaches about the existence of days,
mornings, and evenings before the sun, moon, or stars were
brought into existence, how all kinds of vegetation, including
herbs, plants, grasses, shrubs, and trees, grew and came to per-
fection, bearing flowers, fruits, and seeds, before there was a
sun to send forth a ray of light, or a drop of rain had ever fallen
upon the earth. But it is now well known that this could not
have possibly been the case.

The sun is as old as the earth and probably was the parent
of all the planets that form the solar system, and the indenta-
tions caused by drops of falling rain are found imprinted in
the old red sandstone, made when in a plastic state, and must
have occurred hundreds of thousands, and probably millions,
of years ago. It shows the height of ignorance to talk about
trees and vegetables growing, and producing fruits and seeds,
without the influence of the sun, and without the moistening
and rejuvenating properties of rain and dew. Equally absurd is
the legend about the division of the waters and the making of
the firmament, whose office was claimed to be to divide the
waters above it from those below it, and to keep them sep-
dated. What a crude, clumsy appreciation the writer of that
tradition had of the true state of the case! The "firmament" is
nothing but space, and would be totally incapable of sustain-
ing a body of water in the upper atmosphere even were such a
body there to be sustained. The merest tyro in physical science
can easily comprehend the fallacy of the Bible story.

The account of the setting of the stars in the firmament;
the firmament; of the short job of making the countless millions of suns,
stars, systems, and constellations, as described in the five short
words, "He made the stars also," shows how inadequate was
the conception of the writer of the number, magnitude, and
distance of the heavenly orbs. And it is easy to see how unlikely
it was, if it required five days to manufacture this small globe,
nearly eight thousand miles in diameter, that the sun, a million
times larger than the earth, larger than the entire orbit of the
moon; the planets of our own system, in the aggregate hun-
dreds of thousands of times larger than our own globe; with
the thousands of other suns and systems, many of which are
much more immense than our system, could all be turned out
in a single day. If children are compelled to read such details of
the origin of the systems and constellations, they cannot fail to
see the absurdity of it.

They can see, too, how im-
perfect was the conception of the writers of the Bible when
they talked about the "corners," "ends," "pillars," and "founda-
tions" of the earth, and how ut-
terly ignorant they were of the
fact that the earth is a round ball
that cannot possibly be in the
blue vault of space, turning on its axis daily toward the sun,
and making a journey every three hundred and sixty-five
round that brilliant luminary. The Bible placed "ends" and
"corners" to the earth, but science unceremoniously knocked
them off. Copernicus two hundred and fifty years ago proved
the utter fallacy of the Bible theory, and effectually knocked
thology into a cocked hat. When it is duly realized how little Bible
writers knew of the simple laws of nature, it must be seen how
totality in is the Bible as a factor in the education of the young.

How crude and fallacious was the conception of the writer
of the book of Genesis in reference to the phenomenon of rain!
He thought it was produced by the windows of heaven (prob-
ably in the floor of heaven or the firmament) being opened and
he waters falling through the same to earth. The theory made
no provision for the return of the water into heaven. Yes, how
ignorant that writer was of the simple process of rain falling
to the earth and rising again in the form of vapor, the operation
to be repeated thousands upon thousands of times. It is desirable
that the rising generation should continue to be taught these
incorrect and absurd theories? Shall they continue to read and
believe the incredible story about the flood of waters pouring
through the windows of heaven until all the hills and moun-
tains were covered, the tallest of which reached the altitude of
five miles! Shall they continue to read of and believe the possi-
bility of such a quantity of water coming from the atmosphere
and of its finding a place to go to after the rain was over and the
waters assuaged? Shall they ever continue to be taught that
Noah was able to gather so many millions of beasts, birds, rep-
tiles, insects, and worms from all parts of the globe in a single
vessel and in that airtight ark, in an atmosphere that must have
been foul enough to stifle a bat in fifteen minutes, to keep all
that wide range of animal life for the space of thirteen months,
and without such food as they required?
Has the race in later times produced far better mental pab-
ulum for little men and women? Would it not be far bet-
ter to give them real truths, devoid of monstrosities, fables, and
errors? Shall they ever continue to be told that two men, Moses
and Aaron, were able to change rocks into serpent's to produce
frog enough to fill an extensive country, to change dust into
life, to produce locusts in infinitude, to convert all the water
in Egypt, including the river Nile, into blood, to kill the horses
and cattle of the country two or three times over; that the
waters of a sea divided in the center and walked up on either
cut, like a raised road, leaving a dry roadway over which two
million people were able to pass dry-shod, to say nothing of
horses and herds of cattle and sheep? Are these the highest
truths that our children can acquire—that a nation of people
were kept forty years in the performance of a journey through
a wilderness that could easily have been made in forty days?
That during this forty years they were daily fed by showers of
manna sent from heaven, by fast time, for their special benefit?
That during that long, tedious journey neither their shoes nor
their clothing wore out? Shall they still continue to read how
General Joshua, unable in a given time to slay as many of his
fellows as he desired, and being anxious to continue the
slaughter twelve or fifteen hours longer, by a mere freak of his
will, or with a little aid from the one on high, was able to stop
both the sun and the moon, and make the latter stand still and
to make one
day nearly as long as two ordinary days?

Shall they continue to believe that the kind father of all
mankind was so anxious that a few hundred more of his chil-
dren should be slaughtered that he performed that astounding
feat, never performed before and never since? And how curious, too, that strength superior to any
muskul strength that was ever heard of elsewhere should be
produced by the hair of the head! How unlike the experience
of all other human beings? But the gay Delilah was too much
for the foxy Samson at last; she bewitched him with her charms
and then while he was taking a siesta, his head reclining in her
lap, she sliced up his hair, whereupon he at once became
weak like other men, when his foes had no difficulty in
capturing him, in gouging out his eyes, and in confining him
in prison.

Has it ever occurred to you, my friends, that even school
children might doubt the truthfulness of these remarkable sto-
ries about Samson and his wonderful exploits? Or did you ex-
pect they would believe them always with the same ease and
facility with which their parents and Christians generally are
able to receive the stories of the ancient
Young people are now becoming very inquisitive, and are
searching around for proofs more industriously than was for-
er the case. It seems to be the spirit of the age. The tendency
toward demanding demonstration and proof seems to be in
fectious, and doubt is felt on the part of many who were once
perfectly credulous and unquestioning believers.

Do you expect children will always believe that the man
Elijah was able to prevent rain and dew from falling upon the
earth for more than three years, at the expiration of which term
he was able to produce a most profuse and refreshing rain?
That he was able to create oil and meal from the surrounding
atmosphere; that he could call down fire from heaven and burn up the bod-
ies of animals, the stones of an altar, twelve barrels of water
and more than a hundred men, and finally, when he got tired
of this life on the earth, that a heavenly chariot and horses were
sent around for him, in which he took an aerial ride bodily
up into the upper ether, where sustain life for a moment, and
where scientists tell us there is not oxygen enough to sustain
life for a moment, and where intense cold is 500° below zero,
and where it would be utterly impossible for a man to live a
minute! Will not the children sometimes inquire where the
manufacture is located in which that chariot was got up, and
where the horses were raised?

Are you certain that children will always be credulous
enough to believe these stories? Like some grown people, will
they not take the liberty to question the validity of some of
these improbable statements? When our children read about
the forty-two other children that were torn to pieces on the
highway by two she bears at the instance of the good prophet
Elisha because they alluded to his loss of hair and failed to re-
commend to him some confidence in the kindred of the beings
who sent around those bears to tear those helpless children?
Will they easily believe that that man Elisha could restore life
to the dead, that he could manufacture oil from air, that he
could part the waters of the rapid Jordan with a mantle, that he
could make iron rise and swim upon the surface of the river
and that he could perform other similar remarkable feats,
and that even the touch of his bones after his death was sufficient
to reanimate the bodies of men who had long been dead and in
their graves! Will they never doubt these tales? And if they can
up this race for hours, exerting every muscle of human flesh,
home flesh, and dog flesh, to be “in at the death” of one poor,
exhausted fox, can realize how far the mighty Samson tran-
senced all this kind of business. He found no trouble in catch-
ing three hundred of these shy, cunning, swift-footed animals,
and tying their tails together in pairs with a firebrand attached
to each pair. He then let them go through the Philistines’ fields
of standing corn, setting it all on fire, of course, whether green
or dry. What a chase poor Samson must have had in running
down and catching those three hundred foxes! And a little cu-
sciousness as he disposed of the first two hundred and fifty
foxes while he was running down the last fifty.

Perhaps they were very accommodating foxes, that stood
still while being caught, and were willing to stand still after
they were caught. It might occur to the young minds that the
foxes in that Philistine country must have been very different
from the foxes that have existed in Europe and America. It
might strike them that the land of the Philistines was a pret-
ty good place in which to engage in the fox culture, and in
fox hunting, and that Samson was as fleet as he was strong, to
be able to catch such numbers in so short a time. Perhaps it
was his long hair that carried him triumphantly through the
fox chase, as it did on another occasion in slaying one thou-
sand men with the jawbone of an ass; in breaking the strongest
ropes and the hardest hard stones, and finally in pulling down
that cast temple upon his own head and the heads of thousands of the poor Philistines. There was a power
in that Samsonian hair that was never possessed by hair before
nor since. And how curious, too, that strength superior to any
muskul strength that was ever heard of elsewhere should be
produced by the hair of the head? How unlike the experience
of all other human beings? But the gay Delilah was too much
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always continue to believe them, can they not easily believe the tales of Baron Munchausen and of the Arabian Nights? Will the children readily believe the fish story connected with the purpose, might not the question arise in their minds whether the children of those who do not believe in the divinity of the American people, unbelievers as well as believers. Much stress is aimed to be laid upon the Bible on the ground of its superior morality, but like its divinity, its morality will hardly bear the test of close scrutiny. It is held up as the source of virtue, civilization, liberty, and intelligence. It is pointed out to us as the grand palladium of all that we hold near and dear, but this claim, like the others that are made in its favor, does not possess truth. If the countries where the Bible circulates freely enjoy a higher degree of civilization than is found in other lands, the Bible is by no means the cause of such superiority. There are other causes to be considered aside from the prevalence of the custom of reading the Jewish scriptures. The Abysinians are a Christian nation, and they have had the Jewish Bible in their possession twice as long as have England and America, and yet they remain in barbarism. How much did the Jewish scripture contribute to their elevation? It was easily superseded by the Koran. Mohammedianism has proved itself more potent in subduing the savages of Africa and Asia to comparative civilization than Christianity has ever been, though it repeatedly made the trial. The Greeks and Romans were as far in advance of some of the pagan tribes as we are today, or, as we claim to be. Was it the Jewish Bible that elevated them and inspired them with the talent that made their poets, painters, sculptors, and orators, many of whom the world has never since equaled? The Chinese and Hindus have for thousands of years been far advanced in some phases of civilization, and they certainly did not owe it to the influence of the Bible. They were farther in advance of some of the pagan tribes than we are in advance of the Turks today.

This accomplishment of the Hindoos and Persians, though it may have been only as the means of our advancement in civilization, we should doubtless have the fairness to accord it all due credit, but there have been numerous instrumentalities that have contributed their share to place us where we are. The civilized world owes far less to the influence of the Bible than it does to the influence of the Koran. From India, from Egypt, from ancient Greece and Rome, has the civilized world obtained much of its literature, its philosophy, its laws, and its glory.

When the literature and religion of Greece and Rome were superseded by the Bible and its religion, there certainly was made no advance in culture and civilization. Under Bible and Christian rule a night of mental darkness spread over those countries, and from them extended over a large part of the world, and it required many centuries of skepticism for them to emerge from the long, dark night of gloom thus engendered.

The art of printing had the first step of light across this vast pall of darkness and night, and much has it done to usher in the bright, cheerful day of intelligence and learning. The growth of science has been largely due to the art of printing, coupled with the lessening of the influence of superstition. It is to science we are to look for further advances in the direction to which the world has been tending. From this we have much to expect, but we cannot expect much aid from the Bible. Truthfully, as Professor Denton said, "When a people are much lower than the Bible place, it may tend to elevate them but when they are above it, its influence is degrading."

Our common school system is the foundation of our literature, our mental culture, and our civilization. We should give it all the aid possible in the facilities that promote mental liberty and general intelligence. Every science and every department of study to elevate the mind should be placed within it. But mythology, theology, sectarianism, mysticism, and superstition should ever be guarded against and firmly repelled. The Bible is largely made up of these qualities, and I again repeat. It should not have a place in the schools of the American people. 

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I will not detain you by further allusions to other vulgarities and indecencies of the Bible, for it is not necessary. Allusions to other vulgarities and indecencies of the Bible is perpetuated by their enjoining upon them the necessity of the Jewish Bible is unfit to have a place in our common schools as a text-book or as a reading-book. The priesthood may find it to their interest to continue to hold up the volume before the eyes of the people and declare it to be the inspired word of God, and they may see that its influence over the masses is perpetuated by their enjoining upon them the necessity of its superior morality, and that not a thread of their garments was scorched, and that they had not even "the smell of fire upon them!" If they can easily believe stories of this character, need their credulity be balked at anything? It is probably unnecessary to allude to the hundreds of other improbable and impossible stories and statements which the Bible gives upon various subjects. They are scattered all through the book. They require a great amount of credulity to accept them with a question. These statements have long been accepted with hardly a doubt, but in this day of skepticism, and with the reason requiring to be convinced, and miracles and impossibilities are not passing as current as in the time times gone by. People are becoming less confiding and gullible, and children are partaking of the same feeling, and books which contain such big stories and such marvelous incidents have ceased to be fit for the purposes of educational culture.

The vulgarity and obscenity of the Bible has been mentioned, and all who are familiar with its contents cannot enter on a vessel at Joppa, and from fatigue or long watching went to a state of intoxication, with his two daugh-

The Levite and his concubine, of Ruth and Boaz, and David and Bathsheba, of Amnon and Tamar, of Absalom and his father's con-

Jonah would not also need to be "prepared" to be able to with-

indecencies of the Bible, for it is

allusions to other vulgarities and

infallible voice from heaven.

the children of Solomon the wise man and his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines—Solomon, to whom authorship is attributed a very amorous com-

position called the Song of Solo-

mon, which for broad, indecile allusions has been surpised by very few compositions that have ever been written. I will not detain you by further allusions to other vulgarities and indecencies of the Bible, for it is not necessary. Allusions to other vulgarities and indecencies of the Bible is perpetuated by their enjoining upon them the necessity of

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FILM OF THE LIVE PERFORMANCE
Saturday, October 8th, 7pm
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Free to the Public
http://www.thelifethomaspaine.org
The Satanic Temple has announced plans to launch “After School Satan” clubs at a number of elementary schools across the country. According to a Satanic Temple letter to school districts, the clubs will “enrich the lives of children” by teaching “secular moral values, critical thinking, and self-determination.” Club activities will “include a healthy snack, literature lesson, creative learning activities, science lesson, puzzle solving, and art projects.” Students of all religious faiths are welcome to attend club meetings, as are their parents.

The founding of the After School Satan clubs represents an admitted attempt by the Satanic Temple to counter the influence of Good News Clubs, an arm of the Child Evangelism Fellowship that operates in thousands of public schools across the country. The Satanic Temple believes that Good News Clubs represent a religious invasion of public schools and harm students through their “focus on indoctrination, instilling them with a fear of Hell and God’s wrath.” It further argues that After School Satan Clubs’ “presence in schools that are burdened with the loathsome stink of the Good News Clubs serves an anti-indoctrination function, illustrating to children that opposing religious perspectives can be held by moral and reasonable people.” The Satanic Temple ultimately plans to found After School Satan clubs in every school that hosts a Good News Club.

The Good News Clubs’ presence in public schools has long been controversial. In the 2001 case, Good News Club v. Milford Central School, a six-justice majority of the Supreme Court ruled that public schools that invite outside groups to sponsor extracurricular clubs cannot discriminate against religiously oriented clubs. The First Amendment requires schools that permit secular clubs to teach children about character development and thus it provides religious clubs the same opportunity.

The law unequivocally recognizes the right of the Satanic Temple to operate After School Satan clubs. If school districts that permit religious organizations to operate extracurricular activities attempt to forbid the establishment of After School Satan Clubs, they will be engaging in unconstitutional censorship of disfavored viewpoints. The Satanic Temple has offered to establish clubs in school districts in Georgia, California, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Missouri, Arizona, and the District of Columbia. Stay tuned for updates.

**Josh Zuckerman** is the Youth Free Expression Program Associate at NCAC. This article originally appeared on the National Coalition Against Censorship blog (ncac.org/blog) and is reprinted here with permission.
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Bonnie Lange
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1937–1964

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