

COMMENTARY

Thursday, December 4, 2003

EDITORIAL

Society must address issue of hate-based violent crime

This week, several campus advocacy groups, along with the ASUO, sponsored a "Transgender Day of Remembrance" to honor transgender people who have been brutally murdered around the world in sickening acts of irrational hatred.

On Tuesday, students may have seen the signs around the EMU depicting those people who died and their respective personal histories.

According to the "Remembering Our Dead" Web site, 17 of the 37 people who were killed in the last 14 months have been from America, where a battle currently rages over whether two people of the same sex should be able to affirm their love in a binding legal agreement.

That debate, as well as the hate-motivated deaths of transgender people, has shown a disturbing trend of fear toward non-heterosexual persons that often leads to violence. The mentioned statistic alone shows that there's something deeply awry in the modern human consciousness.

In fact, that groups must dedicate special days to remember victims of hate is indicative that something is definitely wrong with this picture.

According to the Web site: "We live in times more sensitive than ever to hatred-based violence, especially since the events of Sept. 11. Yet even now, the deaths of those based on anti-transgender hatred or prejudice are largely ignored. Over the last decade, more than one person per month has died due to transgender-based hate or prejudice, regardless of any other factors in their lives. This trend shows no sign of abating."

All in all, days like this week's "Transgender Day of Remembrance" help bring awareness to a major problem this society has with discrimination against many different groups.

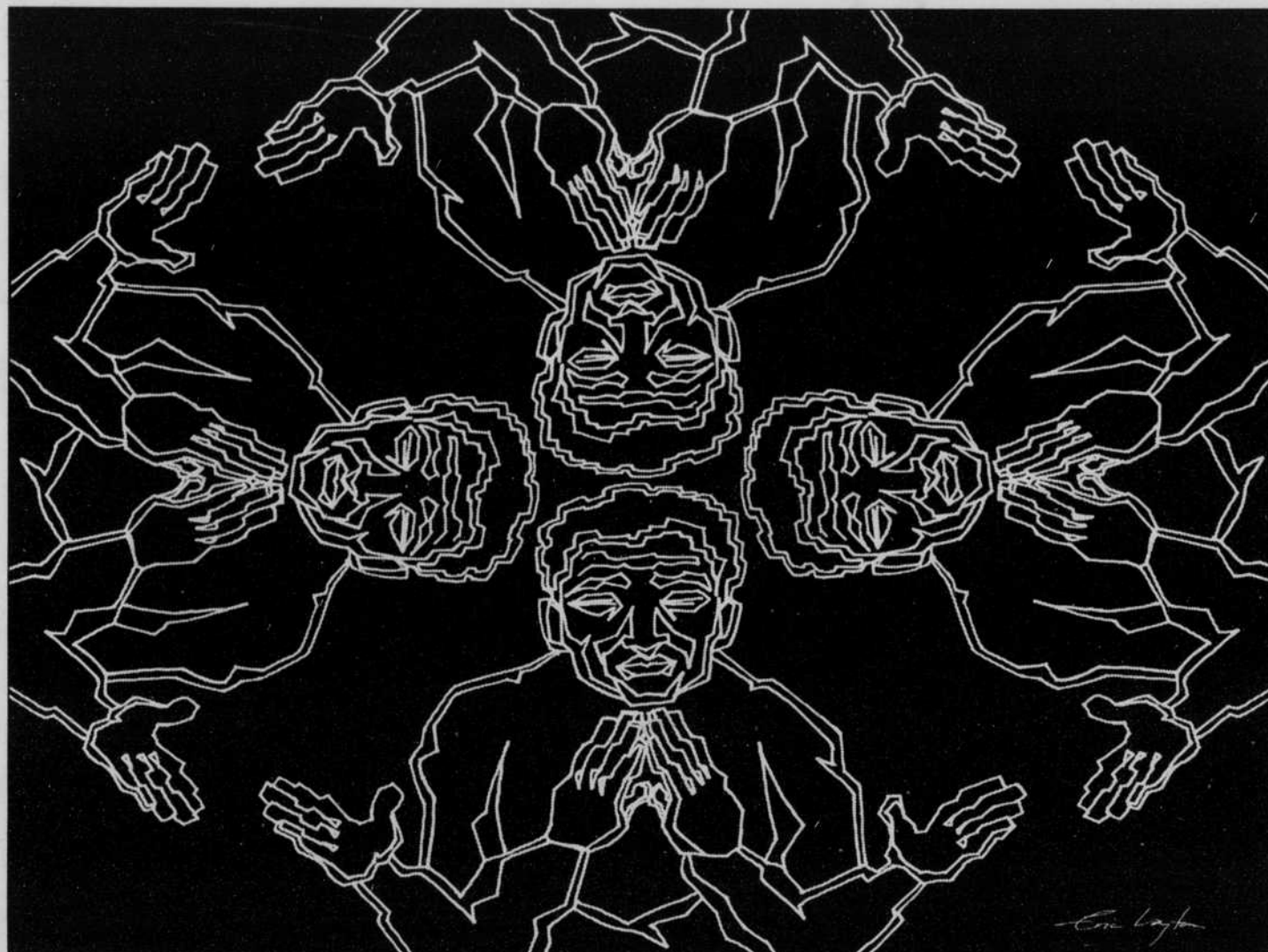
But it is important to remember that a little more open-mindedness can go a long way — and beginning locally is the right way to start changing the way things are.

EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Brad Schmidt
Editor in Chief
Jan Tobias Montry
Managing Editor
Aimee Rudin
Freelance Editor
Ayisha Yahya
News Editor
Travis Willse
Editorial Editor



Eric Layton Illustration

Have faith in doubt

This article originally began as my political tirades typically begin: With a (supposedly) humorous or appalling antidote emblematic of the subject — this time, the eroding separation of church and state.

But, like the cliché of a lecturer at the podium ripping up his carefully prepared speech in order to speak clumsily from the heart, I have pushed those paragraphs down and, perhaps, out of the column entirely, so that I might write more personally about religion and government.

As an undergraduate, I majored in religious studies. I usually get one of two questions when I mention this: Either "Are you going to be a priest?" or "What's your religion?" When I respond that I'm agnostic, I usually get a strange look — again, for one of two reasons: Either they don't know what agnostic means, or they can't understand why somebody who doesn't belong to a religion would spend four-plus years studying it.

As an agnostic, I believe that human beings are too small to answer with certainty the big questions that all religions claim to answer. While atheists feel God cannot exist, agnostics feel certainty cannot exist. Ours is the religion of doubt.

But I feel that many agnostics go astray by abandoning religious questions along with the answers. They are throwing the baby out with the bath water. We might not be able to achieve certainty, but questing for religious answers is what gives life meaning.

That is the wonderful paradox at the center of our mortal existence.

When religions are at their best, they embrace this paradox through faith. Doubt and faith go hand in hand. True faith is about humility; it is a positive emotional response to uncertainty. Too often, however, religion perverts faith into spiritual absolutism and moral rigidity. That is why the separation of church and state is so important.

When House Majority Leader Tom DeLay,

R-Texas, — you remember him, he's the guy who blamed the Columbine shooting on working mothers who take birth control pills — was asked why he entered politics, he said: "To promote a Biblical worldview."

DeLay believes his mission is to take America back "to absolute truth that has been manipulated and destroyed by a liberal worldview."

Biblical vs. liberal. Past tense vs. present. Revealed vs. discovering. The absolute truth of religion vs. the ever-changing truths of science. This is what DeLay refers to as "the great civil war of values raging in America today."



David Jagernauth
Critical mass

And he couldn't be more correct. The clash between traditional and modern (or religious and secular, however you want to couch it) will define 21st century America and reshape politics as we know it.

Take the issue of gay marriage, for example. I cannot think of a domestic issue in which the opposition holds such diverse support. Majorities in all parties, religions, races, sexes and socio-economic conditions are against gay marriage. On the face of it, this is everything that liberals claim to hold dear — multiculturalism, bipartisanship, a coming together of broad cross-sections of Americans — and yet it is wrong, dead wrong.

You might think these issues aren't important enough to reshape politics. Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., in a letter on behalf of the

Alliance for Marriage, said that the threat of gay marriage is a crisis as large as the threat posed by terrorists because both target cornerstones of our culture and faith. He is far from alone in this opinion.

Justice Antonin Scalia, the president's favorite justice, once said that democracy has a tendency to "obscure the divine authority behind government." In other words, he believes that law in America should be based on Christian divinity rather than on secularism. His divine law includes capital punishment for children and all felons including, according to Scalia's own out-of-touch account, "horse thieves."

Meanwhile, back at the executive branch (or ranch, as the case may be), the Bush administration is quietly undoing policies based on sound science in favor of policies based on religious certainty alone.

The examples are too numerous to mention, but here are a few: Faith-based initiatives that allow taxpayer money to fund religious discrimination, Christian fundamentalist judicial nominees and attacks on abortion, privacy, gay rights, the First Amendment, alternative families, health science and comprehensive sex education.

Is it too much to ask that the leaders of a secular government have a belief that science, too, is sacred in its own right?

The separation of church and state — the idea that government should stay out of the absolute truth business — is an unpopular idea that liberals must figure out how to sell to the American people.

We can start this holiday season, the time of year when the colorful falling leaves turn our thoughts to the profound — life and death, family and humanity — by reflecting on the beauty of faith and doubt.

Contact the columnist at davidjagernauth@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.