

## Bible beating down the door

In spreading their faith, some groups spread animosity as well

Throughout the year, students are subjected to an array of individuals peddling newspapers, magazines and credit cards, but they are also targets for fillers of something far more personal — religious ideology.



ELIZABETH KOHL

Perhaps it is because college is viewed as an influential time in a person's life in which adults and peers alike seem to feel such a strong need to share their spiritual beliefs. But there is a fine line between sharing a belief with another person and resorting to infective conversion methods.

Amidst a vast array of groups who ride the line is a Christian organization known as The Gideons International. This religious group comes to campus every year with the sole purpose of handing out Bibles in the form of little green Bibles.

Setting up shop at strategic locations such as the Vohner Building or Sbsa Dining Hall, these typically older gentlemen are masters at herding students like cattle into an outstretched hand and offering them a little green book. Just as a student instinctively dodges one mini-Bible, another seems to be right in front of them.

Thousands of these texts, containing the New Testament, Proverbs and Psalms, flood campus during the week in which the Gideons visit. Because people feel guilty about throwing one of the books away, these Bibles can be found in places like classroom floors or lining hall tables. Even students professing to already have several editions cannot seem to avoid the Gideon's touch and often walk away with one, if not several green books.

Though the theory behind flooding campuses and hotel rooms with Bibles is to spread their faith by spreading the text it is based on, Gideons tactics neglect the fact that often the more insistent one is to an uninterested person, the further disinterested they become.

Individuals sometimes get so excited about sharing their beliefs they overlook the fact that those beliefs lack tangibility and are unable to be physically passed from one person to another. In addition, concepts within a spiritual belief are often so complex or vast that words are in no way sufficient enough to describe them. While an individual could refer to a dictionary and find a definition for terms such as mercy, faith or even God these words take on a much broader meaning to those affiliated with a type of spirituality. Grace to one person may be just a name or the movement of a ballerina, but to a Christian, the term encompasses something far more important and possibly even beautiful. So though a textual definition may supply a general understanding, in some situations that is simply not enough.

Furthermore, religious beliefs are unique to every individual and to a certain degree become emotional

extensions of themselves. Because such beliefs can incite strong feelings, organizations attempting to circulate them need to tread lightly and respect those they seek out.

One group among many who actively send their members out to knock on doors and spread their beliefs is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whose members are commonly known as the Mormons.

Many students have opened their doors only to find two young men, dressed in slacks, a white dress shirt and tie standing politely outside. Introducing themselves with a smile, the pair, when given the opportunity, can embark on a sales pitch that rivals the best of telemarketers. Fifteen minutes is all the young men ask for, and no is apparently not in the Mormon vocabulary.

It is, however, this unyielding persistence that ultimately defeats the message Mormons are seeking to distribute. A disinterested student is more likely to be turn-

ing over thoughts concerning how to politely, or not-so-politely, shut the door than listening to the belief being shoved at them.

When a person believes in something with fierce conviction it is only natural they desire to share that belief, especially if it impacts their life in a positive manner. But most times in attempting to share, the person tries so hard that others are actually turned away, possibly missing out on views that could enrich their lives.

Sharing beliefs is not about who is right or who is wrong. Sharing beliefs is not about shoving faith down someone else's throat. Sharing beliefs is about open minds and intelligent people. When these definitions are confused, the efforts put in by proselytizers often do more harm than good.

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GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

## Solicitors intrude upon former students

Every year, University organizations spend millions of dollars on various expenses ranging from building renovations to tailgate parties. University venues primarily come from government funding and financial support from benefactors such as former students.



SUMMER HICKS

However, many of these donations given by former students are given grudgingly — out of exasperation. Former students are repeatedly solicited by numerous organizations that use unfair and irritating tactics to ensure generous monetary gifts.

University organizations contact former students and request donations for many areas including athletics, scholarships and campus improvements. Groups such as the 12th Man Foundation and the Association of Former Students pursue new graduates and older Aggies alike for money each year. With growing needs, financial appeals have expanded in the past few years to include phone calls as well as mail-outs.

One approach these groups use to increase contributions is the employment of

current A&M students as telemarketers in contacting potential donors. While it is easy to hang up the phone or get angry with a stranger calling from credit card or phone companies, being disrespectful to a fellow Aggie is another situation. Feelings of obligation can cause a sense of resentment that should not exist when donating to one's alma mater.

Another tactic used to petition financial support from former students is to get the potential donor to talk about their college days at A&M. Callers smoothly dredge up old sentimental memories and then move in for the kill. Some University organizations use underhanded methods of reminding former students of their Old Army days as a ploy to ease open their wallets.

For example, one former student said a young woman from a University organization called and began to ask him about his involvement in the Corps of Cadets and the A&M track team while he attended. As he reminisced about his Old Army days, the student asked him if he would like to make a contribution to assist the track program. He agreed and then to his surprise, her supervisor got on the phone and asked for verification of his gift. This lack of trust was shocking to a man who remembers A&M as a place where "Aggies do not lie, cheat or steal."

His disappointment caused him to retract his donation.

The Association of Former Students says that members "give time, thought, energy and money freely for its advancement." Millionaires may give money freely, but new graduates who are working in entry-level positions with a base salary of \$25,000 do not.

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The Association also states that donors "derive a feeling of satisfaction from knowing they are contributing to programs of the highest quality." For many people however, being short a couple hundred dollars every month rarely warrants a feeling of satisfaction.

The 12th Man Foundation states its mission "is to support Aggie Athletics by encouraging, receiving and managing gifts for athletic scholarships and programs..." Encouraging is a pat on the

back or a gentle request, not repeated appeals for loyalty displayed through a checkbook. The Foundation offers benefits such as priority parking and season ticket options to potential donors. Meanwhile, students walk miles to get to football games and haggle for extra sports passes each week to sit where the view of the Jumbotron is better than the field.

The average annual donation from 12th Man Foundation members is approximately \$325. Granted, this money adds up, but the Foundation can raise money without having to result to petty tactics. Bernard C. Richardson probably did not donate his millions for the building of "The Zone" over the telephone to a 19-year-old student during a routine fundraising call.

A&M organizations such as the Association of Former Students and the 12th Man Foundation do provide valuable contributions to the University, but their fundraising techniques are repetitive and often irritating.

The constant, growing need for donations baffles many former students who remember A&M as a "poor boy" school from years ago. How the times have changed.

Summer Hicks is a senior English major.

## VIEW POINTS

**Bush should be wary of over-confidence**

George W. Bush campaign officials, take note. Research published by a psychology professor at Cornell University suggests that Bush's confidence in his ability to lead does not prove he has the ability to lead — it may prove just the opposite.

According to a study in the December issue of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Dr. David A. Dunning has shown that the least competent people tend to be the most sure of their competence. On a series of tests gauging logic, English grammar and other skills, Dunning found that subjects who scored in the lowest percentile were the most likely to "grossly overestimate" how well they had done.

The *New York Times* reports that the research aligns with other studies showing that the vast majority of people rate themselves as "above average" on a variety of abilities — despite the fact the widespread excellence suggested by such widespread confidence is statistically impossible.

Perhaps a political lesson can be gleaned from these psychological results.

There is no doubt that George W. Bush, front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, believes in himself and his aptitude for the job. His claim to leadership ability has become a campaign slogan. He goes out of his way to point out that he reads really big books. Unlike that guy Dan Quail, he can spell. Those who question his political experience — which consists exclusively of two gubernatorial terms — receive little more than a summary scoff.

Of course, Dunning's study does not prove that the mere expression of self-confidence is evidence for actual incompetence. It could be, after all, that Bush is right about his command of the issues.

But he will have to do more than be sure of himself to continue riding his wave of popularity. If nothing else, Dunning's results reaffirm the warning to those who stand: "Take heed lest you fall."

And to Bush and all other candidates who believe unswervingly in their competence, take heed lest you fail. Americans would rather have a president who admits faults that prove unfounded than one who robotically repeats "I know how to lead" only to find out that he does not.

— Caleb McDaniel

**Movie rating system leaves room for error**

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) has been placing its rating system on movies for years. The familiar G through NC-17 ratings have so graced or cursed movies that directors will cut shots, dialogue or even entire scenes to get a lower rating. When parents do not let children see any R- or PG-13-rated movies, the director must cut to ensure a bigger audience.

However, the MPAA rankings are not only arbitrary, but uninformative and imprecise.

Two entirely different movies, *American Pie* and *Die Hard*, both received an R rating. *American Pie* is a sexual comedy, while *Die Hard* received its R rating for violence and language. But, in the eyes of the MPAA, they are both R-rated movies.

As another example, *The Iron Giant* and *Dead Poet's Society* are both rated PG. The movies are nothing alike. *The Iron Giant* is a children's cartoon with some jokes only a grown-up would understand, while *Dead Poet's Society* is well above the head of most ten-year-olds — and many 30-year-olds for that matter. Yet, they received the same rating.

The MPAA should take a page from television's book and institute a more precise and informative system. The small screen currently uses an age scale, similar to the MPAA's.

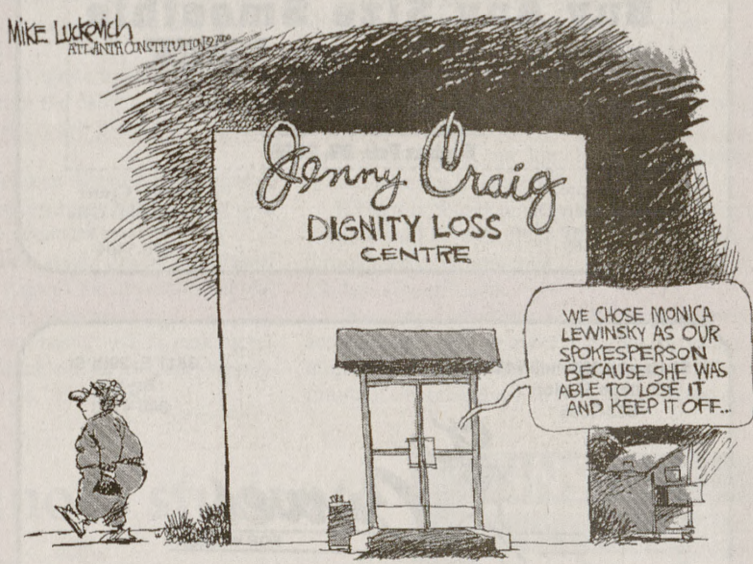
Television rates content some may find objectionable such as foul language, violence, adult situations or nudity.

Such rankings for movies will not only aid parents who believe the content of movies affects the content of character, but it will also help moviegoers of all ages determine if they find a movie objectionable before shelling out the price of a ticket.

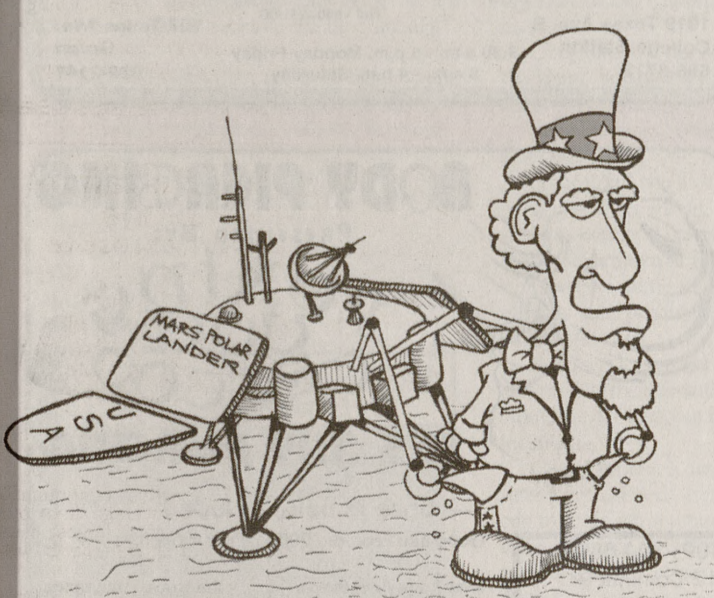
Hollywood's wallet fetish is one reason — the other being the MPAA's total lack of connection to the public — the rating system will not be improved. No matter how necessary they may be, the changes will negatively affect the bottom line.

The MPAA is quoting one of its favorite sons, Clark Gable, by telling the public, "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn."

— Chris Huffines



## Solving society's troubles should come before Mars exploration



MATT ROY/THE BATTALION

On Monday last week, engineers and scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory attempted to contact the missing Mars Polar Lander for the final time.

The only answer they heard back was silence — the missing lander is the second loss for NASA's Mars Surveyor Project in its attempts to study the formidable red planet. The first loss was the Mars Climate Orbiter, which burned up while traveling through the Martian atmosphere last September. While these losses weigh heavily on the hearts of the scientific community, the losses weigh even more heavily on the taxpayer's wallet.

The red planet has been the dream of all people, scientist and lay person alike and has been the subject of speculation, books and theories. It is the nearest planet with the possibility to sustain life, which

is one of the reasons NASA initiated the Mars Surveyor Program.

The goal of the program was to search for evidence of past and present life, to understand the history of Mars, and to see what resources the planet may have to offer. As of now, NASA is planning to launch one more orbiter next year with another lander waiting in the wings. Yet, after the loss of the \$165 million Mars Polar Lander, it is time for NASA to reassess the program and decide if it is worth the cost to the public. For many, the answer is a resounding no.

Exploring Mars does not rank high on their priority list. Taxpayers have more important issues to spend their money on than scientific research of the red planet. Though society has received many everyday conveniences from NASA research, one cannot see any viable items coming from the Mars Surveyor Program.

Further, while NASA stated that these missions to the red planet were to be at low cost to taxpayers, millions of dollars especially when lost on failed

missions, is not a low price.

The money spent on the Mars exploration project could be put to better use. The money could help fund the failing Social Security program, a tax cut, or to reduce the trade deficit.

In everyday life for the citizens of the United States, the Mars exploration is just another way the government is misusing our money. The United States could use funds from the Mars program to help its citizens.

NASA has begun to look into the loss of the lander and of the total failure Mars program. After a careful and detailed investigation, the board will most likely draw the same conclusions the public has come to. The Mars program, though scientifically worthwhile, is not in the best interest of the government — or the general population — at this time. The money already spent cannot be recovered, but by choosing to stop the program, the government can prevent more money from being wasted. There are many more urgent places for that money to be spent than on the Mars program.

With a steady crime rate, overcrowding of jails, and too few police officers, the government could give money spent on the Mars exploration projects to states in the form of block grants. This new aid could help hire more officers or build more jails.

Society is plagued with problems that the few million dollars saved could help solve. Before looking to the stars, people need to look within the country and face its everyday problems. The government cannot ignore its problems and let our citizens suffer the consequences. People should search within this country and try to solve the problems of homelessness, poverty and crime.

By spending the money in more important ways, the United States, can be made a better place for its people. Mars should be studied later when our country can afford to spend \$165 million, but the standard of living cannot be expected to rise while spending money exploring other planets.

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