

February 1998

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Darwin Birthday Celebration

Sponsored by AOF and HAGSA

Atheists & Other Freethinkers (AOF) and HAGSA (Humanist Association of The Greater Sacramento Area) are sponsoring a very special event on Sunday February 15th. The event is in honor of Charles Darwin's birthday! The celebration will be held from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Curtis Hall, 2791 24th Street, in Sacramento.

The speaker at the Charles Darwin Birthday Celebration will be Dr. Eric T. Pengelley, Professor Emeritus, Evolution and Zoology, Division of Biological Sciences, University of California, Davis. Dr. Pengelley is an expert on Darwin, his life, the voyage of the Beagle, and the Theory of Evolution, all of which will be discussed during this presentation.

The cost of the event is \$6.50 per person, which includes a catered Mexican lunch and the lecture. Pre-registration is required, so if you're planning to attend, send a check for \$6.50 made payable to AOF (along with a self-addressed stamped envelope) to:

AOF
P.O. Box 15182
Sacramento, CA 95851

Because the caterer needs advance notice of the number of lunches to prepare, the deadline for purchasing tickets is AOF's regular monthly meeting which is on Sunday February 8th. There will be no ticket sales at the door, and seating is limited!

February 8th AOF Program

On Sunday February 8th AOF will hold its next general membership meeting. The meeting will feature Don Havis, President of the Humanist Community of the Peninsula. The title of Don's presentation will be, "You Are Smarter Than You Think; Your Seven Intelligences." Join AOFers for this very interesting presentation at the Sierra 2 Community Center in our regular meeting room #10.

Camp Quest -- A Special Place

Camp Quest, the nation's first residential summer camp for children of secular humanists, is now accepting applications for campers and adult volunteer staff for its third year of operation. This session runs July 18-26 for boys and girls 8-13, and for Counselors in Training (CITs) 14-15, at a facility near Cincinnati, Ohio.

Camp Quest is operated by the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, and is sponsored and endorsed by the Council for Secular Humanism. For information and applications contact:

Camp Quest
P.O. Box 264
Union, KY 41506
(606) 384-2324
fax (606) 384-7324
e-mail CampQuest@aol.com

President's Message

by Hank Kocol

For the past few days, newspapers have printed articles concerning the month of Ramadan as it is "celebrated" within the Islamic community, including daily prayers and daytime fasting. The

articles have been generally non-critical of Islam, seemingly sympathetic to Islamic laws. In general, Islam is shown as a religion not unlike others with which readers are familiar.

Of course, Islam has much in common with other organized religions, be they the various forms of Christianity, Judaism, or Hinduism. They all postulate a subordinate role for women. They all deem acts which are natural to humans and do not injure others as wrong. They are all structured on a hierarchy which makes moral and canonical judgments for the rest of their members with no thought to human nature or rational ethics. They are, in short, all authoritarian, dogmatic, enclosed within their own small worlds, distrustful of outsiders, separatist in nature, and postulate destruction, in one way or another, for any who are recalcitrant, freethinking, or demon-haunted enough not to see the "truth" as defined by its hierarchy.

Reporters excuse Islamic subordination of women by asking self-professed Islamic women concerning such subordination. The responses from the women go far in indicating the brain-washed "thinking" which has been inculcated into those women. Of course, they see no problems, since they have been told that is the natural way which Allah has intended. As with Christianity, no committed woman will note any discrimination in the way she is treated by "her" religion. There was no mention, in the articles I read, about the problem of female circumcision, which is recognized, generally, in this country, as a horrible example of treatment by Islam relative to its female members.

There is no discussion of Islam's consideration that women are chattel -- they consider the Islamic paradise as being one in which the male has all his sexual needs gratified for eternity; there is no mention of the woman's needs for all that time.

There are also, in the articles, no mention of the world-wide terrorism practiced by Islamic members; indeed, such terrorism is exalted by Islamic priests as the highest spiritual act that a truly devout adherent can commit. Dying in such an act promises immediate entrance into the paradise briefly described above.

It would be a great step forward were the media to publish truly critical information concerning Islam. Unfortunately, the media do recognize that such truthfulness in reporting on one religion may open the gates to truthfulness concerning other religions, perhaps even Christianity, god forbid.

December AOF Program

by Steve Knapp

AOF's December speaker was Clara Henderson, volunteer lobbyist for state/church issues, and she spoke on the subject, "Fighting the Two-Headed Dragon, Church and State." Ms. Henderson accompanied her talk with a few handouts regarding the untaxed status of churches in the USA.

She said that she was not originally against religion. A taxation professional, she began to ask about religion in 1988. In the last seven years or so she has come to realize that religions are generally unregulated, are outside the law, and are untaxed. She said that contributions to religions are doubly untaxed, while investments are doubly taxed. Religions get all the breaks, but not their congregations. Ms. Henderson placed some emphasis on the Catholic church, one of the largest recipients of the tax exemption.

Ms. Henderson discussed recent attacks on Proposition 13. She said that taxing of churches would "save the education budget in California" and other reduced services. But politicians would prefer to repeal Proposition 13 rather than tax churches. She opined that this course would lead to further deterioration in ownership of homes by seniors, for example.

She provided a revised version of the ten commandments in her handout, and their elaboration in her book that she is writing. One of her themes is that many of our institutions, and those in most countries, were written by religious leaders. Both politicians and churches have tax exemptions, and freedom from audits; thus they walk hand-in-hand, and support the exemptions.

There were numerous questions from the audience. Clara said she would run for the governor's office, but someone else has to provide the effort and money, as she has been on this topic for seven years at her own expense. She mentioned that church officials also pronounce on political issues from the pulpit, and sometimes also endorse particular candidates (which is not permitted by law), and that some churches also often have petitions on tables in the churches about political questions, which is not legal.

An article by Ms. Henderson appears in this newsletter.

Local AU Chapter Meeting

The next Sacramento AU (Americans United for Separation of Church and State) meeting will be held at the California Teachers Association at 1118 10th Street, Sacramento, on Wednesday February 18th at 5:00 p.m. For more information regarding local AU meetings, contact Susan Mogull at (916) 944-3459.

Atheist Programming For Your Viewing Pleasure

Wednesday February 4th 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- Dan Barker, Freedom From Religion Foundation -- Channel 74

Sunday February 8th 9:00 pm, Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists) -- EEOC Guidelines for Religion -- Channel 74

Wednesday February 11th 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- to be announced -
- Chan. 74

Thursday February 12th 5:30 pm, Atheists Talk -- Religious Right Exposed

Sunday February 15th 9:00 pm, Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists) -- American Atheists in
Washington, D.C. -- Channel 74

Wednesday February 18th 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- to be announced -
- Chan. 74

Sunday February 22nd 9:00 pm, Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists) -- Religion and Racism
-- Chan. 74

Wednesday February 25th 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- to be announced -
- Chan. 74

Thursday February 26th 5:30 pm, Atheists Talk -- Freethought History

Sunday March 1st 9:00 pm, Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists) -- Atheist Mailbag --
Channel 74

Wednesday March 4th 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- to be announced --
Chan. 74

Initiative

by Clara Henderson

The continual conversion of private, tax-paying land to the status of either private, or public, tax-exempt has eroded the tax base of every city, county, state, and nation of the world.

The rationale that the tax-exempt status provides for the separation of Church and State is completely without merit, because it has been granted to such a vast array of revenue producing corporations. Unlike many nonprofit corporations, religious organizations are not subject to the scrutiny of any taxing authority, and provides for the collusion between Church-State.

As real property is acquired by religious organizations, the opportunity is lost for any revenue and job producing entity on that site. Churches are social institutions, most often gated and locked when not exclusively in use by its members, and are clearly not the highest and best use of our land, a diminishing resource.

Churches discriminate on the basis of race, color, and creed, yet are allowed to operate completely outside the law: Unlicensed, Untaxed, Ungoverned, and absent any Code of Ethics.

Religion is a personal preference and decision.

The tax-benefit law states that a deduction be allowed the payer, when the recipient includes the amount in their gross income.

The 1986 Major Tax reform Act phased out personal interest as a Schedule A itemized deduction, though it adhered to the tax-benefit rule. Disallowance of personal interest expense is the root of increased foreclosures and bankruptcies. When the real estate market was up, taxpayers purchased personal goods and services on the equity in their residence. The real estate market dropped, people lost their jobs, and subsequently their homes.

Dividends paid by "for-profit" corporations also violate the tax-benefit rule and result in double taxation. Dividends paid are not deductible by the corporation in arriving at its taxable income, and stockholders are taxed on the same dollars.

Personal payment to the religious organization of one's choice violates the tax-benefit rule. A deduction is allowed to the payer, yet the recipient does not include, or report the income to any taxing authority, state or federal. Because religious organizations have successfully lobbied against the issuance of the form 1099, no one knows the revenue collected!

Payments to politicians and political action committees adhere to the tax-benefit rule. The payer receives no deduction, and the recipient is not taxed on the dollars received. Because no one contributes large dollars without reason, collusion is suspect. Even more suspect are the unreported dollars received by the clergy that may flow into the politician's pocket, absent any audit trail.

Religious organizations created in America, by virtue of the First Amendment and the tax-exempt status, have eroded the tax base of the world.

Charity Dinner

by Cleo Kocol

What are the aspects of AOF that are roundly applauded at national meetings? They are the Charity Dinner and the Highway Cleanup. We cannot let this aspect of helping society go to the Christians by matter of default because of lack of help on the part of freethinking people.

Our last coordinator, Kay Stinson, did a marvelous job, but as with anything, she finally had to call a halt. Paul Geisert has offered to take over as coordinator this summer when he will again be back in Sacramento, and believe me, Paul, we appreciate that.

However, that means we have February and May to fill with one time coordinators. I have volunteered for February, but I need assistance. I still need people to put together the chili which will be the main course.

I will purchase and bring supplies to the next meeting, February 8th. The recipe is exceedingly simple, mostly a matter of opening cans. Anyone can do it. So please come to the meeting with the idea that you will go home with a recipe and the ingredients to serve ten people. You will certainly have my gratitude.

Also think about coordinating the project in May. If we work together as a community, we can do this. Paul also asks if there is anyone who would like to share the title of coordinator with him? His idea for sharing the load is marvelous. Think about that, too.

Freethought Feminist

by Cleo Kocol

Our computer website has a new addition called the Freethought Feminist. At Pat Kelley's suggestion, I agreed to do this segment. It is her brainchild, and her excellent format, but my writing. She felt that a feminist connection might help bring more traffic to our web.

In a short introductory page I give a small idea of some of my past feminist activities and the people who were involved; Pat provided the computer links to these events and people. I also asked visitors to the website to submit original short stories and poems that are non-theistic and feminist in nature, and we will run as many of those as we can, reserving the right, of course, to reject those that in our opinion are inappropriate. Submit to either Pat or me.

To begin the freethought feminist writers' page, we put on the web a cautionary short story I had written. The story shows life for a woman in a future society, one that is a theocracy. If you have access to a computer and the world wide web, check it out at <http://www.rthoughtsrfree.org/sfw/feminist.htm>.

Pascal's Wager

Pascal's wager seems to be a favorite of teenage evangelists, for some reason. The following article appeared in The Humanist Monthly, newsletter of the Capital District Humanist Society (Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont), January 1998. This article is a good logical analysis of that old, tired argument.

[Pascal's Wager](#)

by [Charles W. Johnson](#)

Pascal's Wager, put in its most famous form by the brilliant French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal, is one of the most common and one of the most logically flawed arguments used by

evangelists. It is properly conceived as an argument for belief in God rather than as an argument for the existence of God. In essence, it goes:

1. Either God exists or he does not.
2. If there is no God, whether you believe in God or not, all that occurs after death is oblivion.
3. If there is a God, and you believe in God, you go to heaven.
4. If there is a God, but you do not believe in god, you go to Hell.
5. By statements 2-4, if you approach belief as a wager, betting on God's existence is a win-draw proposal; either you gain eternal bliss or end up with oblivion like all the other bettors.
6. By statements 2-4, if you approach belief as a wager, betting on God's nonexistence is a draw-lose proposal; either you end up with oblivion like all other bettors, or you suffer eternal hellfire.
7. Thus, belief is the superior choice from a wagering perspective.

The reason why Pascal's Wager is so pathetically fallacious should be obvious upon a little examination. There are two ways to look at the argument, each with its own problems:

Assess statements 1-4 as assumptions, 5-6 as inferences, and 7 as a conclusion, or assess statement 1 as an assumption, 2-6 as inferences, and 7 as a conclusion. In the first approach, it rests entirely upon four assumptions that are highly contestable. Premises 3 and 4 are essentially statements of Christian belief, which means the only people that will accept them are Christians. Thus, the argument reduces to "if you are a Christian, then belief in God is superior from a wagering perspective," a rather superficially silly tautology that results in an argument that only convinces the convinced.

Further, premises 2-4 commit the fallacy of bifurcation: they state that there are only two possibilities when there are in fact more. In this case, it posits that either the Xian model is true or the secular humanist one is. However, many other options come to mind. For instance, if Allah is supreme, then both the believing Xian and the atheist are doomed to eternal hellfire.

In the second approach, inferences 2-4 derive information from nowhere, thus violating information entropy. All that is assumed is that God either does or does not exist. This says nothing about whether God is benevolent to those who believe in him and condemning of those that don't, or whether there is a God who rewards the skeptics and punishes the sheep, or whether there is a God who rewards all, or any number of other possibilities. Because of this, inferences 2-4 are not logically connected to assumption 1, thus causing a non sequitur.

Freethought Quote

"Religion is a very crippling institution. It robs people of their will. I joke now that I worship the sun. The thing that I like is that -- unlike other gods that I could mention -- I can see the sun. It gives me warmth, it gives life to things that I love. And praying to the sun, I probably get the same percentage of answered prayers."

George Carlin

Coalition For The Advancement of Rational Thinking

report by Cleo Kocol

[Atheist Alliance](#) Liaison

The [Atheist Alliance](#), Inc. has formed a way that groups of unbelievers can counteract the religious incursions on unbelievers' civil rights. The vehicle is the Coalition for the Advancement of Rational Thinking (CART). The coalition, while neither collecting dues nor intruding on each group's autonomy, will provide the added visual clout of many organizations' signatures on letters calling attention to religious invasion and intrusion into secular life.

The first initiative by the [Atheist Alliance](#) is a letter of protest to eight medical schools who accepted a John Templeton Foundation grant for courses "that explore the connection between spirituality and health and religious issues in patient care." The National Organizations who signed, in addition to the [Atheist Alliance](#), Inc., were The Rationalist Association, and American Atheists.

Regional or local organizations who signed were:

[Arizona Secular Humanists](#), [Atheists & Agnostics of Wisconsin](#), Atheist Coalition (San Diego), [Atheist Community of Austin](#), [Atheists of Colorado](#), [Atheists of Florida](#), [Atheist Outreach \(Wisconsin\)](#), [Atheists of San Francisco Region](#), [Atheists United \(Los Angeles\)](#), [Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia](#), [Metroplex Atheists \(Dallas/Ft. Worth\)](#), [Minnesota Atheists](#), [North Texas Church of Freethought](#), [Rationalist Society of St. Louis](#), [Secular Humanists of the Low Country \(South Carolina\)](#), and [Society Against Religion \(New York State\)](#).