

The Challenger

Volume 19, Issue 3

December 2007

Senior Editor:
Cathy Ramirez

Contributing Editors:
Ruth Scherer
Mike Zuhlke
Mehul Kamdar

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Joshua P. Sunderbruch

Inside this issue:

From the Editor	1
Living an Ethical Life without Religion	2
A History of Christianity	4
Functioning Doctrine	6
Fear of Not Believing	8

*We Still Want
Feedback!*

Send your email to:
challengereditors@yahoo.com.

From the Editor...

It seems that without effort, one can live a life without considering the very personal *spirituality*. With the personal relationships we all maintain, with determination to succeed in career and finances, and finally, with the hustle and bustle of simply getting from point A to point B every day, who has time to add such a predicament to their overflowing schedules?

Many people have no issues whatsoever in making the time to give their heart and soul to their faith, and others refuse entirely. Then there are those of us who just don't know for sure, and are bombarded with questions which intimidate and even offend those whom we seek information from. It is said that our complicated species requires a complete sense of spirituality, and all should be inclined to experience faith-based love.

With so many perspectives on spirituality, it's no wonder why so many incredible minds have come together and formed so very many logical and so very many not-so-logical practices. It also comes as no surprise that many religions have come to exist that are used to teach all people how to behave in every way.

Can someone live a satisfying and moral life without a guideline that is rooted in religion? Thankfully, we have an atheist writer who is willing to delve into this topic with personal insight on this issue. There is also a question of how some religious practices came to be, and we are lucky to have a writer who has taken a personal interest in the history of Christianity. One can also easily deduce that there is more to mere history when speaking of the

beginning of time, and we have a writer who will help to elaborate on the different stances that can be taken in regards to Creationism. But does a human being necessarily have a particular emptiness that must be filled with a grounded sense of spirituality?

We can read on into the final article written by one who questions particular religious beliefs and practices, and maybe come to understand how anyone can become confused or lost in the spiritual sense. I believe that as rational, adult human beings, we should take a step back from simply what "is taught," and determine what religion, if any, will help us to become a better people, help others become better people, and if necessary, fulfill ourselves spiritually.

Living an Ethical Life Without Religion

Mehul Kamdar

As an atheist for as long as I can remember, I always find it funny how my lack of a belief in the supernatural bothers the pious whenever I let them know that I have neither a god in my life nor any religion. I love laughing at reactions like, “You don't look like an atheist,” from some people and ask them what an atheist is supposed to look like. We do not, after all, have horns on our heads! And then there are those who speak about “having a purpose” in life, and claiming that theirs was dictated to them by the only “true” god there is. Some claim to have experienced miracles and to have had prayers answered. And the worst of the lot, usually the worst bigots, cannot resist the temptation to try to convert me. I have many atheist friends and their experiences mimic mine – rarely do religionists try to convert believers in other faiths, while they declare a never-ending open season on atheists.

But, funnier than the personal experiences that all atheists who are open about their beliefs (yes, we do tire of idiots trying to convert us sometimes and pretend to be religious – there are people who think that I am Buddhist, Muslim, Orthodox Christian and Jain depending on what I told them when they asked me) undergo are the stereotypes of atheists that come from the religious lot. Most often there is the

presumption that an atheist is someone who is disgusted with a religion or a god because he/she has not had a prayer answered, the victim of a transaction in which he/she has been swindled by a deity. There is also an insistence that I “need to have a belief in a superior power” in order to lead a “moral” life. No, I haven't murdered anyone or robbed anyone yet despite having been an atheist. I do not intend to do this, too, and neither do the small but significant number of atheists around the world.

Atheism itself is an amoral position. There is no god to atheists, and neither do atheists fear the threats of spiritual intimidation based on descriptions of hellfire or bad afterlives nor do they care about bribes offered to them as places in a mythical paradise. Without trying to assume the arrogant position of speaking for all atheists, I do think, however, that I could describe how most atheists live decent, happy lives. There is the very simple logical faculty that all human beings have, and it is not difficult at all for anyone who wishes to, to think about the consequences of one's actions. The religious minded do this in anticipation of rewards or punishments. Atheists focus on this to determine if their actions would hurt someone or not. The stress on an atheist is greater than on a religionist because atheism does not rec-

ognize “evil” in a religious sense as something necessary that has to be endured. There is a duty incumbent on atheists, because of their lack of a belief in divine arbitration over their actions in their own lives, to ponder the possible consequences of their actions more carefully than would be done by a religionist who can even seek forgiveness for “mistakes” after harming someone seriously.

There is a particular strength to the atheist position that helps atheists be tolerant towards certain minorities like Gays and Lesbians, for example. Not subject to religious scripture that decrees sexual minorities as sinners, atheists can be more accepting towards these normally discriminated-against groups. There is also the very important factor about atheism being more tolerant towards other religions because it does not claim to offer the “only true path” towards salvation. No one can convert to atheism and there is zero possibility of having an atheist church because the atheist philosophy opposes this kind of institutionalization of the atheist belief. Atheism does not, also, have any kind of occupational rivalry as far as gaining converts is concerned. We are, by and large, an unmanageable lot, and most atheists who try to organize the community into some kind of loose grouping

(Continued on page 3)

Living an Ethical Life Without Religion, cont'd

(Continued from page 2)

complain that it is at least as difficult as herding cats. Atheists are also kinder to certain animals that some religions declare as “inauspicious” or “unclean” because, again, they are not encumbered by religious fetishes that make ridiculous claims about certain animal species.

Beyond all of this is the fact that atheism which is based on the denial of the existence of a deity, and which is often looked down upon by religionists as a “negative” philosophy because of this, offers a refreshingly positive way ahead in life. It was an Indian atheist, Gora, who coined the term “positive atheism” to describe this way of life in the 1950s, a term that is warmly accepted by atheists because of its very affirmative connotations. I remember, distinctly, as a boy, that I never had any nightmares and neither did any of my atheist friends unlike the more religious boys in the Catholic school I attended. The religious would be torn by feelings of guilt for “sins” like eating meat on Fridays or during the run up to Easter, for dreams about pin up models (not something voluntary – so how were they sinning?) or for not attending Mass on Sundays.

"The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one."
George Bernard Shaw

As I grew older, I would learn about brilliant priests forbidden by the church to teach art because they painted nudes, about nuns who left their convents and who found themselves unable to get jobs because their superiors requested prospective employers not to hire them as they had left their religious vocation, and, of course, I would be a witness to the myriad religious conflicts that engulf the world. I consider myself fortunate because I can still listen to Beethoven and Vivaldi's music without worrying that they were agnostics, I can read Harry Potter books to children without the fear that I am committing a crime or turning them, somehow, into future serial murderers. I don't have to waste time on idiotic theories that suggest that brilliant pieces of music like Pink Floyd's “The Dark Side of the Moon” and Led Zeppelin's “Stairway to Heaven” are Satanic chants in reverse. And, what I enjoy most, is the hugely positive feeling that I am not a victim to the kind of religious conspiracy theories that make hard core religionists an embarrassing laughing stock even to their own moderately pious brethren. Of all the positives that go with my “negative” according to my religionist friends, this is the one that I enjoy the most.

In the end, to generalize to a major extent, atheism is more about enjoying the simple pleasures of life without any religious restrictions. My fellow atheists and I do not have any reason to feel guilty after enjoying, let's say, a beefsteak on a Friday or during Lent. I have a devout Catholic friend in India who makes the sign of the cross over his steak after he cuts the shape of a fish on its surface and then eats it with the same gusto with which I enjoy red meat, but that is a different matter altogether. I can read the Bible, the Qur'an, the Puranas and the Buddhist Sutras one after the other without worrying about the dangers that these would pose to my non-existent immortal soul. I can celebrate festivals that belong to all religions, and, by my participation in all of these festivals can not only make them my own, but can also reach out to those who celebrate them on a religious basis.

In the end, this is a “moral” position that, by being open to all people and cultures, makes me a vastly more tolerant, friendly and humane person than someone who is bound up in an exclusivist dogma that claims to offer the only true path to a fictitious salvation. Yes, life is not just good – it is excellent to atheists and with zero worries about children's stories about heaven and hell, I hope to make the most of what I am living.

A History of Christianity

by Mike Zuhlke

May 20, 325 AD

Around the fourth century the Christianity faith was as disorganized as Santa's Workshop on Christmas Eve. Almost every diocese across not only Europe, but the world practiced its own rituals, which resulted in conflict for the basis of beliefs for the religion. In the beginning of 325 AD, Roman Emperor Constantine the Great attempted to conform the religion with the assistance of numerous bishops. It turned into a two month, 4th century seminar in the city of Nicaea, which is now located in present day Turkey. It is now referred to as the Council of Nicaea.

Constantine chose the city of Nicaea because of the location (it was basically the center of all dioceses geographically) and the ease of transportation to get there. He originally invited over 1500 Christian bishops but only around 300 attended. Each bishop was allowed to bring a priest and a deacon of his or her choice, making the population around 1000 according to estimates.

The intention of this synod was to facilitate the problems aroused from Arianism. Arianism was a Christian heresy that believed that father (God) and son (Jesus) were of different religious substance, that father was higher than son spiritually. This caused many problems because Christianity refers that father and son

are of the same religious substance, they are equal.

Arians believed that since the father created the son, then the father would be greater. They used a passage from John, "...the Father is greater than I." (John 14:28). Others believed that even though the father created the son they are still equivalent. A passage from John also states "...The Father and I are one." (John 10:30). This obviously brought confusion, but the council sought out to solve this problem for good.

Even though the focus was on Arianism and establishing the divinity of Jesus, the council negotiated a new date for Easter, the Nicene Creed, and 20 new guidelines for the faith, commonly known as the 20 Canons. The Council of Nicaea was probably the most important congregation of modern day Christianity but rarely does anyone know about it. It did not only resolve issues that were on the agenda, it changed the style of worship and practice of Christianity forever.

The council began on May 20, 325 AD with a formal opening greeting by Constantine. Discussion then initiated about the tribulations arising from Arianism. A bishop by the name Eusebius of Caesarea suggested a baptism creed from his diocese to be adopted for all Christians. This creed was proposed to signify the beliefs of all Christians, instead of having each diocese believe different ideas (for exam-



ple, one diocese insist on standing throughout mass, while another might insist on kneeling throughout mass). Although it was a baptism creed, it was now recognized as a prayer that represented all the major beliefs of Christianity. The creed that was espoused is presently known as the Nicene Creed and all but two bishops adopted the creed (the two were then banished from the council). This eliminated any future conflict brought up by Arianism and the inconsistency of norms between dioceses.

The Nicene Creed, as we know it today, is a modified version of the original but the focus is the equality of the father and the son. An extract reads that Jesus is "...begotten not made, one in being with the father." This creed is used

(Continued on page 5)

A History, cont'd.

(Continued from page 4)

at almost every mass session in Christian churches.

Christian Passover, or better known as Easter, was the next topic discussed. Many bishops did not like that the most essential holiday of Christianity correlated with not only the Jewish calendar but the Jewish Passover as well. Most Christians celebrated Christian Passover (AKA Easter) in two different ways:

- 1) Celebrating the first Sunday after the Jewish Passover, this was an emphasis on the resurrection,
- 2) Celebrating on the 14th day in the month of Nisan, according to the Jewish calendar, which the exact date of the crucifixion according to Biblical scriptures.

To resolve this, bishops decided to adopt a normative from the cities Alexandria and Rome where Easter was celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox, according to the Hebrew calendar. In simpler terms, vernal equinox is March 20th; Easter is the Sunday following the first full moon after March 20th.

Other important discussions involved solutions to a recent persecution of Christians (occurring in the early 300's AD). Including repentance of followers who renounced Christianity to avoid persecution, and what to do with bishop Meletius of Lycopolis who would ignore Christians who renounced during the prosecution, it is known as the Meletian Schism.

Not only did this council determine the divinity of Jesus, a date for Easter, and how to properly forgive followers who repented, they also developed 20 Canons. These are basically guidelines to the Christianity faith. Here are the focuses of each:

1. Prohibition of self-castration
2. Establishment of a minimum term for catechumen
3. Prohibition of the presence in the house of a cleric of a younger woman who might bring him under suspicion
4. Ordination of a bishop in the presence of at least three provincial bishops and confirmation by the metropolitan
5. Provision for two provincial synods to be held annually
6. Exceptional authority acknowledged for the patriarchs of Alexandria and Rome, for their respective regions
7. Recognition of the honorary rights of the sea of Jerusalem
8. Provision for agreement with the Novatianists
- 9–14. Provision for mild procedure against the lapsed during the persecution under Licinius
- 15–16. Prohibition of the removal of priests
17. Prohibition of usury among the clergy
18. Precedence of bishops and presbyters before deacons in receiving Holy Communion

19. Declaration of the invalidity of baptism by Paulian heretics
20. Prohibition of kneeling during the liturgy

The exact duration of the council is not known but it is most likely it ended at the end of June or beginning July.

The effect of this council was tremendous. Many norms today of Christianity are directly related to what was discussed in Nicaea in 325. Such as kneeling during Liturgy and reciting the Nicene Creed at Mass just to name a few. It is something that is worthy of mentioning to all Christian based followers today. The norms adapted from the Council of Nicaea are just as important to Christianity faith as the Bill of Rights is to the United States lifestyle. Religion is of significant importance to many people in the world, but before devoting your life to any religion you must know where those beliefs and norms came from so that you know in your heart your religion is worth devoting your life to.

Works Cited

- 1 -New American Bible. John. Washington, D.C.: Today, Inc, 1970.
- 2 -"The First Council of Nicaea." Answers Corporation. 2007. Columbia Encyclopedia, Archeology Dictionary, Wikimedia. 15 Nov. 2007 <<http://www.answers.com/topic/first-council-of-nicaea>>.

Functioning Doctrine

By Ruth Scherer

Throughout the history of civilization, in philosophy & religion, social & political life, arts, culture & the sciences—creation myths (implies Intelligent design; religious beliefs) have continued to serve many functions. By offering a construction of reality, creation myths provide meaning and make our experience (existence) comprehensible and give purpose to life. Ancient peoples tried to make sense of the random arrangement of the stars for instance, by identifying the patterns of light called constellations—giving them names from mythology. The ancient Greeks believed that from Chaos came Gaia (female-earth) and Uranus (heavens-sky) much like that of the “inferred myths of Celtic creation,” according to one dictionary of creation myths. Of various creation stories which evolved in China, the most striking is that of P’an Ku. He is hatched from a cosmic egg. Christianity beliefs hold that “In the beginning God created heaven and Earth,” (Genesis 1:1). Some argue though, that religion tends to stifle perseverance in most cases, because, “the answers have already been given,” according Richard Dawkins.

In 2006, a ‘spirited debate’ between atheist biologist, Richard Dawkins and Christian geneticist, Francis Collins in *Time Magazine* furthers




this assertion of answers provided. Collins maintains that “when you look at the evidence it is difficult to adopt the view that this was just chance,” referring to the formation of the Universe and those of us inhabitants. “But if you are willing to consider the possibility of a designer (speaking to Dawkins), this becomes a rather plausible explanation for what is otherwise an exceedingly improbable event—namely our existence.”

Dawkins responds categorically that “the problem is that this says because something is vastly improbable, we need a God to explain it.” The “spirited” opposition continues with Collins persisting that “God is the answer to all those ‘How must it have come to be questions.’”

Dawkins points out that emotional in-

vestment in certain issues of conviction may lead (unwittingly) to manipulate the argument. Beyond what may be an earnest attempt to make sense of our experience, religion has little to offer outside the broad spectrum of vagueness. In general, the vaguer something is, the truer it is.

The more vague an explanation, the less information available to guide our questions. Something that is very vague becomes hard to falsify which stands to reason why



Gaia is the earth. She is the offspring of chaos or comes into being after it.

Pan Ku is hatched from a cosmic egg. Half the shell is above him as the sky, the other half below him as the earth.



belief systems seem to be so threatened by the perseverance of questioning by those who cannot simply accept that the answers are “already given.” First hand experience has shown that by simply not accepting the “answers” provided, behavior is branded as “disruptive.” Around age seven, I was no longer welcome in Sunday school because the constant (but well-mannered) questioning—particularly the biblical story of Noah and the “flood”—was seen as “disruptive” (I was questioning the benevolence or omnipotence of god after “wiping out” the entire world save for Noah then acknowledging

(Continued on page 7)

Functioning Doctrine cont'd

(Continued from page 6)

the *mistake* with rainbows). Questioning not only breaks the rules and provokes fear, but so too does it threaten the chain of control. Consider for a moment, Dan Brown's "The Da Vinci Code." One can only imagine as to *why* a fabricated story was perceived as such a threat. Furthermore, one ought to take into consideration the continual contradictions presented by those embracing dogma close in their hearts. Take for example also, the 2007 Associated Press' article featuring a story about the Westboro Baptist Church where the congregation picketed a military fu-

neral because they believe that the "U.S. deaths in Iraq are punishment for the nation's tolerance of homosexuality." Members of the Church carried signs bearing slogans such as

"Thank God for dead soldiers" and "God hates fags," (evidently god doesn't hold the same opinion toward Catholic priests). Not an ideal representation of "love thy neighbor" (Leviticus 19:18), or just a compassionate ideology is it?

French sociologist, Emile Durkheim suggested in his analysis

of god, that it is "the acute consciousness of the power of society to mold for good or ill the minds of its members." The sociological theory refers to this power when it suggests the gods whom people worship, "are imaginary beings unconsciously fabricated by society" and whereas "society exercises control over the thoughts and behavior of the individual." Societies need to function according to certain customs and values and so religion takes those values and sets them up in this divine realm. Religion says these are forever and holy true values and customs, and societies won't run smoothly unless they have these kinds customs and values. That

Excerpts from God Vs. Science: A Spirited Debate Between Atheist Biologist Richard Dawkins and Christian Geneticist Francis Collins. In *Time*. 49-55. Volume 168, No. 20.

Collins "God is the answer to all of those 'How must it have come to be' questions"

Dawkins "**That's the mother of all cop-outs...It's an honest scientific quest to discover...**

Collins "God needs no explanation because God is outside of this"

Dawkins: "**What an incredible evasion of the responsibility to explain**"

is why there is religion, to provide "rules."

Freud had regarded religion as "illusions, fulfillment of the oldest, strongest and most insistent wishes of mankind; a mental defense against the threatening acts of nature."

Whether one accepts ideology as a fabrica-

tion or wish fulfillment, the existence of evil poses a problematic "proof" of belief systems. The term evil is probably very appropriate to some degree. Without the ideology of what "evil" represents, there would be no "moral" justification for just about anything. The authoritative Oxford Companion to Philosophy gives the

problem of evil as 'the most powerful objection to traditional theism' and that "...It is easy to overcome the problem of evil:

Simply postulate a nasty god-such as the one who stalks every page of the Old Testament. Or, if you don't like that, invent a separate evil god, call him Satan, and blame his cosmic battle against the good god for the evil in the world...Or-

Postulate a god with grander things to do than fuss about human distress or a god who is not indifferent to suffering but regards it as the price that has to be paid for free will...

Divinity functions as a representation of perfection or the ideal. It also performs as excuses for intolerance, hate and bigotry. The key argument against ideologies is that the world is far from ideal—thanks a lot Satan! Purposeless pain, suffering and untimely death among other things will escort some to belief systems. And since "the answers have already been given" it can continually be argued that the conclusions are true simply because it has not been proven false.

Arguments by definition are aimed at the goal of demonstrating the truth of falsity of a particular claim. Essentially a group of statements called premises that support or provide

(Continued on page 12)

Fear of Not Believing

By Cathy Ramirez

Born and raised as a Catholic; I was baptized as an infant, I received my First Communion at age seven and attended Mass every Sunday morning for several years. Eventually I felt pressured to participate in the ritualistic practices that are typical in the Catholic Mass, such as kneeling, sitting and standing over and over again as the program booklet instructed, reciting the appropriate phrases at the appropriate moments (cued by the priest), and eating a stale piece with a sip of sour grape juice in Communion. Catholics believe the Eucharist, or Communion, is both a sacrifice and a meal. Receiving Christ's Body (bread) and Blood (wine or juice) through Communion, they are nourished spiritually and brought closer to God. But I never really felt "spiritually nourished" during Mass or any other time as a Catholic. The pressure I felt was due to my own inability to understand the necessity of it all. I asked, what personal significance do the special vestments of the priest have? Or the fact that incense is blessed and placed in a particular place at the altar at a particular time during the ceremony? None at all, I felt no better in my relationship with God during my



participation of these conventions. I appreciate that there is some significance to every practice in relation to history and tradition, but still, I had doubts as to whether Catholicism was giving me what I needed spiritually. Such feelings led me to my conversion to Christianity at age seventeen.

My first visit to a Protestant church with a friend from my high school truly opened my eyes. The very first thing I learned was that music for worship did not have to be dark-sounding, slow, and chant-like. We sang uplifting, cheery hymns that allowed for clapping and even dancing. There was much more emphasis on The Word of God, or the Holy Bible. The sermons seemed to attempt to help me interpret the meaning of the Bible, except, I still found many inconsistencies. The amount of questions I had seemed to multiply. Many conservative Christians believe that the Bible cannot be understood by the natural person. Only after one becomes saved by trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior, then God will enter the

"The wiser you are, the more you believe in equality, because the difference between what the most and the least learned people know is inexpressibly trivial in relation to all that is unknown."—
Albert Einstein

person's body and the meaning of the Bible will become clear. So did I become saved? I sure did! Did the meaning of the Bible become clear as promised? Absolutely not! Some Christians may claim that I likely did not become saved; otherwise I could not make such a claim about The Word of God. My response to that is that it would be extremely challenging to explain how I **knew** I was saved. My weak attempt at a decent rationalization is that I truly felt a level of spiritual fulfillment that I had not felt before (the Holy Spirit?), and that I just **knew** Jesus loved me, and I loved him.

I found out much later in my life that *liberal* Christians believe that we cannot understand what the Bible teaches unless we first realize that *some* biblical passages fall under one or more of six categories:

- 1.) They were copied or adapted from the religious writings of nearby Pagan cultures,
- 2.) Are derived from folklore,
- 3.) Describe events, like the creation story and flood of Noah, which never happened,
- 4.) Do not represent the will of

(Continued on page 9)

Fear of Not Believing, cont'd

(Continued from page 8)

God,

- 5.) Reflect beliefs promoted by the Bible's authors which evolved over time, and
- 6.) Are profoundly immoral by today's religious and secular standards.

This now makes reading the Bible make more sense to me, so does that make me liberal Christian? Christianity is so seriously divided on its understanding of the Bible and of God's will that conservatives will often consider some of the beliefs of liberals to be blasphemy. Liberals often believe that some of the teachings of conservatives are blasphemy. I couldn't help but inquire about different religions, I was compelled to see what else could make better sense of it all. However, it is in fact taught in Christianity that it is taboo to indulge in such curiosity. Why, it is expressly a lack of faith!

I recently interviewed a devout, female, Sunni Muslim student here at Harper. I needed to clear up some of the confusion that might have persisted from heresy, and I valued the beliefs of Islam in her perspective. Our first subject was heaven, because I thought that this subject matter was particularly dif-

ficult for me to understand more than anything else about Islam. In the Islamic faith, the reward for the pious is the ultimate of rewards, *Jannah* (paradise). *Jannah* has been described beautifully in the Qur'an as having numerous trees, and an abundance of water, fruit, and shade. People will live therein forever, because no one will die, and they will live in lofty mansions and sit on thrones. But Islamic tradition recognizes heaven and paradise as separate places. *Heaven* has seven levels, and the ultimate attainment of heaven in the Islamic faith is to be nearest to God at the seventh level. If an adherent of Islam produces the highest deed in the faith, he is awarded that level of heaven,



the nearest to the prophet, Muhammad and the nearest to Allah (God). I think I understand that if an adherent of Islam commits suicide and in the process kills many enemies, provided he does it to defend his belief, the highest level of heaven is guaranteed to him.

This is called *Jihad*, and according to Islamic teachings *Jihad* is *fard* (an obligation) for every individual Muslim. Even among Islamic scholars there are various interpretations of this principle.

According to the Qur'an, *Jihad* assures various rewards, even paradise itself. Muslims believe that *Jihad* is the best thing that a Muslim can voluntarily offer. Some Islamic scholars consider *Jihad* superior to the obligatory acts of *salat* (prayers), *sawm* (fasting), *Zakat* (almsgiving), and *Hajj* (pilgrimage). Clearly, the concept of *Jihad* is worth examining in view of its many possible interpretations. Even according to my interviewee, upon meeting the criteria, a *male* adherent of Islam is also promised an illusory number of virgin females in the seventh level heaven. Needless to say, heaven was also our last subject broached in this interview. The clarification that was made available to me in this interview regarding the insinuation of sexist practices was that women were more than happy with the roles they are expected to fill in Islam. The advice inadvertently given to me was to conduct further research on these matters and make an effort to speak with "an expert."

Another recent practice that sparked my interest is that of the Mormon Church. After some investigation, and to my surprise, I learned that polygamy was indeed being practiced today. Utah state Senator Ron Allen said:

We have thousands of women
(Continued on page 10)

Fear of Not Believing, cont'd

(Continued from page 9)

pulled out of school at an early age, forced into marriages with older men, kept isolated from society, constantly impregnated, and often placed on public assistance with no financial means of their own. They are forgotten citizens facing abuse and fear. On top of it all, the victims are constantly taught that God is just pleased as punch about the whole deal. It has to stop.



Upon further investigation, I found that The Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS), as of 1890, no longer promotes or accepts the ideas and practices of polygamy. The result is excommunication from the church, the ultimate punishment enforced for violating religious and secular law. In 1935, The *Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (FLDS) was founded by two polygynist and excommunicated Mormons: John Y. Barlow and Joseph White Musser. (Polygyny is one variety of polygamy in which one man marries more than one woman simultaneously; the other form is called polyandry, where one woman marries more than one man simultaneously.) Barlow subsequently be-

came the group's first leader. Roulon T. Jeffs became the FLDS' second leader. He died in 2002 at the age of 92. His son, Warren Jeffs, (1956 -) then took over.

It is believed that God speaks directly to Warren Jeffs to reveal His will. And through the prophet, God directs which male members are worthy

of entry into heaven (females are invited into heaven by satisfied husbands). Jeffs is also the only person who can perform marriages, and it is through him that wives are assigned to their husbands. Pleasing the prophet can result in loyal members being rewarded with one or more wives. Wives are considered to "belong" to their husbands for eternity.

The fundamentalist Mormon leader, although currently behind bars, will continue to control the lives of thousands of his followers. Jeffs was convicted of being an accessory to rape for coercing a 14-year-old girl to marry her 19-year-old cousin. But there will always be a question as to the religious

rights of Americans according to the Bill of Rights, and the moral beliefs and rights of all people in such controversial subject matters. There are widely varying estimates of how many people practice polygamy in North America -- 20,000 to 50,000 and more -- but the secrecy of such groups makes a definitive number elusive. Information is unfortunately vastly unavailable to outsiders at this point in time.

The most unique faith I have encountered yet is that of the Tao, exposed to me through the HUM 105 honors class that I took here at Harper. *Tao* (pronounced "Dow") can be roughly translated into English as *path*, or *the way*. It is basically indefinable. It has to be experienced. The founder of Taoism is believed by many to be Lao-Tse (604-531 BCE), a contemporary of Confucius. He was searching for a way that would avoid the constant feudal warfare and other conflicts that disrupted society during his lifetime. The result was his book: *Tao-te-Ching* (a.k.a. *Daodejing*). Others believe that he is in fact a mythical character. Taoism is not really a religion, nor is it just a philosophy. It is a "way" of life. It's said to be the force that flows through every living and sentient object, as well as through the entire universe. When the Tao is in

(Continued on page 11)

Fear of Not Believing, cont'd

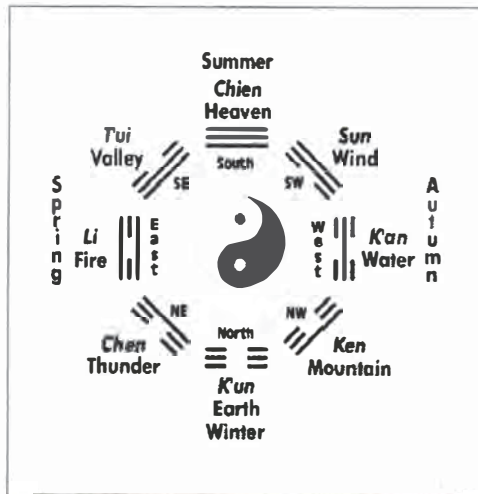
(Continued from page 10)

balance it is possible to find perfect happiness. Naturally, the idea of experiencing genuine and perfect happiness is an ideology worth exploring all in itself.

More a mode of living than an actual theology, Taoism asks that each person focuses on the world around him or her in order to understand the inner harmonies of the universe. It is a kind of 'religious system' that heavily focuses on meditation and contemplation. The Tao surrounds everyone and one must listen in order to find enlightenment. Taoism is a tradition that has, along with Confucianism, shaped Chinese life for more than 2,000 years. During my limited research, I was not able to really make clear where to begin this type of journey. I was told once that my "western thinking" will restrict my progress and even with the strongest will-power, it may take a very long while if it ever happens at all! It turns out that although my interest was piqued, I admitted to one prevailing issue; I was afraid not to believe in God the way I always have. The Taoist heritage, with its emphasis on individual freedom and spontaneity, laissez-faire government and social primitivism, mystical experience, and techniques of self-transformation, represents in many ways the very essence of what I was taught would earn me a first-class ticket to hell...

Despite the fact that I could go on and on about the different religions and denominations that I've taken the liberty of exploring, the fact remains that institutionalized religion has always made me question my spirituality. I have feared becoming too 'detached' from God upon revealing inconsistencies and unreasonable practices that I've encountered. I have also come to terms

that this 'fear' that I have is self-perpetuated because of what has been taught to me all my life. I suppose I can simply keep soul-searching. At this point, I'm still not sure I can completely let go of the idea of God and all His greatness. I admit that I have not yet taken every opportunity to conduct research on far too many other religions as of yet. I have only spent time on particular groups that stand out to me thus far, and I could not include all of them here. But I have mulled over traditions and practices and beliefs for many years now. I believe that I have come to two particular conclusions that are undoubtedly laced with the biases of my own forms of logic. One is that the same traditions that others may find comfort in do not particularly help me to understand my relationship with God. It seems the more rigid a structure in which any distinct religion sets for worshipping, the more substance is stripped away from the development of individual spirituality. Second, God inspires humans their good and evil. If God, in His unlimited capability, inspires good and evil for all beings, then we are either doomed or saved right from the beginning and we have no other alternative. Soul-searching truthfully means nothing when such a decision was already made.



"I screamed at God for all the starving children, and then I realized that all of the starving children were God screaming at me."
—Anonymous

THE HONORS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

Phone: 847.925.6618
 Email: challengereditors@yahoo.com
 Or
Jsunderb@harpercollege.edu



The Challenger

We're on the Web!
[Http://www.harpercollege.edu/cluborgs/honors](http://www.harpercollege.edu/cluborgs/honors)

A Publication of the William
 Rainey Harper College Honors
 Program

Harper College Honors Program Meetings

Harper College Honors Society meetings are held each Wednesday in L329. Business begins at 3:30pm and discussion begins at approximately 4:00pm.

BUSINESS: Officers and Chairs of Honors provide updates with Unfinished Business and New Business and members vote on motions before the group.

DISCUSSION: The latter portion (4pm-5pm) of each meeting is reserved for an open forum on topics of interest. These discussions are open to everyone, not just members of Harper College Honors Society. L329 is located on the upper floor of Building L, across the hall from the Honors/PTK office. Previous topics have included: 9/11 - Iraq; movies/film; transferring to other schools; illiteracy; marriage; consciousness; Pizza with a Prof.; international politics; what is art?; international food; pornography; "Food & Fun"; arranged vs. love marriages; losing humanity in technology; is IQ important?; freedom of speech; and taste of cultures.

Functioning Doctrine, cont'd

(Continued from page 7)

evidence or conclusion. Evaluating arguments by thinking critically of any claim of a given argument is the process by which is to decide whether to accept, reject or re-evaluate a judgment upon which an argument is based. The objective is toward attainment of truth. If for

"Any man who touches the mountain must be put to death" (19:12); "warn the people solemnly... many of them will perish" (19:21). "I am a jealous God who will punish the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me (20:5). In Chapter 23, verse 23 God states he will "make an end of them" (the Hittites, Perizzites, etc). Verses 27 thru 33 God states that he will "send terror and panic to drive the inhabitants (the Canaanites, Hivites, etc) from the land.

example we look at the Holy Bible and take scripture to be truth then it must be true that the being that is or is

not god is a malicious, hateful, jealous and a vengeful god (see scriptures on this page). This seems to beg the question of an all loving benevolent being and perhaps puts light on the perspective that through the use of fear (hell) there is absolute control.

Note to Readers: Only in direct quotations is *God* written as a proper noun.

