

AOK ATHÉE OKIE

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THEOCRACY VS. CIVIL LIBERTIES

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The autumnal equinox has come and gone, and we Oklahomans once again find ourselves facing the looming gloom of the fall season with all its attendant concerns, such as extracting leaves from our yards, gutters, and swimming holes while enduring the marathon sneezing sessions which such work is apt to provoke. While such raking of muck is typically messy, tedious and unpleasant, it pales in comparison to that which free-thinking voters must face in the coming election season.

The task before us is to find someone for whom to cast our vote, one who does not expressly desire to tear down the wall that has been wisely erected between the powers of government and the individual's right to absolute freedom of conscience. I am sorry to say that the outlook is none too bright come this November.

The front runner in the gubernatorial election is Congressman Steve Largent, who claims on his campaign website that "family issues, along with school prayer and an anti-abortion stance," are at the top of his agenda. Considering that voluntary student prayers have never been prohibited in public schools, it would stand to reason that Largent favors the sort of prayers in which a captive audience of students are told to bow their heads in prayer to the school administrator's deity of choice. This conclusion is bolstered by Largent's outspoken support of prayers voiced at public school events, such as football games, and his unwavering dedication to the U.S. government's most conspicuously religious ritual, the annual National Day of Prayer. It seems clear that this candidate is heaven-bent on making second class citizens of those few of us who will not bend our knees in supplication to a figment of the public imagination.

In this issue:

**Rethinking Democracy, Theocracy
Christian Horrors Beyond the Grave**

One might suppose that the outsider in the governor's race might take a kinder approach to those who do not share his religious views, but this is unfortunately not the case. Gary Richardson has posted on his campaign website the revolting notion that we should follow "...black and white clearly written laws of God...against murder, sodomy and all other clearly described sexual perversions and witchcraft..." If we were to hold an intolerance competition among these candidates for governor, I would be at a loss whether to cast my vote for Mr. Largent or Mr. Richardson – it is unlikely I would vote for either of them in any other contest.

Turning now to the not-so-hotly disputed race for Lt. Governor, the incumbent Mary Fallin has earned a name for herself by endorsing popular Christian ministries such as Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and evangelist performer Carman, who have fought unapologetically against the principle of church/state separation, "If you want to see kids live right...start handing out the word of God in schools." Is this message part of Fallin's vision for our state?

In the running for Attorney General we have Denise Bode, who has stated that "As someone who holds two law degrees, I know better than most that we need to re-emphasize the basis for all laws, the Ten Commandments." Did Ms. Bode's keen legal eye miss the Mosaic law that recommends *death* for all who fail to live up to the first commandment by failing to worship the Hebrew deity?

Finally, in the U.S. Congress, we Oklahomans have recently enjoyed the dubious distinction of being one of the very few states in Union to receive 100% approval ratings from the Christian Coalition for each and every Congressman we have elected into office. In 2002, we will have the opportunity to return four of them to Capitol Hill: Representatives Sullivan, Istook, and Lucas, and Senator Inhofe.

I would recommend we forbear.

HEAVEN, HELL AND JUDGMENT

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Given the pervasiveness of so-called “Western” culture abroad, there are relatively few uniquely American cultural phenomena. Just last month, however, some few of the Oklahoma Atheists availed themselves of the opportunity to witness a slice of modern Americana – the staged production of the bowels of hell itself.

Starting in the mid-1980s, evangelical churches around our nation have been sponsoring “Hell House” events which present fire-and-brimstone theology via the mixed media of stage-play and haunted house. The Oklahoma City metro area alone boasted at least a half-dozen such events, two of which we had the opportunity to witness firsthand.

The first of these was an authorized Judgment House[®] production (<http://JudgementHouse.org/>) put on by Wilmont Place Baptist Church of Oklahoma City. It featured an eight-room journey from high school to heaven or hell, in which middle-class white-bread teen protagonists are portrayed by middle-class white-bread teen actors as they wade through the difficult life-decisions facing them in their middle-class white-bread lives.

The first act takes place in a high-school corridor, in which students conversed about their Friday-night post-game plans. Female lead character Natalie Gray receives two invitations to parties that night, one from popular football star Eugene Wayne “Bud” Miller to a raucous kegger at his home, and another from amicable Jesus-loving nice-guy Chris Peterson to a church youth-group after-game party. After agonizing deliberations involving some minor loss of body coordination (it may have been a spasm) Natalie decides to attend the church party with Chris. Not to spoil the ending, but this crucial decision results in her death and damnation to eternal torment before the end of the show. Sorry, Natalie, but you really should have known better than to pick church over drunken revelry on a Friday night!

In the next scene we look in on the church party, consisting of kids hanging out and prattling with one another about everyday stuff just as they did in the previous scene, with the exception of the “video-game-playing boy” character, who appeared genuinely mesmerized (I suspect he had the easiest acting gig of the whole lot of them). Eventually, the children are corralled and preached at for some time

by a man who we can only suppose was the resident youth minister. He explains gently how God tortured and killed himself in order to appease his wrath at his creation, and praises God for this gracious act of sadomasochism on their behalf.

During the course of the following conversation, Chris asks Natalie if she had ever “asked Jesus into her heart.” Natalie questions whether such a painful transplation is entirely necessary, and tells Chris that she needs more time to think about it. Not to spoil the ending, but God clearly does not intend to give her any more time, and this crucial decision results in her death and damnation to eternal torment before the end of the show. Sorry, Natalie, but you really should have known better than to foolishly refuse to invite a homeless itinerant first-century Galilean hippie into your heart!

In the following scene we are transported to the house party, in which Bud and his buddies hang out drinking beer and nuzzling innocently while assiduously avoiding illegal drugs, foul language, and heavy petting – all told, it seemed to us hardly any more of a hearty party than that we witnessed in the church. By the end of the scene the dramatic pace picks up as the partygoers antagonize Bud over the fact that Natalie rejected him in favor of Chris. Angry and drunk, Bud bails on his hosting duties and sets out in his little red Honda Civic to find Natalie. Not to spoil the ending, but he does manage to run into her a bit later on in the evening – at around 60 mph or so.



Above: The path unto hell broad, paved with beer

Next, we see Chris and Natalie driving home in a battered yellow early-model VW Beetle. They discuss various matters of weighty significance, such as the death of Chris' mother and his fond hopes for a heavenly reunion above the clouds. Blah, blah, blah...their conversation drags on and the audience begins to realize why teenagers are continually complaining of boredom – they have nothing meaningful to say! Eventually, though, the pace quickens as Chris and Natalie crash headlong into a little red Honda Civic and die.

The next scene features a wrecked-up VW, a wrecked-up Honda, three wrecked-up teenaged bodies, an ambulance, and a generous overabundance of overacting from those with speaking parts (actors playing corpses take a more subdued approach). The moral lesson here is evidently that God generally prefers to break our bones than break the laws of physics.



Above: Natalie, right, should have gone to kegger

We come finally to the great white throne of judgment, which in this production is actually not so much a throne as a podium. Nonetheless, judgment must be rendered, and Chris, Bud, and Natalie each step forward in turn to receive their just deserts. Chris, having been indoctrinated into the correct religion in the correct manner, goes to Heaven, which is off to the right as you are facing the Podium of Judgment – Hell is to the left (whether this is an intended as a political statement about the Liberal Left and Religious Right is unclear). In any event, Bud and Natalie, having failed in their moral duty to become born-again fundamentalist Christians, are justly consigned to eternal torment by their loving Creator. Hosanna!

After the climatic judgment scene, the audience follows the condemned to their left, probably out of a sense of morbid curiosity at the fate of the evil sinners. They find a depiction of Hell which is surprisingly [Hollywoodian](#), that is, unorthodox and unbiblical. Satan is fully in charge, and with his chief minion (Damien) he inflicts various torments upon the denizens of the underworld as they repeatedly chant “Satan is the Great Deceiver...” This vision of hell coupled with the idea of a roomful of church-kids chanting endlessly to Satan throughout the course of the evening proved overwhelming to our group cameraman, who utterly failed to restrain his laughter and consequently failed to photographically document the room.

After visiting Hell, at long last, the Judgment House® attendees are privileged with a front row-view of Heaven itself. It has pillars, vaulted ceilings, and features a white-on-white decorating theme. In the center of the action is a bearded man surrounded by a host of attractive barefooted virgins wearing gauzy robes. The nature of this setup caused some audience members to mistake the central character for an Islamic suicide bomber, but I have it on good authority that it was actually intended as a depiction of another, more ancient Palestinian rebel who died in an attempt to free his homeland from tyrannical occupation.

The fundamental message here is clear: non-Christians deserve to be tormented horribly and forever. Churches preaching this intolerant dogma, far from being bastions of morality and mainstays of social integrity, are little more than institutionalized hate groups. *Hilarious*, though.



Above: Jesus did it for chicks, they do it for him

There is No God

Arthur Hugh Clough

“There is no God,” the wicked saith,
“And truly it’s a blessing,
For whoa he might have done with us
It’s better only guessing.”

“There is no God,” a youngster thinks
“Or really, if there may be,
He surely didn’t mean a man
Always to be a baby.”

”There is no God, or if there is,”
The tradesman thinks, “’twere funny
If he should take it ill in me
To make a little money.”

“Whether there be,” the rich man says,
“It matters very little,
For I and mine, thank somebody,
Are not in want of victual”

Some others, also, to themselves
Who scarce so much as doubt it,
Think there is none, when they are well,
And do not think about it.

But country folks who live beneath
The shadow of the steeple;
The parson and the parson’s wife,
And mostly married people;

Youths green and happy in first love,
So thankful for illusion
And men caught out in what the world
Calls guilt, in first confusion;

And almost everyone when age
Disease, or sorrows strike him,
Inclines to think there is a God,
Or something very like him.

Events Calendar, Nov. 2002

Nov 3rd – Movie night @ [AMC 24 Time Changer](#) will be playing at [4:50](#) pm.
Come see Christian demagoguery dressed-up as popular cinema!

Nov 17th – [Harmon Bldg. \(Tulsa\)](#)
Quarterly road-trip to the [monthly meeting](#) of the [Humanist Association of Tulsa](#).

Nov 29th – [Galileo Bar & Grill](#)
Monthly chill-out time. Be there or miss out!

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