

AOK! ATHÉE OKIE

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BUSH, EMINEM TEAM UP TO FIGHT GAYS

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A study in contrasts: One man is a white-trash rapper learning to cope with the money, power, and fame suddenly foisted upon him as result of his influential and well-connected father figure (Andre Young, AKA "Dr. Dre"), the other is a white-bread entrepreneur learning to cope with the money, power, and fame suddenly foisted upon him as result of his influential and well-connected father (George H.W. Bush, AKA "Poppy"). Despite their seemingly dissimilar backgrounds, both of these rich and famous (and otherwise wholly unremarkable) white men share a common passion, that is, their mutual disdain for men who enjoy having sex with other men. Bush expressed his views at a recent press conference:

I am mindful that we're all sinners, and I caution those who may try to take the speck out of their neighbor's eye when they got a log in their own. ... I believe in the sanctity of marriage. I believe a marriage is between a man and a woman. And I think we ought to codify that one way or the other. And we've got lawyers looking at the best way to do that.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/07/20030730-1.html>



This is undeniably an (awkward) attempt by Bush to appease his ardent base of supporters in the Religious Right -- without stepping on the toes of more moderate voters -- by quoting some of the most temperate words ever attributed to Jesus. Bush's underlying message is nonetheless clear: gays and lesbians are *sinners*, and marriage is a *holy* union in which they ought not partake.

Rap star Marshall Mathers was somewhat less gracious and diplomatic in his condemnation of formalized monogamous homosexuality, comparing gay marriage to necrophilia and bestiality, "If we can hump dead animals and antelopes, then there's no reason that a man and another man can't elope..."

At the end of this line, the listener is regaled with the sound of induced vomiting, just in case he or she failed to appreciate Eminem's none-too-subtle sarcasm. Mr. Mathers, unlike Mr. Bush, is honest and straightforward about his homophobia.

DEBUNKING (YET ANOTHER) CHRISTIAN MYTH

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Dear Friends,

We must closely scrutinize chain e-mails, especially when they exploit a tragedy. The chain e-mail you have received has been circulating since June 1999; it breathlessly implores you, "Do what the media did not -- let the nation hear [Darrel Scott]'s speech. Please send this out to everyone you can!!!"

Darrel Scott, the father of a victim of April 1999's Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado, addressed the Committee on the Judiciary in the U.S. House of Representatives. Blaming the tragedy on all laws that reaffirms the republic's commitment to the separation of church and state, Scott challenged the committee members: "Dare to move into the new millennium with a sacred disregard for legislation that violates your God-given right to communicate with Him."

We have all been duped by chain e-mails. Happily, resources to combat these nuisances are readily available. One such resource is the Web site *Urban Legends and Folklore* (<http://urbanlegends.about.com>), where we find David Emory demonstrating that the media did in fact "let the nation hear" Scott's speech:

The text of Scott's speech before members of Congress has been circulating by email since the week after it was given, first launched in a newsletter by Donald Wildmon of the American family association.

Was it inadequately covered by the press, as most versions of the forwarded email suggest? That is no doubt a matter of opinion. There wasn't a great deal of major news coverage - you aren't likely to have seen it on television, for example - but there was coverage. (The same, by the way, goes for the testimony given by several other of the parents of the Columbine victims who appeared before the same committee, some of whom expressed opinions considerably differing from Mr. Scott's.) Scott's speech was covered nationally by the Scripps Howard and Associated Press wire services, not to mention in daily newspapers across the U.S., such as: the *Rocky Mountain News*, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, the *Washington Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Arizona Republic*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*...well, you get the idea.

In support of her call for widespread classroom proselytizing, our good friend who forwarded this old chain e-mail to us cites *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall* by Misty Bernall. "We have to find some way to include the spiritual dimension in the institution where children spend most of their formative years," she insists. Our friend goes on to say that Bernall's daughter Cassie "was killed when she answered the question 'Are you a Christian?'" After a September 1999 exposé in *Salon News*, the Columbine sheriff's department and many reporters conceded that they had known for months that the Cassie Bernall martyrdom story our friend repeats was a fabrication. Worse, Misty Bernall knew it was a fabrication long before the publication of *She Said Yes*.

When originally circulated, the story begged an obvious question: How could any exchange have been overheard amid the din of the rampage? The answer was known to many who nevertheless actively promoted the falsehood; the Salon exposé forced them to confront the truth. Responding to that exposé, a spokesman for the sheriff's department admitted that it had "conflicting witness statements from several kids who were in the library." Defensively he said, "But this is not something we're out to prove or disprove. It's not really a part of the investigation we're doing." The *Rocky Mountain News* then printed a long delayed story quoting the only living witness of Cassie's death, student Emily Wyant, who five months before had told the FBI, the newspaper and Cassie's parents, Misty and Brad Bernall, that Cassie never said "yes." Emily was right next to Cassie, looking into her eyes when she was shot, according to her mother. An incredulous Emily reacted to the many news accounts of Cassie martyrdom with dismay: "But that never happened. Why are they saying that?"

Why did Bernall's parents go forward with their best-selling book, and why did the media sit on the truth for so long? In a follow up to the Salon exposé, David Cullen examines these questions and details Emily's courageous battle with the media to out the truth:

<http://www.salon.com/news/feature/1999/09/30/bernal/>

Feel free to forward this to any of your friends who have read the Darrell Scott chain e-mail. A four-year lifespan is long enough for a myth.

Take care,
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Editor's note:

The myth of Cassie Bernall's alleged martyrdom is but one of the many modern Christian myths circulating via the internet. Some of the more popular ones making their way through cyberspace from one inbox to the next include an anecdote in which an atheist professor challenges God to keep a piece of chalk from breaking when he drops it from his hand¹, a story relating that NASA scientists discovered a lost day in time², and a long-standing rumor that atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair and her organization are circulating a petition to have religious broadcasting banned from American airwaves³. All of these myths predate the internet, but they now have been revived and are stronger than ever before, despite the efforts of scrupulous online debunkers, such as the good folks at www.snopes.com. Perhaps nothing in modern literate society resembles the mythmaking oral culture of our distant forebears (who produced such great works of religious mythology as the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran) so much as the medium of e-mail. It has yielded yet another shining testament to the great and abiding power of human credulity, and a cautionary example for those willing to take heed.

¹ <http://www.snopes.com/religion/chalk.htm>

² <http://www.snopes.com/religion/lostday.htm>

³ <http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/petition/fcc.htm>

Mark Twain on the Matter of a Perfect God

If I were to construct a God,
I would furnish Him with some way
and qualities and characteristics
which the Present lacks.
He would not stoop to ask for
any man's compliments, praises, flatteries;
and He would be far above exacting them.
I would have Him as self-respecting
as the better sort of man in these regards.
He would not be a merchant, a trader.
He would not buy these things.
He would not sell, or offer to sell,
temporary benefits of the joys of eternity
for the product called worship.
I would have Him as dignified as
the better sort of man in this regard.
He would value no love
but the love born of kindnesses conferred;
not that born of benevolences contracted for.
Repentance in a man's heart for a wrong done
would cancel and annul that sin;
and no verbal prayers for forgiveness
be required or desired or expected of that man.
In His Bible,
there would be no Unforgivable Sin.
He would recognize in Himself
the Author and Inventor of Sin
and Author and Inventor of
the Vehicle and Appliances for its commission;
and would place the whole responsibility
where it would of right belong:
upon Himself, the only Sinner.
He would not be a jealous God --
a trait so small
that even men despise it in each other.
He would not boast.
He would keep private His admirations of Himself;
He would regard self-praise
as unbecoming the dignity of his position.
He would not have the spirit of vengeance in His
heart.
Then it would not issue from His lips.
There would not be any hell --
except the one we live in from the cradle to the grave.
There would not be any heaven --
the kind described in the world's Bibles.
He would spend some of His eternities
in trying to forgive Himself
for making man unhappy
when he could have made him happy
with the same effort,
and he would spend the rest of them
in studying astronomy.

August 2003 Events

August 14th – Church/State meetup – 8 pm

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

August 19th – Atheists meetup – 7:06 pm

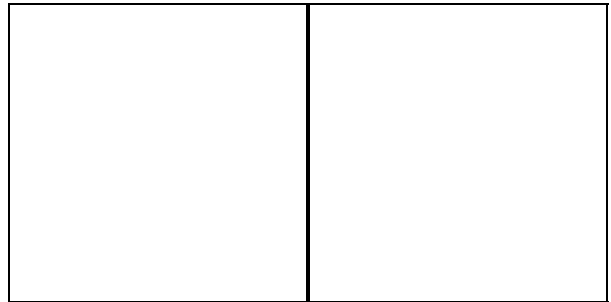
Please vote for your favorite location at
<http://atheists.meetup.com>

August 23rd – Agnostics meetup – 1:00 pm

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

August 29th – 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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