

# Perspectives

## There's middle ground on faith

**ATHEISTS** from D1 that maybe a Jewish carpenter didn't make the world and nobody rises from the dead. The Enlightenment happened because politically and socially, it had become possible to shame the church out of its gory campaigns.

Enlightenment figures started publicly ridiculing the supernatural stories in angry response to religious violence. The same is true today. Once church and state are more fully separate again, most atheists will return to discussing dark matter or the villainelle.

I believe art and family created religion. If God did not create morality and love, then they came from us. Thus the existence of morality and beauty created God; he is an embodiment of our sense of ideals — art and love, morality and beauty. They are what is real and they are awesome. Yet I do not dismiss religion. Religion is the repository of human knowledge about inducing transcendent experiences: rituals, meditations, reminders of death and connections to community, behaviors for celebration, and for grief. Even if you don't care about any of that, you probably have to admit that when the big things happen in your life — births, deaths, the transition to adulthood, marriage — you end up in a church or temple. The question of what human work gets done there is your business.

Likewise, believers should not be so furious at science. Science is more rigorously true than religion, and believing true things takes less energy. Both religion and science are subordinate, in truth and power, to what it is to be human — a living, blinking being, wise to the world and yet part of it, an active witness. I don't mind death because when it worries me I remember that

I'm not fully appreciating the moments I have now, and that gives me a thrill as I attempt to. As for missing people or situations that have passed, consider: Since they happened, they made it into existence, and will always and forever be safe in the first reel.

I think religion is great; I just think it is silly to believe the universe thinks. Or that we don't die. But it is good to gather and sing. It is good to mark life's transitions with a community, historical and local. Many of us do not get these needs met by religion because of its fabulism or its lack of passion. If this failure persists, someday religion will have to pay taxes and write grant proposals like everybody else.

Another future for religion is that it keeps its special status, but serves us better. For that, atheists might consider joining rationalist branches of established religions. There are Jewish Reconstructionist and humanist temples; in the Christian tradition there are the Unitarians and, more spiritual but wonderfully questioning, the Episcopalians. The hard-line evangelical atheists make this seem anathema, as if any interest in religion is childish. Why do scientists weigh in on the meaning of feelings though they despise it when religion talks cosmology?

Granted, it is a bigger problem when believers disrespect the hard-won insights of diplomacy, comparative religion, psychology and anthropology. Didn't Jesus say render unto Newton what is Newton's? Or something like that? Likewise, maybe materialists should get out of the poetry business.

God doesn't exist — but that doesn't mean we can't gather in temples and churches and wish each

other well, sprinkle the babies, or commend the dead. Think of the parades and costume parties. The oratory! (Where else can you go for an encouraging speech?) Think of the four cups of wine in the Passover seder. It's nice. Feelings of poetic grace, of sublime otherness, are real, and not to be contained by some evolutionary "just-so story," any more than by some goofy ancient legends. Science can study these feelings as it studies zebras. Likewise, it cannot argue the beast does not exist.

I appreciate that some people feel nothing of mystery, but if you are tone deaf, do not write music reviews. These critics have been provoked, yes, and we may be rightly grateful for their work, but that doesn't mean that the antireligious, evangelist atheist is the best and only representative of far-rationalism.

If you like religion and you don't strictly believe in God, it may be time to attend a church or temple that doesn't either. For your own good, for the future of religion, and for building the power to keeping the public sphere secular, it may be time to find a community and actually show up. The Republicans won in 2004 because they sent buses to the churches, but there are no similar meeting places for the left. There used to be trade-union halls and secular lodges, but perhaps one cannot create lasting rituals out of whole cloth. The old temples and churches may seem arcane, but standing in such deep tradition feels good, and there are lots of houses of wonder making a go of it. Humanity needs community and beauty. And a place to send the buses.

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MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Inquirer Staff Photographer

**Jennifer Anyayo (second from left)** with fellow Washington International School students. Jennifer was badly burned in a Ugandan war atrocity; she is having surgeries and wears hair extensions.

# Ugandan girl needs help to finish mending

**Carolyn Davis** is a member of The Inquirer Editorial Board



### All Join Hands: Jennifer's Journey

All Join Hands is an Editorial Board series on violence against children.

Jennifer Anyayo has one more round to go. Then, if the planets are in alignment or God is watching — or if bad men just choose to stop fighting — Jennifer will go home to a land at peace.

That would be a first for the 15-year-old victim of war. I met Jennifer two years ago in northern Uganda, where a civil war has roiled for 20 years.

This conflict has its own gruesome twist: A guerrilla group called the Lord's Resistance Army, led by Joseph Kony, has fought the Ugandan government. The LLRA keeps its numbers strong by kidnapping children and forcing them to become soldiers. Tens of thousands have been abducted and ordered to commit atrocities; girls have been repeatedly raped.

One of those atrocities occurred about seven years ago, when rebels attacked Jennifer's village. She and her father were in their hut. They ordered him to leave and killed him as he obeyed. They ordered her to stay and then set fire to the hut.

Jennifer suffered serious burns to her face, chest and arm that received little medical attention for years.

Folks who read her story wanted to help. In December, she arrived in the United States to live, mainly, in Philadelphia and undergo surgery in the metro Washington area by plastic surgeon Craig Dufresne, a talented yet humble doctor.

If she were to go home to Uganda tomorrow, Jennifer Anyayo would already have benefited immensely.

The appearance and functionality of her face have improved after one series of operations at Fairfax Hospital, INOVA Health Systems, in Fairfax, Va. Part of her hairline, which was burned off to the top of her head, has been restored.

Doctors removed scar tissue, loosened her cheek skin to protect her eyesight, put small implants into her cheeks, and did a little work to rebuild her nose.

### philly.com

Donations to the Inova Health System Foundation are tax-deductible. Send contributions (checks only, please) to: Inova Health System Foundation, 8110 Gatehouse Rd., Falls Church, Va. 22042. Attention: Corinne Habel.

You also can contribute to Jennifer's fund at Sovereign Bank, which is not tax-deductible. For more information, see <http://go.philly.com/jennifer>

She made dear friends with children her age in Maryland, where she stayed for the summer. Her English improved dramatically at the Washington International School's language camp.

It has not been a perfect visit. Jennifer has adjusted to U.S. teen culture, with its coarse media and music, a bit too well. She is moody — just like an American teen.

But Jennifer is not an American teen. She is the child of war, and she carries with her the emotional trauma of war. Add the stress of being in a new country undergoing surgery.

Jennifer will be happy to reunite in Uganda with her mother and siblings, whom she deeply misses. But she will have to readjust to her own culture.

Before all that happens, Dufresne would like to repeat the entire surgical procedure — creating new tissue by inserting small balloons under her skin and filling them with saline solution. He uses the new tissue to repair her face.

Fairfax Hospital, a not-for-profit, spent tens of thousands on Jennifer's first round of treatment. But there's not enough left in its

charitable account to cover all the remaining costs. Jennifer needs your help again.

Let me first update you on the Jennifer Anyayo Fund to which readers already have contributed so generously. Your donations have paid for living expenses, including clothing and food.

The money has bought some medications, though James Plumb and medical students at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital raised money to pay for most prescriptions.

The fund paid for Jennifer and her guardian, Abitimo Odongkara, to travel from Philadelphia to the D.C. area for eight weekly outpatient sessions and two surgeries.

We also need to reserve as much as \$15,000 to buy a high-quality prosthetic to cover Jennifer's left hand, now only a bent stump that ends at her metacarpals. A Lee Osterman, a top Philadelphia hand surgeon, has generously donated his services, as has Jefferson Health System's Methodist Hospital, to straighten her hand so it can be fitted with the prosthetic.

The fund will continue to cover some expenses, plus part of the cost of the coming surgery. But that's not enough.

Fairfax Hospital's foundation needs about \$12,000 more to pay for the second round of Jennifer's facial reconstruction.

As she undergoes her surgeries, guerrilla leader Joseph Kony and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni are engaging in peace talks that already have produced a cease-fire and could well end the fighting for good.

For much good. At last, Jennifer and other children scarred in this war might find opportunities for a better life surrounding them, rather than chaos, kidnapping and killing.

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## Coming This Week

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2006

### SAFE WITHOUT SEX?

Even abstinence may not shield you from a dangerous virus. Tomorrow in *Health & Science*.

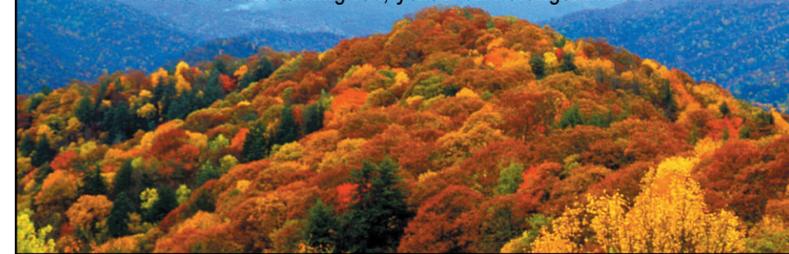


### GLORY DAYS

East Passyunk Avenue's Italian-American business district is on the rebound. Friday in *Weekend*.

### AND COMING SUNDAY: COLOR IT FALL

From Great Smoky Mountains National Park to the Finger Lakes, the leaves are turning red, yellow and orange. In *Travel*.



## The Inquirer

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### Things We Like

What's good out there? What have you read, heard or seen in the past month that really informed you? Books, stories, movies, articles, TV, music, etc.? Send us your suggestions! (See "To Reach Currents," Page D3; if e-mailing, put "THINGS WE LIKE" in the subject field.)

**Article/essay/speech:** "Men Are From Earth, and So Are Women," by James Kullander. A profile and interview of thinker Marion Woodman in the August 2006 issue of *The Sun*. (Excerpt at <http://go.philly.com/marion>.)  
**Short story:** "Flight," by John Steinbeck. A 1938 tale full of clarity and muscle. (<http://go.philly.com/flight>)  
**Book, nonfiction:** *Maximum*

**City:** *Bombay Lost and Found*, by Suketu Mehta. Teeming, postmodern Everythingtown.  
**Book, fiction:** *The Rise of David Levinsky*, by Abraham Cahan. A magnificent novel (1917) about the immigrant experience, early-20th-century life, and the joys and disappointments associated with the American dream.  
**Tom Lynn** Havertown

**Web site/Blog/Video game:** YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>). A site for people's short videos. Much garbage, much zero, and yet ... addicting.  
**Poem:** "Two Bikers Embrace on Broad Street," by Ross Gay, in the September/October issue of *The American Poetry Review*.

**TV:** "When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts," Spike Lee's documentary about New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina, now on HBO (<http://go.philly.com/spikelee>).  
**Movies:** *Gilda* (1946) and *The Big Heat* (1953) — two great ones with the late and great Glenn Ford.  
**Play:** *Hekabe*, by Euripides. In the forthcoming *Grief Lessons: Four Plays by Euripides*, translated by Anne Carson.  
**Song/album/musical/opera:** *Winter: Music of Eric Ewazen and David Snow*. Ravishing modern music (2004) for trumpet and piano.

For a complete list of categories and rules, see <http://go.philly.com/thingswelike>