

Atheists and Other Freethinkers Newsletter

April 1999

Contents

- [April Meeting](#)
- [March Program](#)
- [Election Time](#)
- [Freethinkers Forum](#)
- [Highway Cleanup](#)
- [Atheist Alliance Conference](#)
- [New York Bill on "Vilifying" Religion](#)
- [Alabama Law](#)
- [Internet Site of the Month](#)
- [Calendar of Events](#)

April Meeting

Peter Keat, SMUD District 5 Director, will speak at the April 11 meeting on "Cooperatives and Other Democratically Controlled Enterprises: Why They Matter." Peter has been an influential force for cooperation in this area. He was a catalyst 25 years ago in the founding of the Davis and Sacramento Food Coops, which today account for a combined \$20 million in annual sales. He has served on the Sacramento Coop Board 14 of the last 18 years. He expresses fears of the decline of democracy, and believes that Coops preserve the essence of democracy.

March Program

The speaker for the March meeting was Mary Jo Brooks, on the topic of "Misogyny and Religion". In her introductory remarks, Ms Brooks shared with the audience that she was a long time member of AOF but had not attended often during the last 6 years, during which she has been a volunteer on Sundays at a local animal shelter. Mary Jo is a former chapter head of the National Organization for Women, but recently she parted with NOW for philosophical reasons. She said she remains a militant feminist. Ms Brooks introduced her talk as one of opinions, but her talk and the lengthy Q&A period afterward turned out to be one of AOF's more captivating and thought-provoking talks in the last year.

A repeated theme of Ms Brooks' talk was the irrational fact that so many women support religions and find them valuable despite the many forms of derogation of women by organized faiths. This irrationality was brought home to her when a close friend was murdered by the friend's estranged husband, who then based his defense on religious precepts. Mary Jo asserted

that in reality he could no longer control his wife. This need to control women by men and through the institutions created by men was a second and related theme in her remarks.

The icons of our major religions, Allah, Buddha, and Jesus, all are male, while classical Greek and Roman cultures had some women gods. No religions have harems for women and polygamy seems to be biased for the benefit of men. Mary Jo Brooks was Southern Baptist-raised in Mississippi. She saw no women in decision-making or management roles in the Southern churches, but plenty of women in lesser supporting roles. Maybe this is less true in the West.

The Bible seems to mention women only as either perfect virgins or harlots. But the disparaging words like "harlot" and "whore" are

almost never applied to men in Bible. Unlike men, there are no in-between women types.

Ruth and Esther are the only women for whom books are named, but Ruth was not particularly glamorized and Esther was a queen. Eve is most maligned woman in Bible, the one who desired to touch the tree of knowledge, resulting in the downfall of mankind. And Mary set a standard impossible to meet.

Ms Brooks cannot understand how women can accept and actively seek the subservient role. The men act as if they are divinely commanded, with the idea that all problems in world are a consequence of lack of adoption of their values. Contraceptive and sex education, abortion, homosexuality, family planning, all are opposed by the male religious establishment because they all have the common direct or indirect consequence of men losing control over women.

On the other hand, domestic violence, rape, incest, child violence, and discrimination are major related problems, but sermons and church programs tend not to treat these subjects. While some extreme churches support forces against abortion clinics, there are no forces against incest and domestic violence.

Ms Brooks concluded her remarks by noting again that many supporting workers in the church are themselves victims and this syndrome is not understood. Many women have given up promising careers. Many of these women support men who have committed crimes against the women.

This interesting talk was followed by many wide-ranging questions and discussions. The most controversial (and to many AOFers a waste of time) was a debate about the value of Bible, provoked by one person who was a Promise Keeper and for some unknown reason felt compelled to come to an AOF meeting.

Steve Knapp

Election Time

It is that time of year to elect our board members. We are looking for intelligent and energetic people to participate in bringing our organization into the new millennium. It is a very interesting to participate in forming the events and choosing the speakers. Positions are: president, vice president, treasurer, secretary and three directors at large. We look forward to hearing from qualified candidates. Elections will be held at the May meeting. Contact 920-7834.

Freethinker's Forum

A Freethinker's Forum will be hosted on Saturday, April 17, at 6:30 p.m. The topic will be "The Mythology of the Virtue of Competition." Please call 920-7834 or e-mail PegLucas@webtv.net, for info and directions.

Highway cleanup

Eight hearty AOF members braved hostile-looking storm clouds to clean our two-mile stretch of Highway 99 just north of Elkhorn Blvd. Dave Flanders, Mynga Futrell, Paul Geisert, Don Knutson, Hank & Cleo Kocol, Betty Simonsma and Pete Studelska picked up 15 trash bags of errant refuse while enjoying the cool, crisp conditions. Our next cleanup is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, May 16 at 9am. Please consider joining us.

Atheist Alliance Conference

By now, all AOF members should be aware that AOF will host the Year 2000 (Y2K) Conference of the Atheist Alliance, Incorporated. The Conference will be held over Easter weekend, April 21-23. This is a great opportunity for AOF in at least two ways:

1. Members of AOF who could not otherwise attend an AAI Conference will be able to do so;
2. Any profit (or loss) at the Conference will be split evenly between the host organization (AOF) and AAI.

The Conference typically begins with dinner on the first evening, April 21. There will be a keynote speaker who is meant to be light but will set the tone for the Conference.

On Saturday morning, typically, the official opening of the Conference occurs with welcomes by AAI and AOF. Lectures are given by well-known members of the freethought movement. These can include state-church separation issues, philosophy, the scientific method, history, activities by individual and/or groups of freethinkers. After lunch, there are usually workshops where smaller groups discuss problems of freethought in our society or internationally. Past workshops

have included Internet support sites for freethought, building a freethought organization, and getting the freethought message to the media and the community.

Saturday evening begins with dinner followed by awards to members of the freethought movement for their past actions. Usually, another speaker then gives a presentation.

On Sunday morning, representatives of the associated organizations give reports on their activities. The Conference ends at noon.

During Friday, before dinner, and on Sunday afternoon, the Board of AAI meets. All members, of course, are welcome to attend Board meetings.

We now have a committee of four to select the hotel site for the Conference. We have bids from the Holiday Inn (downtown), the Radisson, and the Doubletree. The committee intends to visit each bidder to judge the facilities relative to AAI requirements. We expect to have the hotel selected before mid-April, 1999.

Soon, we will need help from the AOF membership. The first order of business will be developing the program. If any AOF members have suggestions for speakers and/or workshop leaders, please let any AOF Board member know. Later, we will need help with designing the program, printing, and, very important, a treasurer who will establish a bank account, accept registrations, and keep track of registrants and the money. As the Conference nears, we will need people to work with the hotel staff to ensure that room arrangements have been made, audio-visual equipment is available and working as needed, and to staff the registration desks for the Conference.

Please begin thinking NOW of the part(s) you may play to make this the most successful AAI Conference ever!

Hank Kocol, Co-Chair, Conference Committee.

New York Bill on "Vilifying" Religion

(This note came over the Internet from Gerry Dantone of Long Island Secular Humanists. It has been edited for length.)

A bill has been introduced in the NY State legislature to make a crime of "vilifying" or making fun of religion, "religious groups", or "the deity " in a public place.

Here is the bill and it's a humdinger!

Section 1. The penal law is amended by adding two new sections - to read as follows:

S 245.20 RIDICULE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR PRACTICES; DEFINITIONS OF TERMS.

THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS ARE APPLICABLE TO SECTION 245.21:

1. "DEITY" INCLUDES ANY APPELLATION, SYMBOL OR FIGURE OF ANY PARTICULAR FORM OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP, BELIEF, DENOMINATION, SECT OR CLASS OF PEOPLE PROFESSING A PARTICULAR AND WELL-DEFINED FORM OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND PRACTICES, WHICH BY RECOGNIZED STANDARDS OF SUCH DENOMINATION, SECT OR CLASS OF PEOPLE INDICATES THE DEITY OR IS REASONABLY REFERABLE ALONE TO SUCH DEITY.
2. "PUBLIC PLACE" SHALL HAVE THE SAME MEANING AS SUCH TERM IS DEFINED IN SUBDIVISION ONE OF SECTION 240.00 OF THIS CHAPTER. S 245.21 RIDICULE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR PRACTICES. A PERSON IS GUILTY OF RIDICULE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR PRACTICES WHEN IN A PUBLIC PLACE, HE:
 1. HOLDS UP THE DEITY OR THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PRACTICES, SYMBOLS, FIGURES OR OBJECTS OF ANY RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION, SECT OR CLASS OF PEOPLE, TO RIDICULE, HATRED, MOCKERY, CONTEMPT OR OBLOQUY; OR
 2. PRESENTS, PORTRAYS OR DEPICTS THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PRACTICES, SYMBOLS, FIGURES OR OBJECTS OF ANY RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION IN AN OBSCENE, LEWD, PROFANE OR LASCIVIOUS MANNER. RIDICULE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR PRACTICES IS A CLASS B MISDEMEANOR.

Now get this: The law is a response to the movie "Life of Brian" by Monty Python. Here is the "justification" listed:

Since Monty Python's "Life of Brian" was boycotted for its ridicule of all religions, religious ridicule has been a major issue among the clergy. The movie was seen by religious leaders as a cruel and blasphemous mockery of religion.

This legislation is religiously neutral while focusing on the need for protection against attacks on religion (it really says this - G.D.).

Since the CSH is in New York State, it is important. Imagine going to jail for showing "Life of Brian." I wonder if the Monty Python guys know about this.

If you read the statute carefully it says this, omitting the unimportant phrases in-between:

A PERSON IS GUILTY OF RIDICULE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR PRACTICES WHEN IN A PUBLIC PLACE, HE: HOLDS UP ... THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ... OF ANY ... CLASS OF PEOPLE, TO RIDICULE, HATRED, MOCKERY, CONTEMPT OR OBLOQUY;

The above section of the law seemingly would outlaw the public reading or professing of much of the Bible, in particular its treatment of non-believers. It would definitely outlaw MUCH of what Pat Robertson says about secular humanists on his website or TV show. I wonder if it would be applied fairly? Nahhhh!

Alabama Law

While on the subject of state laws, Peggy

Lucas sent in this note from the Sacramento News and Review:

Alabama has a law banning the sale of sex toys, and a court there is considering the constitutionality of the law. It is being challenged by the ACLU and a group of women. The Alabama Attorney General is defending the law on the basis that there is no constitutional right "to purchase a product to use in pursuit of having an orgasm." If the law survives the challenge, violators will be subject to a year in jail and a \$10,000 fine. The Libertarian Party issued a press release, advising the judge "It's time to give a 'Big No' to politicians who try to regulate the 'Big O'."

Internet site of the month

www.thepoint.net/~effields/ - The Bank of Wisdom, home page of Emmett F. Fields, with works of Robert Ingersoll and others.