

December 31, 2014

Jack Hawkins, Jr., Ph.D.  
Chancellor

Office of the Chancellor  
216 Adams Administration Building  
Troy, AL 36082  
Phone: (334) 670-3200

Re: Disparaging New Year's Email

Dear Chancellor Hawkins,

American Atheists is contacting you on behalf of a Troy University student, who is concerned about a video you sent to all students and staff in your end-of-year email on December 30. The video asserts that religion, particularly Judeo-Christian beliefs, are necessary to be moral, law-abiding citizens, and implies that those who do not attend church will be anti-democracy and anti-social members of society.

Atheists are not a trivial minority. In Alabama alone, we represent 11% of the population, and statistically even higher numbers in universities and among college-aged residents; as many as 32% of people under age 30 are not religious.

On behalf of the student who contacted us, the Alabama members of American Atheists, the thousands of atheists at Troy University, and the hundreds of millions of atheists worldwide who live productive, law-abiding lives without religion, we demand an apology from you for using the public university email system and your publicly funded position to disparage atheists and minority religious groups as well as perpetuating the discrimination and anti-patriotic sentiment against atheists in the United States.

As you represent an institution of higher learning, we would like to take this opportunity to educate you about atheists and morality. Atheists are overwhelmingly ethical and upstanding people. It is not true that religion is necessary to keep people from becoming criminals.

According to leading secularism researcher Professor Phil Zuckerman at Pitzer College, "We can plainly see that the least religious countries and states are generally the most moral, peaceful, and humane, while the most religious countries and states are the most crime-ridden, corrupt, and socially troubled. End of discussion."

In fact, in the United States, in states with the highest percentages of atheists, the murder rate is lower than average. In the most-religious states, the murder rate is higher than average.

Further, on average and generally speaking, atheists have fewer divorces, abortions, and STDs, and lower poverty rates, homicide rates, overall crime rates, and teen pregnancy rates. As a

demographic, atheists have higher IQs, incomes, education rates, and literacy rates, and more Nobel Prizes and university professorships.

We need to teach young people to use critical thinking and be more skeptical, not more obedient. Teaching as such leads—demonstrably—to more ethical behavior.

American Atheists will be hosting its annual national convention the first weekend in April at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis. We invite you to attend any or all of the events to experience for yourself what atheism and atheists are like. We believe that personal experience helps fight ignorance so we invite you to be our special guest.

We ask for a public apology to the student, and other atheists whom you have disparaged with the video you included in your email.

Sincerely,

David Silverman  
President, American Atheists

American Atheists Center  
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