



COWTOWN HUMANIST

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Our meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Friends of the Library located at 5332 Trail Lake Dr Ft Worth . . Time 7:00 PM

For those interested , several of us dine at Joe's Italian Restaurant prior to the gathering. (South side of parking lot across from our meeting place) - Time 5:30 – All are welcome to join us!

The August 9th meeting will feature our own Jeff Rodriguez who will be Discussing the federally funded abstinence-only education curriculum, explaining why these programs are so inadequate and harmful to young people. He will explain how these programs are part of a larger cultural movement, and why the supporters of the agenda are so determined to defend them.

Something I think will interest our members: - Reprinted from the NY Times 7/22/06

GEORGETOWN, Ky. — The request seemed simple enough to the Rev. Hershael W. York, then the president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention. He asked Georgetown College, a small Baptist liberal arts institution here, to consider hiring for its religion department someone who would teach a literal interpretation of the Bible.

But to William H. Crouch Jr., the president of Georgetown, it was among the last straws in a struggle that had involved issues like who could be on the board of trustees and whether the college encouraged enough freedom of inquiry to qualify for a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

Dr. Crouch and his trustees decided it was time to end the college's 63-year affiliation with the religious denomination. "From my point of view, it was about academic freedom," Dr. Crouch said. "I sat for 25 years and watched my denomination become much more narrow and, in terms of education, much more interested in indoctrination."

Georgetown is among a half-dozen colleges and universities whose ties with state Baptist conventions have been severed in the last four years, part of a broad realignment in which more than a dozen Southern Baptist universities, including Wake Forest and Furman, have ended affiliations over the last two decades. Georgetown's parting was ultimately amicable. But many have been tense, even bitter.

In Georgia and Missouri, disputes over who controls the boards of Baptist colleges led to prolonged litigation. In Tennessee, a clash over whether Belmont University in Nashville could appoint non-Baptists to its board led the Tennessee Baptist Convention to vote in May to remove the entire board. Belmont's trustees are still running the university, and while negotiations are continuing, the battle for control could end up in court.

"The future of Baptist higher education has rarely been more fragile," R. Kirby Godsey, the former president of Mercer University in Macon, Ga., said in a speech in Atlanta in June. The Georgia Baptist Convention voted last November to sever ties with Mercer.

The issues vary from state to state. But many Southern Baptist colleges and their state conventions have been battling over money, control of boards of trustees, whether the Bible must be interpreted literally, how evolution is taught, the propriety of some books for college courses and of some plays for campus performances and whether cultural and religious diversity should be encouraged.

At the root of the conflicts is the question of how much the colleges should reflect the views of their denomination. They are part of the continuing battle among Southern Baptists for control of their church's institutions.

More than 20 years ago, theological and cultural conservatives gained control over moderates in the Southern Baptist Convention, the denomination's broadest body, representing more than 16 million worshipers. Similar shifts then occurred in many, but not all, state Baptist conventions, which have considerable independence.

The struggle has continued. Last month, the Southern Baptist Convention elected a president who promised to be "a big-tent conservative" and defeated candidates supported by the convention's establishment.

Southern Baptist colleges are affiliated with the state conventions, and it does not make sense to many members of the conventions to provide significant annual subsidies to Baptist colleges that they view as out of tune with conservative positions on central religious tenets, including how to interpret the Bible. "I did feel that Georgetown was not on the same page as most Kentucky Baptists," said Dr. York, who was president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention last year.

But efforts to rein in what many Southern Baptists see as inappropriate departures from religious orthodoxy have looked to many professors and college administrators like efforts to limit academic freedom.

"The convention itself in its national and state organizations has moved so far to the right that previous diversity on the faculty and among the trustees is no longer possible," said Bill Leonard, dean of the Divinity School at Wake Forest. "More theological control of the curriculum and the faculty has been the result."

David W. Key, director of Baptist Studies at the Candler School of Theology at Emory, put it more starkly. "The real underlying issue is that fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist form is incompatible with higher education," Professor Key said. "In fundamentalism, you have all the truths. In education, you're searching for truths."

The state conventions do not own the colleges, but in most cases they approve trustees and provide annual subsidies. Their power over the boards has often been at the center of contention, with the stakes often involving academic direction.

"We don't want to cut our ties," said R. Alton Lacey, president of Missouri Baptist University, which has been fighting the Missouri Baptist Convention in court since 2002 over who controls the university's board. "We just don't want the conventions politicizing our boards."

The Georgia Baptist Convention's severing of ties with Mercer University followed an unsuccessful effort by the state convention, which did not have the authority to appoint the university's trustees, to gain that power. Many Baptist leaders were also troubled by a forum at Mercer on issues affecting gay men and lesbians, Dr. Godsey, the university's former president, said.

Officials at Georgetown had long been concerned that differences with state Baptists might become irreconcilable. In 1987, college officials negotiated an agreement with state Baptist leaders that allowed either side to end the affiliation, with four years' notice. Both sides said that they had wanted to continue the relationship, but that the strains had recently become acute.

Georgetown asked the Kentucky Baptist Convention two years ago to allow 25 percent of the college's trustees to be non-Baptist, but the proposal was rejected. Only about half of Georgetown's students are Baptist, and less than half of the alumni are Baptist, Dr. Crouch, the college's president, said.

"I realized that our fund-raising depended on getting non-Baptists on our board," Dr. Crouch said.

Then, a year ago, the Kentucky convention turned down a nominee for Georgetown's board for the first time. Around the same time, Dr. York asked the college to look for a religion professor who would teach theologically conservative positions.

"You ought to have some professor on your faculty who believes Adam and Eve were the first humans, that they actually existed," Dr. York said.

Dr. Crouch and Georgetown's trustees decided it was time to exercise their escape clause. The college and the convention wanted to avoid the kind of contention becoming common in neighboring states.

"I think the fear was that I was going to lead a kind of takeover," said Dr. York, a professor and associate dean at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. "But I'm only going to fight a battle that I can win and that I want to win."

Kentucky convention delegates voted overwhelmingly in November to approve a separation; the group agreed to phase out its \$1.4 million annual contribution to Georgetown over four years, and the college became self-governing.

Dr. Crouch noted that some Baptist universities that severed ties with state conventions in the late 1980's and early 1990's have become essentially secular. He hopes that will not happen at Georgetown.

“We call ourselves a Christian college grounded in historic Baptist principles,” he said.

Georgetown continues to pursue serious academic ambitions, like pursuing a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the college honor society. Only 270 colleges and universities have Phi Beta Kappa chapters, and there are rigorous standards for new ones. Among the most important requirements are freedom of inquiry and expression on campus, along with respect for religious, ethnic and racial diversity.

A Georgetown requirement that tenured professors be Christian could pose problems with the honor society. The college must also improve on a number of specific standards, including increasing the number of books in its library and reducing professors’ course loads. Phi Beta Kappa considers applications over a three-year cycle, and Dr. Crouch hopes Georgetown will be ready to reapply in 2009.

“Phi Beta Kappa is the gold standard,” said Rosemary Allen, the Georgetown provost.

Some of the few students on campus this summer said they supported Georgetown’s decision to become independent and to improve its academic standing, although they acknowledged they had not followed events closely.

“It’s good to go to a college that’s religious, but it doesn’t really matter to me,” said John Sadlon, a sophomore. “What matters to me is getting my education.”

Here is a list of the colleges affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention:

Anderson College, Averett College, Baylor University, Belmont University, Blue Mountain College, Bluefield College, Brewton-Parker College, California Baptist University, Campbell University, Campbellsville University, Carson-Newman College, Charleston Southern University, Cumberland College, Dallas Baptist University, East Texas Baptist University, Furman University, Gardner-Webb University, Georgia Baptist College of Nursing, Hannibal-LaGrange College, Hardin Simmons University, Judson College, Louisiana College, Mars Hill College, Mercer University, Meredith College, Mississippi College, Missouri Baptist College, University of Mobile, North Greenville College, Oklahoma Baptist University, Ouachita Baptist University, Palm Beach Atlantic University, Samford University, School of Biblical & Theological Studies, Shorter College, Southern California Seminary, Southwest Baptist University, Stetson University, Union University, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, The University of Richmond, Virginia Intermont College, Wake Forest University, Wayland Baptist University, William Carey College, William Jewell College, Williams Baptist College, Wingate University and Yellowstone Baptist College. Some of these institutions may no longer have formal or financial ties to the SBC but continue to claim a Baptist heritage or identity.

By Cathy Lynn Grossman, USA TODAY

Ah, summer camp: Canoe. Swim. Climb rocks. Tell tales by the fire . And — perhaps hear lectures on famous freethinkers at Camp Quest West, an hour’s drive north of Sacramento. It caters to young people whose parents are skeptics, humanists, atheists and agnostics.

GALLERY: Take in the sights and sound of Camp Quest West Or — at Belladonna Fairy Camp in Berkeley, Calif., learn to perceive auras with clairvoyant counselors. "We help children understand their individual spirituality and the entire rainbow of expressions and ideas," camp founder Jodi MacMillan says. Or — "discover the powers of Mother Earth spirituality" at Little Priestess Camp, which is setting up for young girls in August on a horse farm in Killingworth, Conn., says camp co-creator Kari Henley.

Clearly, a new breed of summer camp is springing up under the trees these days. Unlike the thousands of traditional Christian and Jewish camps and vacation Bible schools that weave God’s glory into their programs, these are camps for future "nones" — campers whose parents answer "none" when pollsters ask their religious identification. Surveys count 14% of Americans in this category.

Make no mistake: A few hundred campers warbling freethinker anthems or future priestesses trying out their psychic powers barely compare with the volume of summer camps with a traditional spiritual spin.

A survey of 1,000 camps in the Christian Camp and Conference Association found that 2.5 million people under 18 will be attending Christian overnight camps for a weekend, a week or more this summer, according to Bob Kobielush, president of the association, based in Colorado Springs.

Millions more go to vacation Bible schools — generally week-long day or half-day camps sponsored by hundreds of thousands of neighborhood churches.

Still, a growing number of "nones" want their kids to sample alternative spirituality or a secular worldview for a week or so. Hence the creation of Little Priestess Camp, launched by two veterans of women's empowerment circles. It aims to teach girls to "connect their bodies and their imagination and their relationships, to sensate, meditate, create and communicate," camp co-founder Sarah Suatoni says.

And there's the expansion of the Camp Quest network with two new camps this summer, including Quest West, where teens can toast their marshmallows and test conventional social wisdom about the Judeo-Christian world with their peers.

"All our parents sign a statement affirming the humanist manifesto so they realize we are a camp that is secular in nature, and the majority of staff are individuals who identify as atheist or agnostic," says Camp Quest Ohio's registrar, Shawn Jeffers. Quest West director Chris Lindstrom, 33, daughter of evangelical Protestants, says she "became a freethinker at 20."

Last week at Camp Quest West, held at a former Campfire Girls facility, 14 teens and pre-teens joined in plenty of old-fashioned singing, dancing, field trips, games and goodies such as homemade ice cream. But instead of traditional end-of-camp competitions, Quest West featured a skit showdown with teams asked to come up with "their own religion — that everyone can believe in and that will be good for all for all time," Lindstrom says.

Smiling down on their dinner hour was a rotating portrait gallery of famous freethinkers, props for mini-lectures featured at all the Quest camps. "A lot of kids don't know Susan B. Anthony was a very outspoken atheist," Lindstrom says. "The point is, you can think differently about religion and still make significant contributions to the world."

These chats are one of Quest veteran Chelsea Pavey's favorite parts of camp, along with songs such as John Lennon's Imagine or a German folk song that translates as My Thoughts Are Free, she says.

"I always cheer when Ted Turner (the media mogul who regularly denounces religion) comes up, because he's from Atlanta, like me," says Pavey, 20. She began attending the original Camp Quest in northern Kentucky when she was 10. This summer, she was a counselor at its camp in Hamilton, Ohio.

"I've never faced much prejudice," Pavey says, "but friends and campers have had people make fun of them or tell them they're going to hell, or they're devil worshipers. They get teased and taunted. "But not here. Here, we think alike about religion, even if we have diverse backgrounds."

That's exactly what mom Jil Sinon thinks as she prepares to send her daughters, Carlee-Jo, 10, and Savannah, 8, to Little Priestess Camp next month after they've finished vacation Bible school at an evangelical Christian church in Madison, Conn. "My kids loved Bible camp. Carlee-Jo wants to volunteer. They sing songs like Jesus Loves Me, but I don't think they realize this is so religious. They just think it's fun. "Now my girls will go to Little Priestess camp because I know (co-founder) Kari, and she's just such a spiritual person that I think it will be fun for them to try other avenues. They're very adaptable children." Sinon grew up with a Jewish mother and Protestant father and married a Catholic, but now claims no religious denomination.

"I'm not sure what I believe. I believe in spirits. I believe in souls. But I'm not sure I believe the Bible is written by God and is true," Sinon says. "I'm more agnostic. I just believe if you are a good person and live your life as a human being who is kind to others and to animals, it's not such a bad thing not to belong to a church where people tell you how to behave."

Cultural anthropologist Frank Pasquale calls Sinon an "educator," one of several varieties among the "nones." "Educators systematically encourage their children to seek a broad understanding of human religious and philosophical thought. They'll read the Bible, the Koran and the Upanishads (Hindu) text and let the child choose," says Pasquale, a research associate at the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College in Hartford.

Other niches he sees:

- "Modelers," who don't talk about ideas so much as show desirable, ethical, loving behavior in action. "The kids may have no interest in Western or Eastern philosophy, but they see service, social responsibility and community involvement are important things."
- "Reasoners," who focus on critical thinking and independent judgment. "They don't talk about religion pro or con, but they want their child to think soundly."

• "Affirmers," who explicitly teach a non-religious or religiously critical point of view. "They may call themselves humanists or ethical culturalists, but they espouse positive alternative ways to think and act about life other than religion. These are the types sending their kids to Camp Quest."

He disputes the media fascination with "seekers" and the idea that everyone is looking for the meaning of life in some format and hoping, if they are parents, to share this with the next generation.

"Lots of people are actually indifferent on fundamental metaphysical questions, on the nature and purpose of existence," Pasquale says. "But they're still very devoted to community service, happy as clams and raising some really nice children without obsessing about 'What is well-being? How do we act and why?' "

And camp is one more way they do this. MacMillan says many parents of her Belladonna girls "have strong roots in traditional religions, but their girls may have expressed an interest in alternative spirituality or magic or a special sensitivity to the world."

"I heard one Belladonna mother call the camp 'West Coast Bible school,' " she says. She may be joking, but the camps serve a similar purpose, notes Patricia Killen, professor of religion at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Wash.

Vacation Bible schools rely on the Western world's best-known narrative to teach Christian values in a child-friendly way. For the "nones," these new camps "convey morally compelling visions," Killen says. They just do it "in utterly naturalistic terms, in a playful but lasting way."

Don Ruhs has several cd's, which he will distribute at the meeting, outlining the thoughts and beliefs of Sam Harris, author of "The End of Faith." The cost is \$1.50 each. The money collected will be forwarded to our treasury. For more information go to: <http://www.samharris.org/>

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For newsletter comments, complaints and/or suggestions

Owe Dues? See Dolores Ruhs