

MAY 1996

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Lecture on Christian Right at Sierra 2

"The Christian Right and Political Power - 1996 and Beyond" is the title of a lecture that will be given by Sara Diamond, one of the country's leading experts on the Christian Right and right-wing movements. Her books include *Roads to Dominion: Right Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (1995), and *Facing the Wrath: Confronting the Right in Dangerous Times* (1996).

The lecture will be given on Thursday, May 9, 1996 at 7:30 pm at the Sierra 2 Community Center (2791 24th Street., Sacramento) in the main theater. The price of a ticket is at least \$5. (Additional donations are welcome).

The Central America Action Committee is sponsoring this event. Several groups, such as the Interfaith Alliance and Project Tocsin, (which are interested in the separation of church and

state) will be in attendance. There will be a question and answer period after the lecture and also time for discussion about what we can do to counteract the actions of the Religious Right. Since this topic is at the core of AOF's purpose, we encourage all AOF members to attend.

Quote of the Month

"The time has come to knock off this religion business in American politics. There's no end to the mischief that can occur. It's like putting nitroglycerine in a Waring blender." **Lowell Weicker, US Senator (and later Governor) of Connecticut, 1984**

President's desk - Pride

This year I have been very aware that we have tried to focus on the *positives* of atheism so I want to conclude my "President's Desk" column by listing some of the positive thoughts I've collected from various readings and from my own conclusions:

We do not hanker for the past, but continue cheerfully on our way to other things. We are ready for the adventure of this real life.

Our thinking is not poisoned by the thinking imposed by a belief system. We are not bending our minds to fit a creed.

We see all people as equal. No group is "chosen."

We die without fear.

We are not content with injustices, cruelties, and chicaneries - thinking they will be righted in the 'hereafter.' Rather, we try to improve things in our lifetime.

We strengthen ourselves with knowledge

We do not parade ourselves in humility.

We do not use our precious time pondering over one book.

We believe in the steady and clarifying conflict of ideas.

We women are free from the lowly position that women are put in within the religious communities.

We grant that every man can "believe in any theory of religion or politics or social conduct which is preferred by him, we do not forget that we have an equal right to promote our own ideas and to attack, relentlessly and clearly, ideas which we recognize as vicious in theory and inevitably vicious also in practice. (From *meaning of Atheism* by E. Halderman Julius, p.6.) (Thinking of the ritual practice of female circumcision or withholding birth control information.)

Atheism is sanity. Life is much prized by atheists.

We are free from the fear and terror that a belief system instills.

We take responsibility and credit for what we do.

Highway Clean-up Update

AOF completed another highway clean-up on Sunday, March 31 at 10:00 am. The day was beautiful, the weather just cool enough for such work, and the company was great. Fourteen AOFers turned out to pitch in. Because so many people helped, and because the highway was the cleanest it has been since our adoption of it, the work went fast - some found the day more of a walk than work!

CALTRANS has assigned AOF the two-mile portion of Highway 99 between Elkhorn Blvd. and Elverta Road. Anyone who wishes to see our signs can travel north from Sacramento on I-5, past Arco Arena, to the exit designated "Highway 99, Yuba City Marysville." Less than one mile north, at the Elkhorn exit, is our southernmost sign. On the other side of the highway, just south of Elverta Road, is the sign for the southbound traffic. The project allows us to announce our existence and to show the community that we are doing our part toward community service.

We will alternate our clean-up days between Saturdays and Sundays to accommodate those for whom one day is more convenient than the other. Also we will set the starting time according to the seasonal weather, i.e., early afternoon in winter, early morning in the summer. Therefore, the next clean-up day will be SATURDAY, June 1, at 8:00 am. **Be sure to bring sunscreen and you own bottle or canteen of water** for this outing, as it does get warm as the day goes on. If 8:00 am is just too early for a Saturday, please feel free to join us at a later time - we can use any help you can offer. Just let me know when you plan to arrive and I will look for you at the starting point.

Details of this event will be announced again at the next AOF meeting, and on the AOF voice mail. If you are interested in more information or would like to volunteer, we'd love to hear from you!

March to Fight the Right

by Larry Judkins

Larry is an AOF member who has a regular column (*Atheist Perspectives*) in the Sacramento Valley Mirror, in which the following article appeared April 16, 1996.

Thousands marched in San Francisco on Sunday April 14, to protest the incursions of the "Radical Right" in American society and politics. The US Parks Police estimated the crowd at about 13,000. However the National Organization for Women, the sponsor of the event, placed the number of participants at approximately 40,000. The progression moved westward through the Marina District in the north part of the city. It ended about a mile and a half away at Crissy Field, a beach area in the Presidio area.

Besides NOW, groups participating in the march included a variety of feminist and abortion rights organizations, civil rights groups, labor unions, and gay and lesbian associations. Political outlooks ranged from moderate to extreme left, with a number of socialist and communist organizations taking part. The International Socialist Organization was represented, as was Act Up and the Gray Panthers. Members of the California Teachers Association were there, along with Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Sacramento-based Atheist and Other Freethinkers.

Participants came from as far away as the states of Washington, Idaho, and even Maine. Students from colleges and universities from all over California were present in abundance. Many of the marchers carried signs and banners. A number of signs protested the California Civil Rights Initiative. One woman carried a sign which read, "Keep Your Rosaries Out Of My Ovaries." A golden retriever was spotted with a sign draped over its back that proclaimed, "Neutered Male For Choice."

Music, songs, and chants could be heard all along the route of the march. One lesbian organization chanted: "Two, four, six, eight! How do you know your grandma's straight?!" Another group of women belly danced - on stilts - the entire length of the procession. Police officers were out in force, and there seemed to be very little trouble during the march. However, one marcher was called a "faggot" as he walked by a man playing volleyball near the beach.

At the end of the march a rally took place at Crissy Field where several famous people gave short speeches. Among those who spoke were actors Danny Glover and Melanie Mayron, Mayor Willie Brown, activists Dick Gregory, Delores Huerta, and Jesse Jackson, and feminists Patricia Ireland and Eleanor Smeal. Thousands seemed speechless by Rev. Jackson, who began with his trademark call for the audience to loudly proclaim, "I am...somebody!" Gloria Steinem had spoken to the crowd at the beginning of the march.

Some of the participants in the march and rally were upset by the "extremist" groups and individuals who attended. For instance, one gentleman, who is himself gay, complained about the presence of ACT UP. Another person, a young woman whose sister is a lesbian, was sure that her sister would not have approved of the topless lesbians who chanted, "Two, four, six, eight! We think sodomy is great!" Overall, however, everyone seemed happy with the turnout and was confident that everything went well.

Besides Larry, the AOF contingent consisted of 11 members who carried an "Atheists and Other Freethinkers" banner and wore T-Shirts with our organization's name on them.

May Program

Our general Meeting on Sunday May 12, 1996 will feature our own Jon Pederson who was once a fundamentalist preacher in the midwest. He will discuss his personal experience as a fundamentalist and we will learn how he has evolved into a dedicated member of Atheists and Other Freethinkers. This type of transformation has happened to many people over the years-here is our chance to hear about the experience first-hand.

ELECTIONS!

Don't forget that the annual election for a new Board of Directors will take place at the May Meeting. Be sure to exercise your voting privileges! After Jon's presentation and the elections, we will have refreshments and time for socializing on the patio adjoining our meeting room. Please join us for this altogether informative and pleasant gathering.

Famous Atheist Coming to Sacramento

Radio talk-show host and outspoken atheist, Tom Leykis is coming to Sacramento sometime in May. The date or place has not been announced yet, but Tom mentioned that he thought the show would be taking place somewhere in Old Sac. Although Tom does not proselytize for atheism or freethought, his frequent public comments concerning his atheism has helped greatly to put the face of humanity on atheism - which just so happens to fit nicely within AOF's statement of purpose. I think it would be a fun thing to have a good showing of Atheists and Other Freethinkers at his show, don't you? Tom's show airs on Radio 650 am from 3:00 pm to 7:00 pm.

by Pat Kelley

Atheist Convention a Stunner!

It was easy to imagine *a world beyond belief* (the theme of the conference) at the second annual convention of the [Atheist Alliance](#). The jam-packed workshops, banquets, debates, social hours and attitude adjustment talk-fests were cornucopias of freethought wit, wisdom and fun. This year's gathering, held at the Sheraton Park Place Hotel in Minneapolis-St Paul Minnesota, took place during the Easter weekend.

Hank and I arrived on Thursday in time to attend a debate at the University of Minnesota between William Lane Craig, professor of Philosophy of religion at Talbot Seminary, and Quentin Smith, professor of Philosophy, University of Western Michigan. Although outnumbered by members of the Campus Crusade for Christ and like-minded god-centered beings, we of the [Atheist Alliance](#) arrived in style in limos and clapped wildly to show our support for the University of Minnesota Atheists and Humanists, and Internet Infidels who helped sponsor the event.

From Friday evening on, [Atheist Alliance](#) hosts presented speakers, programs and lectures. Topics ranged from philosophical inquiry (our own Hank Kocol gave a speech on the scientific method) to an examination of the connection between Star Trek and freethought. The latter was presented by Scott Lohman (Minneapolis) and Margaret Downey (Philadelphia) in costume as Captains Kirk and Janeway!

Some highlights of the conference: Awards were presented to activists Howard Kreisner (San Diego), who fought to remove the cross on Mount Soledad, and Margaret Downey, who took on the Boy Scouts; the member societies of the Alliance reported on what they are doing and AOF received applause for our charity dinner and highway cleanup projects, our participation in the "Fight the Right" march, and for our representation in the press; Alliance members from Colorado are promoting tax reform- proposing to tax non-profits who benefit from their tax-exempt status; slides from AOF were featured in a montage of pictures from member societies.

How does the [Atheist Alliance](#) work? AOF is an autonomous group as is every group in the Alliance. We make our own rules. But membership in the [Atheist Alliance](#) allows us to benefit from a larger network of freethinking people and gives all of us more clout and support. At the present there are twelve member societies. Each member society has a voice on the [Atheist Alliance](#) board which decides policy by vote. Also, the [Atheist Alliance](#) maintains friendly ties with other freethought organizations such as the American Humanists, Rationalists, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation. AOF remits annual dues of \$125 for these membership privileges.

Member societies may, if they choose, host the annual conference of the [Atheist Alliance](#). Profits are shared with the Alliance. It is tentatively planned that the next convention will be held in Florida, probably in the Orlando area, during the Easter weekend in March 1997. I urge everyone

to make plans now to attend. The conference is educational, inspiring in a liberating way, and just plain fun. **by Cleo Kocol**

FYI Freethought News You Can Use

Atheist Magazine

The [Atheist Alliance](#) publishes the "only atheist magazine in the USA," the Secular Nation. Howard Kreisner, editor, solicits freethought material. Send typed or PC compatible floppy disk to PO Box 4786, San Diego CA 92164-0786 or send your work to ATHALSDH@aol.com. Membership dues collected from [Atheist Alliance](#) societies plus subscription fees make the magazine possible. Subscriptions are \$14 annually for four issues per year. The subscription address is: Secular Nation, PO Box 567 Burlingame CA 94011-0567.

Freethought Bumper sticker

Seen enough "Abortion stops a beating heart" bumper stickers? RSPI Freethought Products has answered that with a "RELIGION STOPS A THINKING MIND!" bumper sticker. You can get your own for \$2 each or 10 for \$15. (Already California and Kentucky lead the way in numbers of orders for this sticker!) Send check to: RSPI PO Box 1444 Brookfield WI 53008-1444.

Source: The Sacramento Bee, Monday, March 18, 1996

Atheists get permit for Easter ceremony

San Diego cross longtime site of Christian service

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO - Unbelievers have taken the high ground for Easter. The Atheist Coalition of San Diego has received city approval to hold an Easter Sunday ceremony beneath a 40-foot cross on Mount Soledad.

"This isn't being done to besmirch Christianity or to kick sand in anyone's face," said Peter Irons, 55, a professor at the University of California, San Diego, who put in the application. "The whole point is to open up (the sunrise service) to everybody, not just Christians.

For more than 40 years, local Christians by the dozen or hundreds have celebrated Easter at the white cross on the hill overlooking La Jolla.

But last month Irons, acting on a whim and without the atheist group's knowledge, applied its name for city permission to gather on April 7 at Soledad Natural Park, which surrounds the cross. To his surprise, he was accepted, and the atheists embraced the idea.

"It's first come, first serve," said Andy Guyer, the Department of Parks and Recreation area manager who processed the permit and found himself fielding angry citizen calls afterward.

"It's very insensitive," said William J. Kellogg, president of the Mount Soledad Memorial Association, which built the cross 42 years ago. "Our community has enjoyed having that service for many years."

"The Christians didn't know they were in a race to get to the permit office," said Edward Starkey, president of the Ecumenical Council of San Diego county, which represents about 100 churches. "Most of these churches are regarding (the atheists' ceremony) as a sad little event.

The atheists "trampled on human decency," said an editorial in the San Diego Union-Tribune.

Former mayor Roger Hedgecock said callers to his radio talk show were divided.

"Half of them were outraged, saying that for the atheists to target that day was like showing up...for a pork barbecue at a Passover seder," Hedgecock said. "The other half were delighted that the atheists were going to be there beside a cross and said they'd be praying for them" to become Christians.

Kellogg said the sunrise service always has been open to anyone and the cross isn't exclusively a religious symbol anyway.

"It was a community wide effort to create a lasting memorial to the people who died in World War I and II and Korea," he said. "They (the builders) were not trying to proselytize some religious belief.

"We're going to have as inclusive a gathering as we can," said Craig Kelso, 25, an atheist who heads an ad hoc group called The Park Belongs To Everyone, which is organizing the Easter-morning event.

Kelso said some Christian churches plan to participate. He has invited Buddhists, Jews, Muslims and a witch to what's billed as "a gathering and a protest" against oppression.

The witches are a little iffy, though. "I don't know if witches even get up early enough on Sunday mornings," said Irons, a Unitarian.

Calendar of Events

Thursday, May 9	Lecture - Sara Diamond
Sunday, May 12	General Meeting
Sunday, May 12	Newsletter Deadline for Submissions
Tuesday, May 21	Board Meeting
Saturday, June 1	Highway Cleanup
Saturday, June 9	General Meeting