

HUMOR

We all know the words:
*I led the pigeons to the flag
 Of the United States of America...*

Or something like that.
 On Oct. 14 the Supreme Court agreed to consider whether reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with the words "one nation, under God" was an unconstitutional endorsement of religion by the government.

It's about time.
 I was raised in an agnostic household. My father's attitude toward the existence of a deity was pretty much "Who knows? Who cares?" So I always felt uncomfortable saying "under God" when I wasn't entirely certain there was a big, invisible man in the sky.

My only positive childhood memory of the Pledge of Allegiance is from Mr. Newman's fourth-grade class. Mr. Newman was a single gentleman in his mid-30s, given to florid ties and an above-average enthusiasm for musical theater and physical fitness. He was the first male teacher I ever had. He was also the first man I knew who had pecs.

Every morning when we recited the pledge I would steal a glance at Mr. Newman as he furtively slid his hand inside his jacket and massaged his left tit, undoubtedly sore from chest day at the gym, or perhaps because his nipple was overworked by (what I feverishly imagined to be) an equally fit male lover. Of course, I didn't have pecs of my own at the time, but I knew that when I did, I'd feel the same way about mine as Mr. Newman did about his.

As a gay kid, I grew up with an awareness of what it is to be an outsider. What I seemed to know instinctively as a child—and what the

Fags and flags
 With liberty and justice for most

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARC
 by Marc Acito



supporters of "under God" fail to understand—is that a democracy protects the freedom of all by protecting the freedom of the few.

The Under Godders argue that the Founding Fathers were Christian. Well, the Founding Fathers also wore wigs and high-heeled shoes, so why isn't Congress legislating cross-dressing?

And it's not as if the Pledge of Allegiance is some sacrosanct statement Betsy Ross recited to herself while she was sewing. In fact, the creation of the pledge is actually a story of capitalism, Communism and coincidence.

In 1892, *Youth Companion* magazine, the *Reader's Digest* of its day, commissioned the pledge to honor the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus landing in the New World and giving syphilis to the Indians. The magazine sent out leaflets containing the pledge to schools all over the country.

Now, here's the amazing coincidence. The owners of *Youth Companion* were also in the flag-selling business! Can you imagine? Only in America would a company invent a pledge as a way to move merchandise (26,000 flags to be exact).

Since then, the pledge has been amended three times, the last being in 1954 when the words "under God" were added as a way of distinguishing Americans from the godless Commies. (The author of the pledge, Baptist minister Francis Bellamy, was a Socialist.)

America has changed a lot since 1954, and I'd like to think that an increased sensitivity to "liberty and justice for all" would inspire the courts to amend the pledge once again.

Given the current state of the economy, I might suggest something more accurate like, "One nation, unemployed." Or, with the heightened state of alert under Attorney Generalissimo John Ashcroft, "One nation, under guard." Or perhaps a tribute to the man really running our country: "One vice president, underground."

Make no mistake. I now believe in God with all my heart. And I proudly salute my nation's flag. Just not at the same time. Slipping

God into any secular exercise makes us a nation divisible between believers and non-believers. No one should be excluded from pledging allegiance to the republic for which it stands—not even atheists.



I can't help but notice that the people who rush to protect the flag don't seem remotely concerned that they trample other people's civil rights to do it. Nor do they seem to comprehend that when religion

and government mix, fundamentalism increases. Once you believe God is on your side, you're free to perform whatever atrocities you'd like in His name.

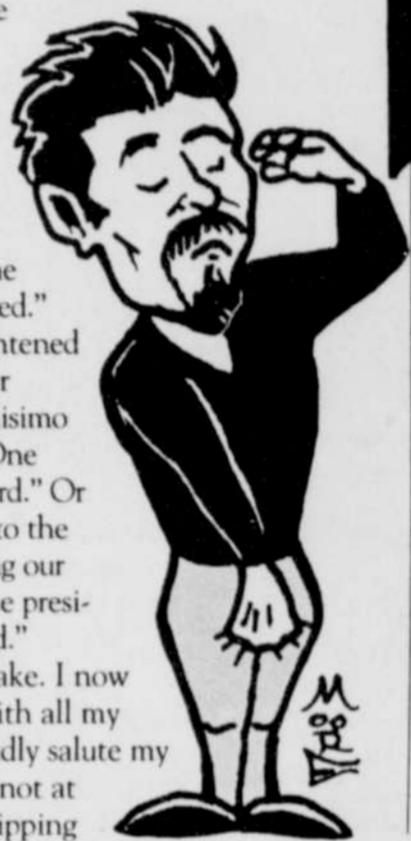
But as long as we're rallying around the flag, I think it's high time the gay community came up with a pledge of our own. After all, we've had the rainbow flag for

25 years now. So would you all please rise, place your hand over your hard-on and recite with me:

*I pledge allegiance to the fags
 Of the United Gays of America,
 And to the recruitment of Britney's fans,
 Fun taste in underwear,
 Individual,
 With Liberace and juicy dish for all.*

And that, my friends, is The Gospel According to Marc. ☐

MARC ACITO's first novel, *How I Paid for College*, will be published by Doubleday in September 2004. Write him at marc@marcacito.com.



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