

RELIGION

Right-to-die issue impending at Supreme Court

Final results highlight the roles religion, age and pain play

As America waits for the U.S. Supreme Court to release its landmark ruling on the right-to-die issue, 30,000 Americans age 55 and over have already offered their opinion on the subject, thanks to an in-depth study by Rx Remedy, Inc., a leading information company specializing in the health concerns of people 55 and over, America's fastest-growing age group.

This is the first-ever national study of the age group most likely to face this ultimate issue. The results show strong across-the-board support for right-to-die legislation. But respondents also voiced concerns about the potential for abuse — for instance, whether some insurers and hospitals might quietly use euthanasia to reduce the cost of caring for terminally ill patients.

Here are other highlights of the

provocative 44-question survey:

- 65% of the 30,000 mature Americans surveyed agree that the terminally ill should have a legal right to commit suicide with a doctor's assistance, and 64% favor enacting legislation to give people this right.

- Atheists are the strongest advocates for the right to die. Catholics are the least inclined to take this ultimate step if terminally ill. Specific percentages by religion of those who support the right to die in the 30,000-person survey: Atheists-96%; Jews-88%; Protestants-68%; Catholics-50%.

- As Americans get older, support doesn't waver. 64.7% of people ages 55-65, 64.8% of those 66-80 and 65.9% of those over age 80 support right-to-die legislation.

- 57% agree that more attention

to pain control could virtually eliminate the need for euthanasia, and 78% agree that it is acceptable to give patients high doses of pain-control drugs (such as morphine), even if it hastens death.

- 53% agree that physicians should be allowed to give people instructions on how to end their own lives; 33% disagree. But a full 90% agree that doctors should be allowed to withhold life-sustaining measures at the direction of a patient, proxy or living will; only 5% disagree.

- Religious beliefs are somewhat more of an obstacle for men than women: 43% of male respondents (vs. 39% of female) say their faith would prevent them from considering suicide for themselves. Even more men, 48% (vs. 43% of women), say faith would prevent them from

helping a terminally ill friend commit suicide.

- Support for physician-assisted suicide is weakest in the Midwest and Deep South. Yet overall, 46 states had 50% or more respondents who supported the right. Interestingly, support was strongest among respondents in the nation's capital — 72% of respondents in Washington, DC say it should be legal.

As for concerns about abuses, the survey elicited dozens of letters. Following are some excerpts:

A nurse of 30 years writes: "Doctor-assisted suicide will become a means of disposing of unwanted people. How soon before insurance companies, Medicare and Medicaid will refuse to pay for extended care?"

Another nurse writes: "Like all

things in government, loopholes will allow people to kill elderly relatives or others under the guise of 'she/he is terminally ill.' Unfortunately, greed is in all professions and I include the medical profession."

A man from Michigan asks: "Who has not experienced periods of deep discouragement, anguish and depression? Are we all to call it quits when that happens? What if Franklin Roosevelt, Itzhak Perlman or Beethoven had given up when physical calamity struck? Many greedy relatives (or even well-meaning ones) try to coax an aged or ailing relative to end it all, saying things like, 'They have lived their lives, haven't they?' I say 'No, no, no.'"

These findings are the first results from a comprehensive study

undertaken by Rx Remedy, Inc., a five-year-old health-information and database-marketing company. The firm has invested \$20 million in building an unparalleled data warehouse about the health practices, attitudes and behavior of American consumers in more than 1.2 million 55+ households.

The 44-question survey was distributed to households in the company database through its consumer link, RxEEMEDY(R) Magazine. Over 100,000 households returned the surveys, many with impassioned letters based on personal experiences. From this response base, 30,000 surveys were selected and tabulated to create a demographically balanced national sample. All sample respondents are age 55 or over; the median age is 71.

Local Actress Passes

Well known Portland actress, Denise Carlen "Nuffy" Williams passed June 16th. Among many, her credits include Ain't Misbehavin', The Colored Museum, Red Beans and Rice, Long Time Since Yesterday and a Los Angeles production of Fame.

Ms. Williams is survived by her: mother, Georgia Williams-Hooper; father, Hugh Williams; brothers, Eddie Denarval, Hugh Michael, II, Brian Keith; sister, Nicole Ronal; a host of aunts and uncles; special friend, James Hill; special cousin, Shawn Daniels; longtime friend, Freda Walker and many more relatives and friends.

Funeral services were held Saturday, June 21st at 12 o'clock noon at Daniels Memorial Church of God in Christ. Internment will be Lincoln Memorial Park.



"We need something different in hip-hop," says Mondo McCann. In one motion, he removes his army fatigue cap, brushes his chocolate brown hand over his low-cut hair, lets out a slight gush of air, and continues: "I'm tired of hearing 'how high I can get.' I'm tired of hearing you just stuck up so-and-so. I'm tired of hearing about your clothes. I'm tired of hearing, 'Yo we need something different' - and nobody could put their hands on it, or know what it was they really needed. So I'm like, 'Bet. That's all you had to say, 'cause I felt the same way.' I'm not buying another record 'til I hear something different."

"We not just getting on the mic on some blah-blah, rah-rah tip," adds Vex (Sean Pollard) in his raspy drawl, erratic locks of hair peeking from underneath his skull cap. "We actually have something to bring to the table that could actually change your perspective on how you're living right now."

Mondo and Vex, co-conspirators in seditious and inspiring musicianship, who together form the itinerant hip-hop duo known as the Boogiemonsters, sit back and relate the meaning of their sophomore offering, God Sound.

Weaving Biblical sensibilities, pre-millennium precariousness and an inquisitive nature of the state of the

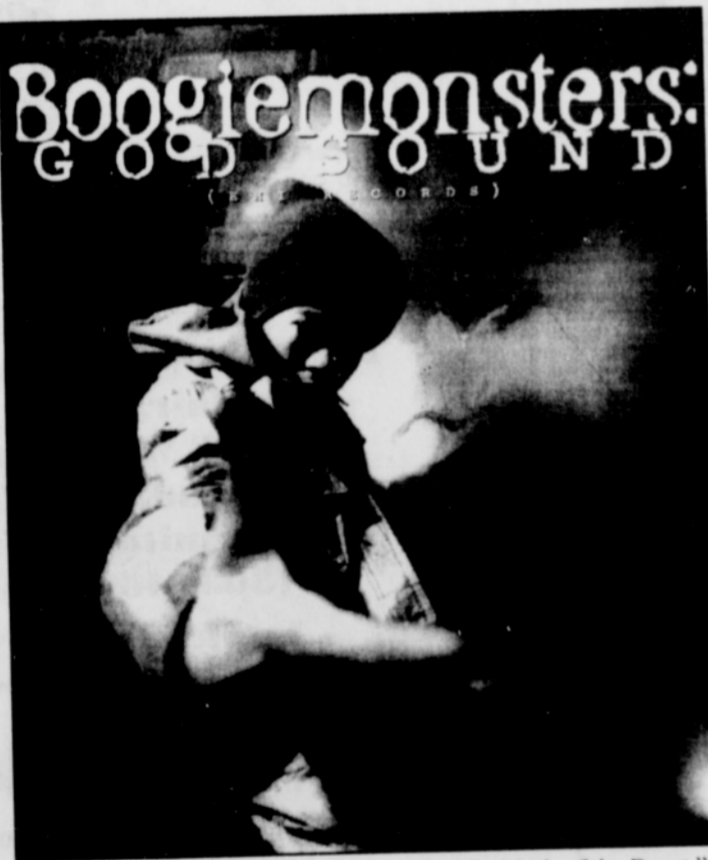
global community within a hip-hop jones, God Sound is an aural tapestry that rings vibrant like a religious revival: a blend that is alternatively prognostic, condemning, uplifting and oftentimes fun; never preaching or condescending; and always loving.

"To me, it's kinda like living in Manhattan and being surrounded by all of these buildings, but yet the sunset is still dope," explains Mondo of the album's title.

"No matter how much you try to take away from it, no matter how high you make the buildings, you still look at it like, 'Yo, that's a phat sunset.'"

Beginning with "Intro," an ominous instrumental score which relays conversation like a smoky jazz piece, God Sound takes the listener by the hand, painting pictures of our relative world juxtaposed next to spiritual imagery and Revelations-type premonition, most notably on "The Beginning of

the End," "Mark of the Beast," "Sodom & Gomorrah" and "Behold A Pale Horse." Here the Boogiemonsters play significant yet low key figures. While schemes of grandiloquence may have other rappers fancying themselves as Biblical Kings, Prophets or Messiahs, Mondo and Vex seem happy to the two unidentified angels taken in by Lot at Sodom's gateway. (Gen. 19.)



Ruling sparks new debate

The Supreme Court's decision in *Agostini v. Felton* will spark new debate about whether controversial school voucher programs are next on the Supreme Court's agenda, according to Dr. Charles Haynes, the First Amendment Center's religious liberty scholar.

"This decision will raise questions in some minds about how high a wall of separation there should be under the First Amendment's Establishment clause," Haynes said. The narrow 5-4 vote ruling held that tax-paid, public school teachers may provide instruction on secular subjects in parochial schools without violating the First Amendment.

"For a majority of the Justices, the government may provide remedial instruction to disadvantaged children in a religious school without advancing religion or becoming entangled

with religion," said Haynes. He noted that both Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who wrote the Court's majority opinion and Justice David Souter, who wrote the dissent, sought to uphold the principle that the government may not advance religion.

They were in conflict, Haynes said, on whether the facts in this case entangle the state in religion in violation of the First Amendment. "While the majority of the Court argues that this decision upholds government neutrality toward religion, the minority claims that it is opening the door to government support for religion" he said.

"This decision may signal support on the Court for other forms of government aid that may be used in sectarian schools, including voucher programs," said Haynes. John Seigenthaler, founder of the First

Amendment Center, said that the question is whether the Court will now allow substantial state funding for private religious education in other cases. "Justice O'Connor's ruling does not knock down the wall of separation between church and state - but it opens another leak in the funding dike that allows state support to flow to religious schools."

The First Amendment Center is a non profit, non partisan institution funded by The Freedom Forum. Its mission is to foster a better public understanding of and appreciation for First Amendment rights and values.

For the complete text of the *Agostini v. Felton* decision and in-depth analysis on the impact of the Court's ruling check the First Amendment Center website at www.fac.org.

Reformed church joins Evangelicals

For a quarter-century, John and Shirley Damore did everything Herbert W. Armstrong told them to: They tithed up to 30 percent of their income, followed Old Testament dietary laws, and sent their children to schools run by the Worldwide Church of God.

For this, the Damores and some 150,000 other church members expected that when Jesus returned to Earth - and that was any day now - they would be among the select few taken to "the place of safety," then transformed into godlike beings ushering in the Kingdom of Christ.

If that is where the story ended, the Worldwide Church of God would qualify as a uniquely American religious success story, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, who carved out an original theology and thrived by never deviating from it.

Instead, after Armstrong's death began one of the most remarkable transformations in American religious history: The church formally declared its founder had been fundamentally wrong all along and that the historic creeds of Christianity were the new gospel.

This spring, the Worldwide Church - once reviled as a cult in conservative Christian circles - was welcomed into the National Association of Evangelicals, a staggering turnaround for a group that once viewed the Catholic Church as the Whore of Babylon decried in Revelation and Protestant churches as the whore's harlot daughters.

How great a change is this? You can't compare it to the Mormons' decision to give up polygamy to assimilate with American culture. Instead, it would be more like the Mormons suddenly becoming Baptists.

The fallout from admitting its members have no faster route to eternal life than other Christians has devastated the church. Annual income has dropped from \$200 million to \$50 million, and membership plunged almost in half.

Three major breakaway denominations have formed, and the number of informal splinter groups could run into the thousands, says Dixon Cartwright, publisher of *The Journal*, an independent publication following the Churches of God.

The people who reject the changes - the ones who won't stop believing they soon will be raised up, while others wait 1,000 years for an uncertain judgment - consider themselves still the true church.

"I'm literally basing my life on that, my eternal life on it," says Rod Meredith, who left Worldwide to lead the new Global Church of God.

But for the thousands who had become estranged from children, neighbors and even spouses because of the old church's rigorous rules, the revolutionary turn toward orthodoxy is a breath of theological fresh air.

"I don't think anything could have been better than to have these changes," says Ron Walston, socializing with his family at the North Dallas Worldwide Church of God on a recent Saturday. "It's absolutely astounding, but it's absolutely wondrous."

In life, he had a penchant for private jet planes and meetings with world leaders. But in death, not even a separate headstone announces the final resting place of Herbert Armstrong.

Baptists condemn Disney

Southern Baptists voted unanimously to boycott Walt Disney Co. theme parks and stores as well as its ABC radio and TV networks, protesting what church leaders say are Disney's "gay friendly" postures such as its same-sex employee benefits and the popular "Ellen" show.

The resolution, which passed with a show of hands of the more than 12,000 delegates, urges "every Southern Baptist to take the stewardship of their time, money and resources so seriously that they refrain from patronizing the Disney Co. and any of its related entities."

"This boycott is another Mickey Mouse attempt by religious conservatives to push their anti-family agenda," said Keith Boykin, executive director of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum.

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