

First Thoughts



In last month's issue, the "In the News" section contained an article about a billboard that had been placed in Alabama proclaiming, "Imagine There's No Religion". Being in the Bible belt, it has naturally generated much controversy. One aspect of the story that didn't receive much coverage (at least not in a positive light) was the stand taken by an advertising company that refused to place the sign. Crosswinds' Board Member Tommy DeRamus, who works in the advertising industry, sat down with Tom Traylor—the General Manager who made the call not to place the sign—and reports on his findings in this month's feature article.

When he refused to take the advertising, the atheists threatened litigation and claimed their rights were violated. We asked Eric Johnston of the Southeast Law Institute his opinion on this and his reply can be found in his article in this issue, *Morality in Advertising*.

MORE BILLBOARDS FOR ATHEISM

"In the News" contains a couple of related stories including an excellent reply to the "no religion" sign by retired pastor, Roger Lovette, that appeared in the *Birmingham News*. Another news story I encourage you to read appeared in the *LA Times*, "Must Science Declare a Holy War on Religion". You can read a portion of it "In The News" with a link to the full article.

These articles confirm that atheists have an organized agenda to promote their beliefs; certainly, they have the right to do so. As such, Christians need to be aware this conversation is taking place and become educated on how to take part in the discussion.

AMERICA: POST CHRISTIAN?

Clearly, our religious landscape is shifting, as is evidenced in a recent *Newsweek* Poll that asks if we are now a post-Christian nation. Some of the findings are in this month's *Culture Tracks*, with a link to the full report.

With trends such as those that appeared in this poll, is it any surprise that we find people who attend Christian Churches trying to incorporate other religions into their "Christian" beliefs? Be sure and read "Buddhism Strengthens Ties to the Church" in the "News" section.

REPORT FROM ROMANIA

A couple of men who are certainly engaging their culture are our team in Romania. Along with our regular features, this issue also contains an update from them. They are doing a great work and are an important part of our team. Be sure and read their report and consider helping them in their efforts there.

Last month I shared that we would be putting video segments on our website that will accompany our feature articles. The first video is now online and features the author of last month's article, Alonza Jones and professional counselor, Dr. Howard Eyrich addressing the subject of the modern state of marriage.

Many of our readers have become financial supporters of our efforts and for that we are deeply grateful. You are the ones who enable us to accomplish much through the information and training we offer that we might become those who influence cultural trends, rather than simply reacting to them.

Please let me know if we can be of help to you with any questions or information needs.

Blessings,

YOUR DONATIONS HELP

To make a financial investment in our ministry make your check payable to: Crosswinds Foundation and mail to: P.O. Box 12143
Birmingham, AL 35202

For information on giving by credit card (Visa, MC, Discover, AMEX) contact us at 205-327-8317; or info@crosswindsfoundation.org

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Missing Articles From Past Issues

Just let us know and we will be glad to send copies of those you would like to have. Some of the topics we have covered:

- *Becoming a Post-Racial America (2 Parts)*
- *Oprah and Spirituality*
- *President Bush, Faith, and Culture*
- *Atheists and Christmas*
- *Coming Soon to a Bus Near You*



No Internet access? Contact us and we will mail copies of research reports we offer.



Imagine No Religion? Lamar Says, "Imagine No Avails" by Tommy DeRamus

Earlier this year, our feature article was about atheist groups using mass transit systems to advertise their belief that there is no God. The focus was on a group in England that had placed signage on London buses proclaiming, "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy life".

In subsequent articles and news items we expressed how this was a growing movement. Now it has made it to the middle of the Bible-belt, central Alabama. A national atheist group, the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) and its Alabama affiliate, the Alabama Freethought Association recently purchased advertising space on a billboard, prominently located on well-traveled Interstate 20, which connects Birmingham and Atlanta with many other large southern cities.



The highly visible billboard, located about thirty miles from Birmingham, near Pell City, proclaims in large bold letters, "Imagine there's no religion". The advertisement is an obvious play on, former Beatle, John Lennon's "Imagine" with the lyrics:

Imagine there's no Heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky...
Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

Of course the implication here is that religion leads to wars and strife and without it there would be peace. This is an idea conveyed by FFRF local chapter president, Pat Cleveland, in interviews with local media. In fact, in an interview with the Birmingham News, Cleveland clearly inferred Christians are hostile and atheists peaceful stating, "There's no hostile intention [in placing the sign]". She then describes those responding to it as irate, claiming, "They're ugly, just hateful".

So, how peaceful is the FFRF toward those who disagree with their position? Consider their actions toward Lamar Ad-

vertising. The Freedom from Religion Foundation and the Alabama Freethought Association, originally sought to have their advertisement placed on a billboard with extremely high visibility in downtown Birmingham; however, they were rebuffed in their effort thanks to a courageous stand by Tom Traylor, General Manager of Lamar Outdoor Advertising's Birmingham office.

The (FFRF) sent Lamar a check along with an order and the vinyl for one of Lamar's bulletins near the Birmingham-Jefferson Civic Center complex along Interstate 20/59 in downtown Birmingham. In the advertising business, this is the easiest money to make - the display is already produced by the client (no production work to do) and the payment is already in the house (no billing or collection efforts to make). Just post the vinyl and deposit the check.

In today's economy, many advertising companies are offering discounts and deals not seen for 25 years or more, if ever. As many retail businesses struggle, their ad budgets have been slashed and companies like Lamar are feeling the pinch as well. But when Tom Traylor saw the message on the FFRF vinyl he was faced with a decision - take the money or take a stand. Tom chose the latter, and we can all be thankful for what he did.

Tom said "it was offensive to me," and he added "I don't think it was the kind of message we wanted to stand behind." He returned the check and the vinyl to the FFRF, and when they were informed that Lamar had rejected their order they threatened to sue.

Eric Johnston of the Southeast Law Institute, says the law is with Lamar on this issue. (See accompanying article, Morality in Advertising) According to Johnston, advertisers have the legal right to accept or refuse clients, or copy sent to them, based upon their own corporate criteria, which typically includes consideration of community standards.

Traylor says Lamar offices and their management have the responsibility to decide what is in the best interests of their company, and his personal Christian faith guided his decision in this case. Lamar's contracts give the company the right to reject any client's displays for any reason,

so he doubts any efforts to sue the company will be successful.

Ultimately another local company took the FFRF's business, resulting in the display posted along Interstate 20 in the Pell City area. Regarding their not getting to place it at their first choice, the FFRF Alabama affiliate office says they were "censored" by Lamar. (Ibid, Birmingham News)

It is interesting the FFRF representative would describe those who oppose their sign as "irate" and "hateful" and at the same time express their own opposition to Lamar's right of refusal with threats of litigation and decrying it as "censorship". In the greater Birmingham area, we can be thankful that one man's "spiritual education" and concern for community standards gave him the courage and wisdom to make a decision and stand behind it.

Editor's note: A similar campaign has also been initiated in Fort Lauderdale, FL where a billboard has been placed proclaiming: "Being a good person doesn't require God. Don't believe in God? You're not alone." As in Alabama, it has created much controversy. See the "In the News" section for articles.

Tommy Deramus is employed by Means Advertising and serves on the Crosswinds Foundation Board. Email Tommy at: tommy@crosswindsfoundation.org



"Morality in Advertising"

by Eric Johnston

Advertising is a way of life for all of us. It is how we find or identify something in which we have an interest. It is how merchants hawk their wares and how we let others know what we are thinking. It is knowledge in the information highway. It is speech.

The internet has revolutionized advertising. Even so, newspapers, magazines and billboards are advertising sites. Advertising on the internet is different from traditional methods. Likely as not, the advertiser will create his own website, and may join with search engines or other services, to draw your attention to it. Like traditional providers, internet advertising services are usually provided by private companies. What happens when we want to advertise but our request is rejected? Or, what happens when we object to disagreeable ads?

Continued on page 3



Morality in Advertising, continued

First, it depends on whether the provider is public or nonpublic. Take city buses as an example. These are owned and operated by governmental entities, usually cities. They are prohibited from free speech discrimination. When the American Humanist Association placed ads on the Washington, D.C. Metro buses in September 2008 saying "Why believe in God? Just be good for goodness sake," hundreds of complaints were filed. D.C. Metro had no choice but to accept the advertising. The response was a later bus ad by the Center for Family Development which said "Why believe? Because I created you and I love you, for goodness sake – GOD." This is free speech in action.

But, what about a privately owned newspaper who rejects an ad? The one that comes to mind proposed to show graphic pictures of aborted children. It was shocking, but it would have gotten the message across. The newspaper had the right to reject the ad.

Similarly, when atheist groups The Freedom from Religion Foundation and the Alabama Freethought Association wanted to run an ad, like on the D.C. Metro buses, but on a billboard in Birmingham, Alabama, a private company, Lamar Advertising, rejected the ad. However, another private company later put the ad on its billboard.

The principle is that a private provider can accept or reject ads based on its own personal judgment or values. This is not censorship. On the other hand, a government provider cannot reject ads, unless the content is unlawful. Speaking of the latter, a small Alabama town objected to billboards by a private company advertising sex toys. Because the ads are not unlawful, the city could do nothing. While billboards can be regulated for safety reasons, *i.e.*, proximity to highways, sight distances, *etcetera*, it cannot discriminate on the basis of content.

On the bright side, Christian businesses cannot be required to advertise pornography, atheism, homosexual matters or other objectionable things. But, as with so many things in the public square, community values will ultimately dictate the content of advertising, public or private. No one stays where they are not wanted, it is not fun or profitable. What are the values in your community?

If you are like those who opposed the atheist ads on D.C. Metro buses, be vigilant for such ads. Join with others to purchase ads expressing your values. You may want to do this, whether you have seen an objectionable ad. We do not need to always be on the defensive.

Support values organizations with whom you identify. Encourage them to speak out publicly in the advertising media. Remember, advertising is putting knowledge on the information highway. By doing so, you inform your community of its values. Be a leader for, as well as, a defender of our traditional moral and religious values.



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Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans.



"Cultural Trends Related to Religion in America"

The following is from an April 2009 Newsweek Poll: A Post-Christian Nation?

Concerning how they would classify their religious affiliation:

- 81% of Americans identify themselves as Christians.
- 6% identify as part of another religion
- 11% identify themselves as Agnostics, or atheists

When asked, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?

- 19% responded increasing (Just four years ago, 57% responded, "increasing". Interestingly, 1968 was identical to today at 19% down from 69% in 1957 which indicates how long it takes to again be viewed as having an influence.)

When asked, do you believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, or that religion is largely old-fashioned and out of date?

- 48% responded can (87% in 1957)
- 25 % responded old-fashioned (7% in 1957)

When asked, do you consider the United States a Christian nation, or not?

- 62% responded, yes
- 32% responded, no

Full report at: <http://www.newsweek.com/id/192311>

Crosswinds in the World Report

ROMANIA: Our men serving in Romania are having an impact, not only in their own country but other parts of Europe, as well. The following is just a brief listing of the activities of the Crosswinds Foundation in Romania.



Between June 26-30, Nelu taught and preached in Spain among Romanians who have established Churches in the Barcelona area. During July, he also had the opportunity to preach in Vienna, Austria.

In addition to these preaching opportunities, during July, Nelu also spoke at a conference in Pancota on the topic "Christian Integrity, Morality and Spirituality into Contemporary Culture.

Ieremia has also been busy this summer preaching every Sunday of June and July at Churches in Ploiesti and the surrounding localities, such as, Brazi and Ploiestiori. In addition to this, Ieremia has taught two summer classes at Timotheus Bible Institute in Bucharest on the subjects of Christian Apologetics and History and Philosophy of the World Religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism.



Nelu and Ieremia have quickly become an important part of the Crosswinds team. If you would like to help with their financial report just indicate "Romania" on your gift.

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In the News

Excerpts from articles reflecting trends in American spirituality (LINKS PROVIDE FULL TEXT)



RELIGION MAKES WORLD RICHER

Birmingham News, 07-19-09 by Roger Lovette

Driving down the highway the other day, I saw this huge billboard smack dab in the middle of the Alabama Bible Belt: "Imagine No Religion." Hmm. "No religion?" I thought as I drove. Without religion, I don't know if I would have made it.

Growing up in a family with a lot of conflict barely underneath the surface, I found solace in a little mill church up the street. Church members befriended me and loved me. Later, they would take up nickels, dimes and dollars and send me off to church camps and, much later, to a Baptist college in Birmingham. There, I found myself stretched in ways that still boggle my mind. Doors and windows that I did not even know existed opened little by little to a larger world. No wonder I found myself as a minister years later.

...The good side of church and religion can be seen in almost every good cause that we have. Without healthy religion, there would be no hospitals, no orphans' homes and no charity work that spans the globe. There would be no Salvation Army or Red Cross. Many of our major universities began as religious institutions. And every year, believers, flawed and human, board planes and travel to faraway places to help hurting people.

We cannot ignore the dark side of religion. Sunday worship still might be the most segregated hour of the week—not only for blacks but for gays and immigrants and those who don't have the right kind of clothes. And yet, this same church has a wondrous side. From our earthly ranks have come Martin Luther King Jr. and Dorothy Day and Mother Theresa and a multitude of others. All these have helped change the world.

As I drove along, I tried to imagine a country without religion. How poverty-stricken we would be without the great music and art and breathtaking architecture that have come from this all-too-human institution...No, I cannot imagine a world without the contribution that faith has made in my own life. One of the Latin roots for the word "religion" means to bind. That binding does not mean to tie down or to restrict... This binding, I think, is something like a rope—a strong cable has tied me to other people and a wide and wonderful world of hope and possibility. Without that kind of religion, the world would be poorer indeed. http://blog.a1.com/birmingham-news-commentary/2009/07/imagine_no_religion_billboard.html

ATHEISTS PUSH FOR GREATER VISIBILITY

08-01-09, Miami Herald

There's nothing unusual about churches advertising Sunday services, but South Florida atheists are turning that idea on its head: Why not promote the belief that there is no God?

"Most people are under the impression that atheists lack morals and ethics. We are trying to dispel that myth," said Ken Loukinen, founder of the 400-member Florida Atheists and Secular Humanists, which is sponsoring a controversial billboard in Broward County. "Being a good person doesn't require God," the sign declares. "Don't

believe in God? You're not alone!"

The first of its kind in the state, the sign directs passersby to www.freethoughtflorida.com, where they can donate toward putting up similar signs throughout Florida. Over the past six months, atheists in a dozen other states also have launched advertising campaigns. In a bid for greater acceptance and visibility, atheists are also undertaking community service projects, organizing children's camps and engaging in other activities often associated with religious groups. <http://www.miamiherald.com/living/top-stories/v-fullstory/story/1165325.html>

BUDDHISM AND THE CHURCH

08-09-09, The Denver Post

What in the recent past seemed exotic and foreign is now almost routinely folded into "the fold." Buddhism is not only accepted as a mainstream American religion, it is a path increasingly trod by faithful Christians and Jews who infuse Eastern spiritual insights and practices such as meditation into their own religions...And they are contemplating contemplation itself.

There are Jubus - Jews who bring Buddhism into their practice of Judaism - and Bujus, who are Buddhists with Jewish parents. Then there are UUbuses, or Unitarian Universalist Buddhists, and Ebus, or Episcopalians Buddhists. There are Zen Catholics.

"There is a definite trend and movement that will not be reversed," said Ruben Habito, a laicized Jesuit priest, Zen master and professor of world religions at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. "We are in a new spiritual age, an inter-religious age." People are hungry for a deeper spiritual experience - meditation, mindfulness, personal transformation, deep insight, union with God or the universe...For many Christians cut off from the past, or alienated from the faith of their upbringing, Buddhism has served as the bridge to ancient wisdom. "The problem is the contemplative tradition in the Christian Church has had its ups and downs over the centuries," said Father Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk and leader in the Centering Prayer movement, a modern revival of Christian contemplative practice.

"There is growing permission to turn back to some of the early church practices and pieces that helped us to be whole," said the Rev. Stuart Lord, an ordained Baptist minister and new president of Naropa University, a Buddhist-founded institution. "I've been studying Buddhism and meditation for about seven years. I look at it as helping a person lead a fuller Christian life." http://www.denverpost.com/ci_13023827

MUST SCIENCE DECLARE A HOLY WAR?

By Chris Mooney & Sheril Kirshenbaum, 08-11-09, LA Times

...evolutionary biologist and bestselling author Richard Dawkins—recently famous for his exhortation to atheism, "The God Delusion"—returns to writing about science. Dawkins' new book, "The Greatest Show on Earth," will [offer] the stunning "evidence for evolution," as the subtitle says...it's also fair to ask: Who in the United States will read Dawkins' new book (or ones like it) and have any sort of epiphany, or change his or her mind?

Surely not...America's anti-evolutionists. These religious adherents often view science itself as an assault on their faith and doggedly refuse to accept evolution [from] fear it so utterly denies God that it will lead them, and their children, straight into a

world of moral depravity and meaninglessness.

...Dawkins will, however, be championed by many scientists...galvanized by "The God Delusion" and inspired by it to take a newly confrontational approach toward America's religious majority...but what this unending polarization around evolution and religion does for the standing of science in the U.S. is a very different matter.

It often appears as though Dawkins and his followers—often dubbed the New Atheists—want to change the country's science community... They'd have scientists and defenders of reason be far more confrontational and blunt: No coddling the faithful, no tolerating nonscientific beliefs.

Scientific institutions, in their view, ought to stop putting out politic PR about science and religion being compatible...[The] highly regarded nonprofit organization...the National Center for Science Education has drawn at least as much of the New Atheists' ire...[It] is the leading organization that promotes and defends the teaching of evolution in school districts across the country [making] frequent alliances with religious believers who also support the teaching of evolution, seeking to forge a broad coalition capable of beating back the advances of fundamentalists who want to weaken textbooks or science standards.

...the New Atheists have chosen their course: confrontation. And groups like the NCSE have chosen the opposite route: Work with all who support the teaching of evolution regardless of their beliefs...Despite the resultant bitterness, however, there is at least one figure both sides respect—the man who started it all: Charles Darwin. What would he have done in this situation?

It turns out that late in life, when an atheist author asked permission to dedicate a book to Darwin, [he] wrote back his apologies and declined. [Stating] "Though I am a strong advocate for free thought on all subjects, yet it appears to me (whether rightly or wrongly) that direct arguments against Christianity & theism produce hardly any effect on the public; & freedom of thought is best promoted by the gradual illumination of men's minds, which follows from the advance of science."

Chris Mooney and Sheril Kirshenbaum are coauthors of the new book, "Unscientific America: How Scientific Illiteracy Threatens Our Future." <http://www.latimes.com/>



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