

AOK|ATHÉE OKIE

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BILLY GRAHAM'S HATEFUL SPEECH

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According to the (downright encyclopedically) knowledgeable folks at <http://wikipedia.org>, English speakers commonly use the phrase *hate speech* to designate “speech intended to hurt and intimidate someone because of their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or disability.” While most of the debate over hate speech to date has centered on whether and how it should be regulated by the government, an even more vital and fundamental question is what sort of speech we should rightly consider hateful.

Hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Westboro Baptist Church (GodHatesFags.com) carry an obvious message of hate – but what of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association? Such a prominent American icon cannot possibly be dispensing a message of religious bigotry and hate? Surely not!

Surely so. The central message of Graham's crusades is one of salvation – but from what? From sin, vice, depravity, and *Sex in the City*? Yes, however, Graham's real focus is on the long term; salvation from the fate of sinners in the hands of an angry God. Remarkably, Graham is pushing the same old message of brimstone and hellfire (and salvation therefrom) that was so successfully purveyed by the likes of Jonathan Edwards so long ago.



Believe this book, or burn in hell!

Do not take my word for it, though, when you can read this hateful message from the pen of the man himself:

“Those who inhabit hell will be separated from God forever. ... Those in hell will know only sorrow and torment; those in heaven will know only peace and joy.” *My Answer* (April 9, 2003)

“The only way we have acceptance before God is through Jesus.” *Questions and Answers #517*

Billy Graham's message of salvation is clear and consistent. Billy Graham's message of salvation is clear and consistent throughout all of his writings and sermons. Either you believe just as he does – that a perfectly loving God exists who could not forgive us humans without first arranging for a torturous human sacrifice – or else you deserve to undergo the worst torture imaginable, forever. If that is not hate speech, I cannot imagine what is.

APOSTASY COURTESY OF THE SKY

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When asked, apostates can easily identify the influences in their lives that caused them to reject their faith. On occasion, I have been asked to identify the reasons behind my choice of user name for the Oklahoma Atheists webring, “leonids11”; my apostasy and my user name are profoundly connected.

When I was a devout Roman Catholic nine-year-old, reports of an impending meteor shower captured my imagination. I planned to stay awake until the predicted onset of the meteor shower, four in the morning; the strategy my nine-year-old brain devised to accomplish this was: lie awake in bed. The best way to fall asleep being forcing yourself to stay awake in the dark while at idle rest, I quite naturally fell asleep almost immediately and got a good night's sleep; good enough, happily, to cause me to awaken at the unusually early hour of—four o'clock. From my bedroom window, I was treated to a spectacular display of meteors—a display that inspired an abiding passion for stargazing and for studying astronomical phenomena.

At 19, I took a college astronomy course. The course textbook spoke of the possibility that in November 1999 the annual Leonid meteor shower would produce a meteor storm (1,000 or more meteors an hour) of such intensity the night sky would be illuminated. I resolved to see that storm. By the conclusion of that astronomy course, it became crystalline clear to me that our expansive universe was immeasurably beyond the ken of my petty sky god.

In the months running up to the Leonids of November 1998, I read several breathless reports predicting an outburst of thousands of meteors an hour. Satellite companies planned to take the precautionary measure of turning their sensitive instruments away from the oncoming path of the Leonids. During the meteor shower's previous intensification, in 1966, an observatory in Europe estimated the Leonids produced over European skies a mind-boggling 150,000 shooting stars an hour.

Comet Temple-Tuttle stages the Leonids. Every November the earth intersects the orbit of Temple-Tuttle, an orbit described by ribbons of jettisoned debris—bits of rock, ice and metal. Traveling at speeds of up to 150,000 miles an hour, this debris, called meteoroids, plunges into the earth's atmosphere; the intense pressure the debris exerts on atmospheric gases result in fiery incandescent streaks—meteors. The hardier bits of debris able to fall to the earth intact are dubbed meteorites. Temple-Tuttle wends its way around the sun in an elliptical orbit every 32 or so. In early 1998, Temple-Tuttle crossed the earth's orbit and approached the sun. The nearer the comet to the sun, the more the sun's radiation vaporizes its ice and rock, pushing the debris away, thereby replenishing the ribbons of debris the earth passes through every November. (The gravitational pull of

our solar system's bodies perturb Temple-Tuttle's orbit, accounting for the separate ribbons.)

Despite my planning, I failed alas to witness the Leonids of November 1998 as the peak came 14 hours earlier than expected. Storms in 1999 and 2000 never fully materialized.

In 2001 astronomers, having tuned their forecasting methods, confidently predicted a meteor storm of up to 4,200 shooting stars an hour visible to viewers in North America between 3 and 5 A.M. CST, November 18. This represented my chance, perhaps my last. Temple-Tuttle's orbital perturbations had lead astronomers to theorize that it won't produce storms during its next two perihelions, hence it won't be another century, they warned, before stargazers would have another opportunity to see a storm of this magnitude.

The closest place I could find with clear skies forecasted was Tucumcari, New Mexico. On a Saturday afternoon, I was bound to New Mexico in the company of three other hopeful fellow stargazers. At midnight as we crossed the Texas-New Mexico borderline, a dramatic fireball blazed overhead, whetting our appetites for the promised display in store.

Ten miles west of Tucumcari, we exited I-40. After several failed attempts to find a spot alongside an isolated dirt road, at 1:30 we stopped, amid the cactuses, at an ideal locale. Yellow-, blue-, orange-, and green-hued meteors appeared about once every twenty seconds in the dark New Mexico night sky. Meanwhile, to the west large clouds gathered and crawled ominously eastward on a pace that would place them directly overhead within two hours. We decamped to double back east on I-40. At 3:15, we found a second viewpoint, some 15 miles northeast of Tucumcari. Nothing left to do but look up.

At a rate of one a second, meteors animated the night sky. Wherever we looked, they darted relentlessly, oftentimes several concurrently, either fanning out or coming down in parallel rows like brilliant celestial race horses crossing a finish line furnished by the atmosphere. Some erupted like nebulae, some so bright the dusty car reflected them. One of the minute-long intervals in which we counted the meteors, cheering them on, resulted in a tally of 72. The few, brief lulls in activity afforded us the opportunity to monitor the duration of the vapor trains left in the wake of the larger meteors. Hour after hour, the storm raged. Even as the sun rose meteors continued to spangle the sky: the single brightest one I sighted flashed above the eastern horizon as the stars yielded to the first rays of the rising sun.

I felt a witness to celestial history—our ostensibly static night sky, home to stately distant objects, transforming ephemerally into a dynamo for one sublime night. Being well publicized in advance, the 2001 Leonid meteor storm drew many sky watchers of all ages; one day some erstwhile believers, I predict, will mark the spectacle as the germination of their eventual apostasies.

Thomas Jefferson on Freethought

“...shake off all the fears of servile prejudices under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal for every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a god because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear. You will naturally examine first the religion of your own country. Read the bible then, as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature does not weigh against them. But those facts in the bible which contradict the laws of nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from god. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong as that [its falsehood] would be more improbable than a change of the laws of nature in the case he relates...

“Do not be frightened from this enquiry by any fear of [its] consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no god, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in [its] exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. If you find reason to believe there is a god, a consciousness that you are acting under his eye, and that he approves you, will be a vast additional incitement. If that there be a future state, the hope of a happy existence in that increases the appetite to deserve it; if that Jesus was also a god, you will be comforted by a belief of his aid and love. In fine, I repeat that you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject any thing because any other person, or description of persons have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable not for the rightness but uprightness of the decision...”

(Thomas Jefferson, letter to his young nephew Peter Carr, August 10, 1787. From Adrienne Koch, ed., *The American Enlightenment: The Shaping of the American Experiment and a Free Society*, 1965, p. 321.)

June 2003 Events

June 9th – Freethought book club

We will discuss the essay *The Practical Separation of Church and State* by Benjamin Underwood at the Barnes & Noble on May (north of NW Expy).

June 17th – Atheists meetup – 7:00 pm

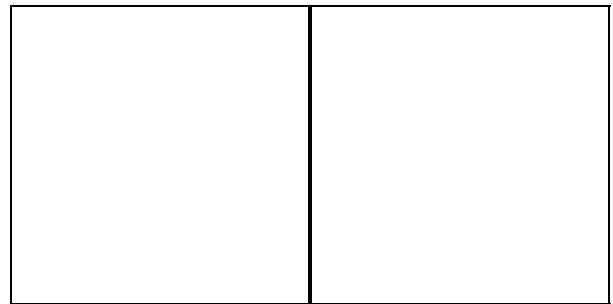
Please vote for your favorite location at <http://atheists.meetup.com>

June 21st – Agnostics meetup – 1:00 pm

Please vote for your favorite location at <http://agnostic.meetup.com>

June 27th – Labyrinth Deli – 7:06 pm

Food, fellowship, fun! 3214 N. Classen Blvd.



Visit <http://www.CafePress.com/AOK1>
(or AOK2, AOK3, AOK4, etc. and so forth...)

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