

"It is said that men may not be the dreams of the Gods, but rather that the Gods are the dreams of men."  
— Carl Sagan

# Critical Thinker

The Bimonthly Newsletter of United States Atheists | January / February 2004



Photos of folks enjoying good company at the festive USA Solstice Social and Auction, held December 20, 2003 at the Atheist Community Center in Portland, Oregon.

## Upcoming Events

### State of The USA

**Tuesday, Jan. 27, 7:30pm** USA President James Archer will give his "State of the USA" presentation during this week's meeting at the Atheist Community Center.

### Humanist Potluck & Movie

**Friday, Jan. 30, 6:00pm** Humanists invite USA members to a potluck and showing of "A Love Divided," a film about a small Irish town split into warring factions of Catholics & Protestants (film @ 7:30 with discussion lead by Prof. Mueller). At the home of Sandra Auld, 15041 SE Mt. Royale Ct., Portland.

### Pie Social

**Tuesday, Feb. 17, 7:30pm** We will have a Pie Social during this weekly meeting. Come and enjoy a piece of pie and coffee!

### Film: "A Love Divided"

**Tuesday, Feb. 24, 7:30pm** Bill Meulemans will show this film (see description above) during this weekly meeting.

## Weekly Meetings

**Every Tuesday, 7:30pm** Join us at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland. Guests and the public are always welcome to attend.

January 6, 13, 20, 27

February 3, 10, 17, 24

## "Bunk Busters"

"Bunk Busters" is the cable TV show produced by USA and co-hosted by Jerry Billings and Kendall Auel. It is cablecast through Portland Cable Access. For more information, contact Alfredo Torrejon at [bunkbusters@unitedstatesatheists.com](mailto:bunkbusters@unitedstatesatheists.com).

### Schedule (subject to change):

Tuesdays	7:30pm	Ch. 22
Saturdays	1:30pm	Ch. 23
Sundays	5:30pm	Ch. 11

### Note new time on Sundays!

For up-to-date schedule information, see: [www.pcatv.org/programming/tab.htm#m2681\\_](http://www.pcatv.org/programming/tab.htm#m2681_)

## Critical Thinker

For complete submission guidelines, go to [www.unitedstatesatheists.com/critical-thinker/](http://www.unitedstatesatheists.com/critical-thinker/). The deadline for next issue is February 15, 2004. Send to the editor at [criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com](mailto:criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com), or mail in care of the USA address. Contact the editor if you are interested in placing advertising in the newsletter.

# A Call for a Kinder, Gentler God(dess)

Book Review by **Alfredo E. Torrejon** Producer of "Bunk Busters," United States Atheists

**God.Com: A Deity for the New Millennium**

By John A. Henderson, M.D.  
From Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc.  
\$10, 92 pages  
www.johnhenderson-god.com

Despite its terseness, this new work from Dr. John Henderson presents the interesting results of juxtaposing religious belief systems with the logical thinking that one would expect of a medical professional. Henderson's religious background includes a Methodist upbringing in a small Midwestern town in the mid-1930s, years of practicing medicine in the Bible Belt, and his own study of religious history. Though Henderson does not profess a belief in a soul or in any deities, his philosophy is that people should be free to hold any belief system they desire, as long as those belief systems do not cause harm to the practitioners or to those who refuse to accept them. Out of this philosophy come Henderson's suggested guidelines for a modernized deity tailored to contemporary social needs. In keeping with Information Age chic, he calls this new deity God.Com.

The self-consciously terse style employed in this book is very reminiscent of James Hervey Johnson's *Superior Men*. Each chapter begins with a self-explanatory title, such as "Only Fantasy is Perfect" or "Order in the Universe," and then makes its point in six pages or less. For a reader who is beginning to question the nature of religious doctrines and has not yet given considerable thought to the issues presented in the book, Henderson's terse presentation could be seen as a great vehicle to provide food for thought. However, seasoned non-believers may be somewhat disappointed by the minimal amount of

supporting evidence that Henderson provides to make each of his points.

Most of the book is devoted to exposing problems with popular religions and then suggesting modifications to those belief systems to make them more socially benign. Henderson feels that the inherent cruelty in "Hellfire and damnation" doctrines does not bring out the best in people or society and effectively only lead to hatred and fanaticism. Although he notes that mainstream Christianity is gradually shifting its emphasis away from such an approach, he believes that a religion without any concept of Hell would be more beneficial to the individual and to society. He goes on further to suggest that in order to bring about the greatest societal good, the idea of strict paternal god should be replaced with a motherly goddess that would embody a more humanistic set of values.

Whether Henderson intends it or not, this message is guaranteed to ruffle a few feathers.

People who follow organized religion tend to draw a large part of their sense of identity from their religious affiliation. A call to such people from an outsider asking them to re-examine their doctrines might, at best, be seen as arrogant. Then there are hardbound atheists who might see Henderson's vision as being so "touchy-feely" as to insult the intellect. In reading through the book, I saw the former as a nagging, largely unresolved issue. Only one chapter, "What To Do About Religion," was devoted exclusively to

the discussion of how Henderson's vision might be accomplished. Here, Henderson's terse style was a very clear handicap, and at times I could not help but think that he was trying to dodge the issue of resistance from religionists to his proposed changes. The best suggestion that Henderson could supply was that religion should be "contained" by "keeping it out of the schools, out of politics, and as much as possible out of the media." Although I do not believe that any atheists would question the importance of church-state separation, the preceding statement seems to suggest that any discussion or even mention of

religion should be barred from the schools and the media. If this were indeed what Henderson meant to say, then he would be contradicting his idea that people should be free to believe as they wish, as long as nobody is harmed.

The greatest merit of this book is that because it is fairly light reading and because it

carries a low price it has the potential to present an intelligent critique of religious dogmas to many people who do not have the opportunity to engage in group discussions about religion or who don't know where to turn for this type of thought. However, Henderson's brief treatment of the issue of resistance from religionists to outside social pressures, like those that would undoubtedly be caused if Henderson's ideas were to be put into motion, make this appear to be somewhat of an unfinished work. ■



## What Would Jerry Do?

by **Jerry Billings** Treasurer & Co-host of "Bunk Busters," United States Atheists

Dear WWJD Person,  
You Atheists just will never understand that God gave every one of us Free Will to believe what we want to believe. You can decide to believe in God or you can decide to believe in nothing. Someday you will pay for your choice and the price will be high.

Washed in the  
Blood of the Lamb  
Portland, Oregon

Dear Washed,

We hear that old Free Will argument over and over. It is usually dismissed after a little thought since it is so obvious that one cannot change an opinion simply by an act of will. Just try it, decide to honestly believe that O. J. is really innocent, for example.

But as I read your letter, I had a new thought, a different approach to the Free Will argument. If your creator had the power to give Free Will to his human creation then it also had the option to not give it. Suppose that you simply did not have the option to sin or not sin, to worship your creator or not worship it. You would think that Earth was a paradise.

We are told that the creator wanted to share the heavenly rewards with only those humans that freely worshiped it and obeyed its commandments. The rest of us were to be consigned to eternal torment for holding a mistaken opinion.

A being with such incredible powers as to create the entire universe and

all life in it in six days but which also made humans so flawed that the greatest majority of them did not worship it or obey it is impossible to comprehend. The only other alternatives are two — 1) such a creator is entertained by the failure of its creation or 2) it simply does not exist.

The vision that you have of your god is so contradictory as to make it impossible that it could exist.

Jerry

Dear Jerry,

When I was born, I had a twin brother; call him "Adam." Two years ago, Adam was killed in a logging accident near Alsea in the Oregon Coast Range. Adam and I were very close and I knew everything that he was about to say before he uttered a word. Since Adam passed over, I talk to him nearly every day. I know that he is not dead as we know it but just on another plane of life in another dimension. I feel sorry for people like you who do not believe in psychic miracles.

Eve in Newport, OR

Dear Eve,

It must have been a great loss, to lose your twin brother so suddenly. I completely understand your desire to speak to him. Millions of people all over the world talk to their dead loved ones every day. That is not a miracle. What would be a miracle is if your brother talked back.

Jerry

## Letters

to the Editor of the Critical Thinker

Now why is it that when people talk about Jesus and all the holy places he's been and died on, no one mentions where he was entombed? I was having a conversation with a Christian the other night and the subject of religion came up and why I didn't believe in Jesus as god. Now I didn't want to have a long conversation with him, seeing as how we were in a bar trying to have a good time and I had just met him and his friend as they tried to pick up on my sister's friend. But I brought up the point that so many things in the Bible are holy, including the cross, and yet no one seems concerned about the final resting place of Jesus. Now I wondered, that with all we know about his journies, how was it that his cave never became a hallowed place to visit and be healed, like all the other places that miracles have happened.

For some reason, after I asked him that, he didn't have any response except to suggest that I might have more fun dancing instead of talking to him.

First time reader  
Ryan Tankersley

Ryan,

You bring up an excellent question. We've all heard about searches for Noah's Ark and other biblical myths, but no mention of any searches for the tomb of Jesus. It does seem like this would be an important place for Christians to find, since their entire religion is based upon the supposed resurrection of Christ. Then again, if about a billion people believe the story without any evidence, why should they bother looking?

The Editor

Join us for lively discussions and good times at our weekly meetings. We meet every Tuesday night, 7:30pm at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland. Bring a friend!

# The Financial Trust Group, LLC

## Experts In Mortgage Solutions

Residential Purchases and Refinances, Home Equity Loans  
Commercial Property Loans; Apartments and Mixed Use

- Zero Down, Zero Closing Cost Options
- Low Low Rates fixed for 5 Years
- Solutions for tough credit issues
- Investment property 10% down option
- Great Debt Consolidation Programs
- Residential Construction Loans
- Experts in Self Employed loans
- 'No Doc' loans. No employment needed
- NIV loans. No income verified by Lender
- Never had credit? OK!
- Low down payment programs
- Commercial Construction Loans

Contact Steve Lindell, President at 503 730 1222

## Enitiatives.com

### WHY PAY MORE FOR A WEB SITE?

Enitiatives.com, provides you with everything you need for the Internet:

Your own Domain Name

- Reliable, inexpensive Hosting (99.99% up-time guarantee)
- 6 Page Web Site (\$15 one time fee for each additional page)
- FREE text editing tool to use with your web pages
- 5 FREE email accounts@yourdomainname
- Multiple Custom Templates and Colors to choose from
- FREE image upload software. Place photos on your website from your computer.

**COST? Initial Set Up UNDER \$45**  
**Ongoing Hosting of \$16.95 per month**  
**Other Packages and Pricing Available**

Great for any small and medium sized business

**WWW. ENITIATIVES.COM**

SteveL@enitiatives.com

Providing 'e'ntiatives since 1997

Upgrades and Custom Site Designs available. FREE quotes.

Toll Free 1-888-257-3220

