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There was a day last week where I felt victim to a campus under siege.

You, too, may have been a victim, not to some radical hippie group or environmental terrorists, but the scourge of all scourges: the militant Bible thumper and not just one — mind you — but an entire legion. According to my friend Andy, who's a religion scholar at Stanford, these people were the reason God invented guns.

It was such a horrific sight. They were posted at every key intersection on campus. The nicer ones offer complimentary Bibles while the extremists waved their banners and condemned total strangers straight to hell.

Don't these people know that the key to successful recruitment isn't coercion and scare tactics but free stuff and a pleasant smile? Just last week, I signed up for a dozen credit cards and three cellular phones just for the complimentary schwag.

On a more serious note, the actions of these biblical radicals were disturbing for several reasons.

First off, they are cowards. On the surface they may seem to be the most courageous Christians on the planet. After all, it does take a tremendous amount of spirit to chastise total strangers, right?

Wrong. Think about it. They weren't preaching to the general public but to the most apathetic college students in the world. Keep in mind that these were apathetic students on their way to class.

If these Christian soldiers were truly brave, they would venture onward from the friendly confines of an apathetic university that has its own police force and into the real world.

The intersection of Crenshaw Boulevard and Jefferson Avenue in South Central Los Angeles would be a good start.

Picture this. Our militant group posts up on the corner, and moments later, a fellow wearing a pair of rather baggy pants strolls past. The biblical radicals see this and begin the cat calls. "God doesn't tolerate clothes like that, young man. Join us or suffer the wrath of hell." Needless to say, "Loc-Eazy-Biz-Dogg" would have his deuce-deuce out popping caps faster than Quick Draw McGraw. I know this is a pretty rude scenario, but it's just an example of how the rest of the world is a little less tolerant to social morons than we fair Nebraskans. Besides, if God exists, their lives could be miraculously spared.

About tolerance, it was terrible to witness one particular fellow labeling women as sluts based on their wardrobe. Since when did Jesus become a yuppie? I'll eat my words if someone can show me a rendering of Jesus without long hair, a scruffy beard, sandals and a robe. If anything, he looks a lot like a Phish-head.

Sally Struthers will be proud of my final complaint. Did anyone see anything wrong with being condemned by children? I thought only the Nazis tried to control the minds of children, but I learned different on my way to physics. I was stopped by a junior Bible beater who was offering pamphlets.

"Read this, it's important," he said with impish glee.

"What's it say?" I asked.

"It says what you need to do to get into heaven," he replied.

"Could you read it to me?"

"Um, I don't know how to read yet," he replied.

It is exactly this kind of brainwashing that has me a bit fearful of organized religion.

Like a lot of people, I started attending church as a child, not because I wanted to, but because I had to. At age 17, I became a confirmed Catholic, because I was told it was the right thing to do. In the future it may prove to be the right thing, but not long after confirmation, I realized that making a lifelong spiritual commitment at an age when I only started to question the world around me wasn't exactly a wise choice.

I remember the first Mass I attended as a card-carrying Catholic. The sermon focused on how important it was to give money to God, because only the generous get into heaven. Since when did God start charging admission?

Ironically, it was about the same time the church was being remodeled.

Since that day, I haven't been back too much. However, that sermon inspired me to explore other outlets of religion, something the nuns

A Religious Experience

Search for faith leaves no room for fanaticism

would never allow. Having an 8-year-old give a presentation on adultery? Yes. Mentioning another religion? Harder than trying to milk a duck.

Anyway, not long after that fateful sermon, my friend Andy from above invited me to his church youth group. The next week I went back, not because he twisted my arm, but because I wanted to. I liked it so much that I started even started attending their services. Although it was a Presbyterian church, the message was the same. And, unlike going to the Catholic church, these parishioners seemed like they actually wanted to be there. Heck, I even played left field on his church's softball team.

It was probably out in left field that I realized chosen religion didn't matter as much as it seemed. Everyone on the team or in his group knew I wasn't member of his church, but that didn't matter. Not once was I given the ultimatum of being told to convert by the third inning or face sitting the bench. All that mattered was that I was there.

Attending a different church really sparked my curiosity about other religions. On my bookshelf is a Bible, a Book of Mormon and one on Buddhism. All three were gifts from members of these faiths, and the manner in how they were given was interesting. The nun shoved the Bible in my face like I was being served at a soup kitchen, the Mormon left a message on my answering machine five minutes later, and the Buddhist said when the time is right I would open the book.

Someday, I hope to finish those three books and some more after that. Like the Buddhist said, I will do so when the time is right. Choosing a religion is a deeply personal experience and one that shouldn't be made on the spot simply because someone has threatened you with eternal damnation.

Someday, I'll find religion when the time is right. But until then, I plan on following the Ten Commandments as best as possible while trying not to stir up bad karma, as I walk on under the Star of David through Mecca, on my way to see if perhaps the Tao could lead to Nirvana.

In the event of a catastrophe, it helps to have your bases covered.



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When the University of Nebraska-Lincoln became transformed into the Church of Religious Fanatics on Wednesday, one couldn't help but hear the subtle voice of pulpit reason calling also.

What was heard? One of two things — and maybe you heard both. Either you're going to hell or Jesus does, indeed, love you.

Christians have a directive in life and a very difficult and profound one at that.

They are, as the New Testament says, to make fishers of men. The world is the mission field.

It was displayed at an extreme last week. Enough that Seinfeld might say, "Who are these people?"

For Christians on campus, seeing obnoxious, fundamentalist groups like this can only signal a testament to the many things wrong with the social aspects of extremist Christianity.

One can be an extremist Christian and profess thus, but when others spout off about the ills of society and the impending doom of the world, it distorts the meaning of being an extremist.

All those involved in religion should be extremists if their creed is what they truly believe.

Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and all the faiths of the world should be extremists on their Celestial Being's behalf.

There is no problem there. In fact, that's the highest good for all.

But to go to the extent these "Christians" did last Wednesday is inexcusable.

While they think they may be doing a service for their religion, they are doing a great disservice to their God.

Excuse biblical tongue, but does not the Bible teach "Judge not, lest ye be judged"?

It wasn't particularly heartening to walk out the west doors of Andrews Hall and be enveloped by the brazen, ugly shouts of "You're all destined for hell!" from adults and small children alike. Thank

God is great, but zealots are a challenge

goodness for the Gideons a few steps away who handed out green-covered New Testaments and reassured everyone that "Jesus saves."

They were able to maintain a guise of sanctity and, in turn, did credit to Christianity. That's an honorable mission.

The rest of the production on Wednesday made case for modern translators of the Ten Commandments to add an eleventh: Thou shalt not make an ignoramus of thyself in the name of the Lord thy God.

There should be specific dogmatic laws against people like that in any religion.

No fanatics. No televangelists. No coalitions. No impromptu preachers in the streets.

They may be protected by the U.S. Constitution, but if the Christian Church or one of its sects created a code against their behavior, we'd be sure to have some turnaround.

It's just not, to steal the godly rhetoric, a Christian thing to do.

It's not any religion's thing to do, and face it, no other religions are of the extreme fanaticism that some Christian sects proudly claim.

Look at other extremists. Look at the much-scrutinized Rescue the Heartland, under fire this week in a Lincoln City Council decision to ban their anti-abortion picketing.

The ordinance was overturned with a mayoral veto. The reality is that under the Constitution, that type of bill should never have been introduced in a legislative body.

It would have done more good in a religious governing committee, but think about the diehard zealots who probably would run that council.

Religion is for these extremists, but Christianity isn't.

Religion gives them all they need to have structure in their lives and, therefore, an excuse to ignore the real message of Jesus Christ — faith, compassion, love and forgiveness.

Most of the people here last Wednesday would rather have given you the who, what, when, where, why and how than explain to you the real meaning of Christianity.

They're mostly concerned with the literal things, the religious aspects.

There is no personal level for them in Christianity but a thin facade, easily picked apart by even the casual observer, who might even mock or ridicule the ranting speakers.

In truth, "Jesus" and their big, black Bibles are mere tokens of their true faith — man-made, flawed religion.

It gives them a reason to yell and scare people. It gives them a power that they've never had for the loftiest purpose.

Christianity is a simple religion based on innocent faith — made complex and belabored by people such as those at UNL on Wednesday.

It's great to have an intelligent, theological discourse about the salvation and grace given to man by God.

But within the extreme environment, as seen Wednesday, more people are turned off by this unappealing drivel than are brought in by it.

Let's quit listening to these people. They may be comical and sometimes insulting to our intelligence, but they are who they are — they're fanatics.

Most people could do without another day like we had Wednesday.

Whatever your creed may be, there's more to Christianity than what was demonstrated here Wednesday. It should be enough to make more Christians sick and ashamed.

While the world remains a mission field, it is of utmost importance to realize that as a major doctrine of the world, Christianity must make a better showing.

Christians should be ever vigilant against impostors of their faith who choose to soil its founder's name and the ideals He created for the world.

