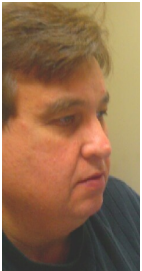




## First Thoughts



Welcome to the first edition of the print version of our newsletter, *CrossingCurrents*. If you subscribe to our E-Letter, you may have already read some of the information presented here. However, we realize that not everyone has email, nor does everyone who gets the email version, actually read it, as they prefer their news in a print format that they can hold and pass along, or copy for others. Whichever your preference, you'll now have options on how you read our newsletter.

If we are going to be effective in engaging those in today's society, we need to understand there is a clash of cultures occurring all around us. Many are centered on issues of "spirituality". Indicative of this are the "Bus Wars" heating up between Christians and atheists.

Though it didn't get much attention, this actually began in 2008 with a gospel ad placed on buses in London. It went largely unnoticed, as the media didn't make an issue of it, until an atheist comedy writer got offended—then it became news of worldwide scope. Why?

We'll give you the details in this issue of *CrossingCurrents*, along with some noteworthy

news items on alternative medicine and what one study has to say about the impact of spirituality on kids.

A recent Barna Poll seems to confirm that Americans are continuing to move to a cafeteria approach to religion, wanting to pick and choose what they put on their "spiritual" plate. You can see some of Barna's findings in the "Culture Tracks" section of this letter.

A final note, our staff member, Don Malin is on the ground in Afghanistan where he will serve as Chaplain with the 168th Engineers. Here is a brief note Don sent our supporters:

"Here is my official address for anyone wanting to send letters or stuff for ministry and troops: Task Force Storm

HHC 168th EN BDE  
FOB Sharana  
APO AE 09311

Thanks for everyone supporting this ministry to the troops in Afghanistan."

We hope you enjoy this issue and find *Crosswinds* to be of help to you in your own education and ministry experience. Please let us know if you have any questions, or would like for us to address a particular topic or subject.



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Photo of Don (right) with Chaplain Carlson, the Chaplain he is replacing

## "Bus Wars"! Atheists and Christians Jump On The Bus

by Bob Waldrep

Amazing as it may sound, during a time of such economic difficulty as we are currently experiencing, atheists and Christian groups are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to advertise on buses, in what can only be called - the "Bus Wars". As we reported last November, it began when an atheist group in England raised funds to purchase advertising on London buses that proclaimed: "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying

and enjoy your life."

Obviously, atheist groups around the world found this to be a brilliant strategy as several of them adopted the campaign in their own cities. In the November issue of *Crossing Currents* we reported an atheist group was also introducing an advertising campaign on metro-buses in Washington DC. They are now joined by groups in Canada, Brazil, Australia, Germany, and Italy.

Do not be misled into believing that their message is limited to the posters placed on the sides of buses; it has a much broader scope. As the media picked up the story the message also found its way into local and national periodicals and has been widely reported on Internet sites.

For example, Time Magazine reported the slogan to be placed on Italian buses will read: "The bad news is that





God does not exist. The good news is that we do not need him."

Therefore, it is not only the people of Genoa, Italy who are exposed to this campaign but the readers of Time and other media outlets who run the story, without a Christian response. And, by Christian response, we do not mean on the side of a bus.

Unfortunately, it appears there will be no shortage of such reactive responses made by Christians. For, it is not only the atheists who are investing their donations in bus advertising. Christian groups are also jumping on the band-wagon, or should we say, the band-bus.

For example, to counter the atheist campaign in London, a Christian group, the Trinitarian Bible Society, has spent \$50,000 to place Psalm 53:1, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God", on the side of 125 London buses. Apparently, this let's those atheists know where they stand.

A conservative political group, the Christian Party, is also placing a message on London buses: "There definitely is a God, so join the Christian Party and enjoy your life." I guess in this case, God wants you to enjoy life by joining a political party.

Even the Russian Orthodox Church has joined the fray, partnering with a Russian satellite-TV channel. Their "bus message": "There is God. Don't worry. Enjoy your life!"

Thus far, the "Christian" response, as reported by the media, has been to call the atheist a fool (of course using Scripture), to point out life really begins when you join a political party, and to boil it down to just enjoying life. Nowhere in these responses is there any hint of the gospel.

One would think if we were going to expend the funds and efforts to counter a message that says there is no God, it would be to point to the only one who can connect us to God, Jesus.

This is not to say the Christian response has not gone unnoticed by the atheists. It hasn't. In fact, Hanne Stinson, CEO of the British Humanist Association, said, "[The Christian response] just proves that we've had an impact."

If, by impact, Ms. Stinson means it has

raised the ire of some Christians, I would agree. However, if "impact" means winning people over to their way of thinking, I believe an ad proclaiming, "God probably doesn't exist" - probably - isn't going to convince someone He doesn't.

On the other hand, neither is advertising that the atheist is a "fool" probably going to win anyone over to the belief that God is real. As the *Time* article noted, in quoting renowned author and atheist Richard Dawkins, "That's a particularly obnoxious quote from one of the Psalms...[the humanist's] was extremely gentle and respectful by comparison."

I would agree with Dawkins assessment that, the humanists probably come off looking better than the Christians, in this case, at least, to the general public. Now, don't get me wrong, this is not to say, that when confronted by a campaign like that of the humanist groups, our primary goal should be to try and appear to be the least offensive. However, that does not mean we should dismiss all charity and wisdom from our sharing. After all, the gospel is offensive enough on its own to those who reject it.

## A conservative political group, the Christian Party, is also placing a message on London buses: "There definitely is a God, so join the Christian Party and enjoy your life."

In fact, the origin of the current campaign by atheists is evidence of this. It was initiated by comedy writer, Ariane Sherine, who was reacting to a Christian ad campaign she found offensive. Here is how she describes it "...the campaign was originally started as a positive counter-response to the Jesus Said ads running on London buses in June 2008. These ads displayed the URL of a website which stated that non-Christians 'will be condemned to everlasting separation from God and then you spend all eternity in torment in hell...Our rational slogan will hopefully reassure anyone who has been scared by this kind of evangelism."

Note the Christian ad is depicted as condemning and scary. The atheist response, however, is depicted as positive, "rational" and will "reassure".

Had she seen a poster on the bus that said, "You are condemned and going to hell" I could understand why she might be upset and describe it as she did. However, here are the words that were on the ad she saw: ""When the son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8)."

In fairness, she did say the message that so offended her was on the website the ad promoted. She is correct in that the website does contain language such as she describes. However, context is very important. (Read the context for yourself at [www.jesussaid.org](http://www.jesussaid.org).)

Interestingly, when one goes to this website the first message proclaimed is not of condemnation, but hope. Here is what is boldly proclaimed across the top of the web page, "JESUS said: I AM the resurrection, and the life, whoever believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die."

To find the message that so enraged Ms. Sherine, you have to read eleven pages into the twelve page website. The rest of the pages are a clear presentation of the gospel describing how to avoid that which so upset Ms. Sherine. Quite the contrary from being condemning, these pages contain such headings as: "who is Jesus", "who are we", "what is religion", "if you believe you become a brand new person", and "good news".

What observations can we make about the culture from this?

First, it is noteworthy that, in 2008 London buses were advertising a message asking "if Jesus would find faith upon his return" and did not get media attention, which would have promoted the message of the Christian website sponsoring the campaign. However, when an atheist group placed ads on buses they were found to be newsworthy with the media circulating their message as part of the story. (It is interesting that when the "Jesus Said" campaign is mentioned as part of this story it is in a negative light.)

Next, atheists are becoming increasing-



ly vocal in defending and promoting their own views. And, despite their protestations to the contrary, are attempting to recruit others to their beliefs about god and religion. The bus advertising campaign is but one example of this. It is also being done through books written by such best-selling authors and atheists, as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens; as well as through lectures and public debates with Christian leaders.

Finally, Christians need to be prepared to present a reasoned response - not simply resorting to name-calling, even if under the guise of quoting Scripture - that offers the real hope found only in Jesus Christ. We must realize the attention given to the atheists' ad campaigns has presented Christians with

a wonderful opportunity to talk about the gospel - the good news that not only does God exist but he cares for you.

We might do much better to not focus on the ads so much as on the opportunities they present. Rather than view the atheist bus ads as an attack on Christian beliefs, let us appreciate the fact that they have introduced an important question into the culture: "Is God real"?

Now, that is a great question and one that we should want to discuss. If we don't, then it seems the only ones who will actually benefit are the owners of the buses who probably hope the "Bus Wars" last for a long time.



### Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting some of the findings regarding the cultural footprints of Americans.



### Is Christianity America's Default Faith?

50% of adult no longer believe that Christianity is the faith Americans automatically accept as their own faith.

- The two largest segments of the population that believe the above are evangelical Christians 64% and Hispanics (60%)
- Despite the statistics, those in the South are less likely to agree Christianity is not the first choice of faith people consider.

71% of adults said they are more likely to develop their own set of religious beliefs than to accept a comprehensive set of beliefs taught by a particular church. The largest segment of the population to embrace developing one's own beliefs is 25 years old and under (82%)

The impact on Christians in the culture.

Of those who describe themselves as Christians:

- About 50% believe Satan doesn't exist.
- Some 33% contend Jesus sinned while on earth.
- 40% say they do not have a responsibility to share the Christian faith with others.
- 25% do not believe the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches.

From The Barna Group, January 2009 [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)

Want to get *CrossingCurrents* sooner?  
Visit our website and sign up for our E-Letter:  
[www.crosswindsfoundation.org](http://www.crosswindsfoundation.org)

## In the Mailbag What Our Readers Are Saying



As always an excellent newsletter! I really appreciate you exposing the Oprah distortions. As Christians, we must be ever vigilant to not allow secular, mainstream media to define our beliefs. It is our responsibility to yell "Foul!" Thanks for dropping the yellow flag on Oprah and her minions...Email, Birmingham

It is at least interesting to see people in the west playing the dangerous game of atheism. I was born and raised in a country where atheism was the main doctrine of the society and I could testify that when you take God out of the picture people become their own gods and they have no reason to restrain themselves. Atheism creates monsters and these monsters are jeopardising the human society. There is no good apart from God and nobody could know what good is if they do not measure their good to God's standards. Beware of atheism!!!...Email, Romania

(Editor's Note: Our Spiritual Buffet series, running in the Alabama Baptist, has been completed and the last few articles on the Family, Seventh Day Adventists, Unification Church, and Universalism will soon be published. After their publication all fifteen articles in the series will be published in booklet format. We will be letting our subscribers know how to order copies in the near future)

### Missing Articles From Past Issues of CrossingCurrents?

Just let us know and we will be glad to send copies of those you would like to have. Here are 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

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### In the News

Excerpts from articles reflecting trends in American spirituality

#### THE TOUCH THAT DOESN'T HEAL

Wall Street Journal December 26, 2008

A survey of 32,000 Americans by the National Center for Health Statistics, released earlier this month, suggests that 38% of adults use some form of "complementary and alternative medicine," or CAM...Among the most popular therapies are acupuncture, at \$50 to \$100 per session; reflexology, which involves massaging various parts of the hands and feet, starting at \$35 an hour; and aromatherapy, which relies on the supposed healing properties of about 40 "essential oils," with treatments at \$30 to \$90 an hour...one of the great ironies of modern health care is that many of the august medical centers that once went to great lengths to vilify nontraditional methods as quackery now have brought those regimens in-house.

"We're all channeling East Indian healers along with doing gall-bladder removal," says Arthur Caplan, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Bioethics ... "It's not as noble as, 'I want to be respectful to Chinese healing arts.' It's more, 'People are spending a fortune on this stuff!'"

Not by coincidence is CAM most avidly touted by a loose alliance of self-help gurus (Andrew Weil, Deepak Chopra, et al.) and veteran hucksters like erstwhile infomercial king Kevin Trudeau. Read article at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123024234651134037.html>

#### SPIRITUALITY, NOT RELIGION, MAKES KIDS HAPPY

US News January 9, 2009

The link between spirituality and happiness is pretty well-established for teens and adults...Now a study has reached into the younger set, finding the same link in "tweens" and in kids in middle childhood.

Specifically, the study shows that children who feel that their lives have meaning and value and who develop deep, quality relationships—both measures of spirituality, the researchers claim—are happier... However, religious practices were found to have little effect on children's happiness... Religion is just one institutionalized venue for the practice of or experience of spirituality, and some people say they are spiritual but are less enthusiastic about the concept of God. ...A child's temperament was also an important predictor of happiness. In particular, happier children were more sociable and less shy. The relationship between spirituality and happiness remained strong, even when the authors took temperament into account. However, counterintuitively, religious practices—including attending church, praying and meditating — had little effect on a child's happiness. Read article at: [www.usnews.com/articles/science/culture/2009/01/09/spirituality-not-religion-makes-kids-happy.html](http://www.usnews.com/articles/science/culture/2009/01/09/spirituality-not-religion-makes-kids-happy.html)

#### THE QUEST FOR A SPIRITUAL HOME

Newsweek January 26, 2009

A surprising number of Americans are switching from one religion to another. A 2007 survey done by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that 44 percent of Americans profess a different religious affiliation from the one they were raised in. Ex-

cluding shifts between Protestant denominations, the number—28 percent—is still remarkably high. Read article at: [www.newsweek.com/id/180039/output/print](http://www.newsweek.com/id/180039/output/print)

#### PROGRESSIVE FAITH GROUPS TRY TO SHIFT DEBATE

Washington Post January 31, 2009; A04

With a president they view as more sympathetic to their causes, progressive religious activists are pushing the new Obama administration for aggressive action on poverty, the environment and social justice issues— [marking] a significant shift in the faith agenda that dominated the Bush years...Many faith groups close to President George W. Bush focused on abortion, stem cell research and same-sex marriage. ...liberal and centrist evangelicals and other activists...are...trying to turn the debate.

"The last administration showed no interest in talking to a large chunk of the religious community," said Melissa Rogers, director of the Center for Religion and Public Affairs at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. "We're already seeing change . . . This administration, so far as I can see, is not making a similar mistake."

The change...also sets up potential conflicts for President Obama, who has reached out to religious activists across the spectrum. He runs the risk of alienating supporters and detractors alike as his administration attempts a dialogue on a host of issues and begins new policies, such as his decision this month to lift the ban on federal funding to international groups that provide abortions and abortion counseling. Read article at: [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/30/AR2009013003471\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/30/AR2009013003471_pf.html)



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