

AOF News & Views

Monthly Publication of Atheists and Other Freethinkers

September 1998

September Meeting

The speaker at the September 13 meeting will be Dr. Joe Morrow. A professor of psychology at CSUS, he is known professionally for his work with autistic children. He is one of the foremost Sacramento skeptics, and has appeared on Access Reality. He is also known as Ace the Magnificent, an amateur magician. He will speak on -- and demonstrate -- "psychic magic".

Internet site of the month

The website of the month is from the Internet Infidels site. The address is:

http://www.infidels.org/secular_web/feature/1998/skeptic.html

The document at this site is "Everyone's a Skeptic -- About Other Religions", by James A. Haught, dated July 12, 1998. It was originally delivered as a talk to the Campus Freethought Alliance, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia. It includes a set of dubious dogmas that no one (other than a practicing member of the religion in question) would believe.

Atheism: The Official State Religion

Recently through the opinion section of the Sacramento Bee, I learned that 40 years ago liberal politicians overthrew the government to establish Atheism as the official state religion. Since then congresspeople have passed laws to force atheism upon every citizen! The author didn't really go into detail so I thought I would examine America's shift to Atheism for myself.

A Government Internet website search of the 105th Congress revealed 58 Senate Bills that contain references to "Acts of Humans." Most are simple recognitions of outstanding and enduring humanitarian contributions by Atheists. Recently Atheist congresspeople submitted a Constitutional Amendment to Restore Religious Freedom. It read in part, "To secure the people's right to acknowledge reality according to the dictates of conscience: The people's right to speak freely on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed. The Government shall not require any person to join in

readings of "Origin of Species" or other scientific activity, initiate or designate school science experiments, discriminate against science, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of scientific knowledge." The amendment apparently failed because it was considered insensitive towards some of the minority Christian citizen.

For the past 40 years Presidential speeches have ended with the phrase: "We must help ourselves, because no God exists to do it for us." American coins all carry the phrase "In ourselves we trust," and official swearing in ceremonies always end with "trust me, I don't believe in God."

Today, Atheistic political groups like to adopt legislators in the hopes of changing their actions in government to benefit Atheists. Sometimes Atheists

(State Religion, Page 2)

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rationalist, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited. The contents of News & Views are informational and educational. Subscription: \$8 per year (free to members). Views expressed via the articles in this publication are not necessarily those of Atheists & Other Freethinkers. Submissions may be sent to AOF (attn.: newsletter committee). AOF cannot be responsible for unsolicited submissions. Past AOF newsletters can be viewed at www.rthoughtsfree.org.

AOF's Statement of Purpose: The purpose of the association, Atheists & Other Freethinkers (AOF) is to promote the understanding and acceptance of Atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend Atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll send one free newsletter to any individual upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$8 per year. Or become a member and get this fabulous newsletter free as part of your membership!

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State Religion (continued)

join hands and publicly praise the excellent work of politicians in protecting separation of church and

state. Politicians don't seem to mind the attention of these earnest unbelievers. Some consider it a compliment because one of the fastest ways to get elected is to declare one's disbelief in god. Every Thanksgiving, the President calls on Americans to acknowledge the labor of agricultural workers who provide the plentiful food resources for the U.S.

The year's slowest business revenue season happens during the Winter Solstice when people are encouraged to be rational, not partake in senseless spending but to concentrate on paying off debt and planning for the future.

During the Solstice season public school students are forced to sing Atheistic theme songs composed by Dan Barker. School officials claim they are not infringing upon minority rights because the songs are cultural representations of our Agnosto-Atheist heritage.

Government offices close for all major Atheist holidays including All Rationalist Day which celebrates Voltaire, Ingersoll, Russell, Paine, and other freethought leaders. In addition Green Laws which require businesses remain open on Sundays have grown quite popular even though small gatherings of Christians regularly protest them claiming they prevent Christians from practicing their religious beliefs. These protesters are generally considered as extremist troublemakers and often receive hate mail and death threats for their efforts. On the other hand, every weekend people look forward to door-to-door visits from evangelical Atheists asking people not to go to church with them.

Atheists are so popular at sports events that people often carry signs that read "The Age of Reason, page 6." Before every game famous Atheist celebrities belt out various renditions of "Our thoughts Are Free" to stadium crowds. Atheist coaches encourage their players to practice good sportsmanship and to take a moment to thank their parents and ancestors for their superior athletic genes in the hopes it will increase their chance of winning.

At virtually every public banquet an Atheist proselytizer thanks the cooks and kitchen staff for providing the food they are about to eat. Those who find the practice offensive are flatly ignored. High-school commencement ceremonies routinely feature pro-atheist speakers who spend hours lauding the atheist foundation of our educational system. Teachers make it a practice to tell their pupils during the first week of class that they are atheists. This is thought to instill in the students a sense of trust and admiration for the teacher. Christians are portrayed in school history books as ignorant, irrational and hardhearted. Atheists, agnostics and freethinkers are depicted as positive, contributing members of society. Television movies and sitcoms depict Christians as miserable characters who eventually convert to atheism or die trying. Sci-fi movies always make atheists the good guys and religious believers the bad guys. In fact, movies with excessive religious content are likely to be rated PG-13 or R.

Virtually everyone assumes Atheists have high moral standards. Christians cannot be trusted to tell the truth, hence, religious believers are constantly under pressure to justify the basis for their morals. Whenever an atheist commits a crime, people argue that they weren't true Atheists in the first place. All prisons have Atheist Chaplains. Inmates are strongly encouraged to participate in weekly Bible Contradiction discussions and, if addicted to drugs or alcohol, pressured to join Rational Recovery sessions. Prisoners frequently convert to rationality in order to receive early paroles. The courts look at acceptance of biological evolution as a favorable sign that the prisoner has rejected a life of crime. Judges often rule against religious parents in favor of the Atheist parent in custody hearings and adoptions, because Reason and Freethought are considered virtuous parenting qualities.

Most people are assumed to be Atheists, therefore whenever someone publicly admits to being a Christian people give them odd, disapproving looks. The social taboo is so overwhelming that many Christian children attend Bible-contradiction school every Sunday just so they can "fit" into the social community. Christian businesses dreadfully fear the

Atheist boycott. In fact, as a result of Atheist led boycotts against Christian books and films, the Holy Bible and any movie that might cast a positive light upon Christianity have virtually disappeared. On the other hand Darwin-fish logos commonly appear in business ads. Grocery store checkouts everywhere carry magazine titles: "Atheism Today," "Atheist Parenting" and "The Atheist Science Monitor." Medical waiting rooms display copies of Atheist literature for children to read. Parents frequently use attached order forms to send off for their own copies.

One of the best things I found through this research is that no Christian dares refer to the founder and author of the US Constitution as a "dirty little atheist" any more. However, some things never change, even though Atheists outnumber Christians in the general population and in powerful government positions, atheists are quick to charge that this is an Anti-Atheist country whenever they don't get their own way!

Pat Kelley

Applied Numerology From Ken Nahigian

This is gleaned from one of Martin Gardner's columns on mathematical games. Numerologists have used this as proof of the divine origin of the Bible.

Below are the first three verses of Genesis (King James Version) with the number of letters in each word following in parentheses:

"In(2) the(3) beginning(9) God(3) created(7) the(3) heaven(6) and(3) the(3) earth(5).

And(3) the(3) earth(5) was(3) without(7) form(4), and(3) void(4); and(3) darkness(8) was(3) upon(4) the(3) face(4) of(2) the(3) deep(4). And(3) the(3) spirit(6) of(2) God(3) moved(5) upon(4) the(3) face(4) of(2) the(3) waters(6).

And(3) God(3) said(4), Let(3) there(5) be(2) light:(5) and(3) there(5) was(3) light(4)."

August Speaker

What's interesting is this: Select ANY word in the first verse, take the number of letters in that word, and count ahead that many words. Continue in this fashion until you arrive at the third verse.

(Examples: If you started with the first word, "in", 2 letters, you would count ahead two words to "beginning". You would then count ahead 9 words to "the" in the second verse. If you started with "heaven", 6 letters, you would count ahead six words to "earth". You would then count ahead 5 words to "void"). On what word do you arrive in the third verse?

As it turns out, no matter where you start, you always arrive on "God".

Is this divine providence? Actually no, though it is rather amusing. Your count will always end that way because of a mathematical principle called the Kruskal Count, named for mathematician Martin Kruskal in the 1970's. Any text will behave in a similar way, provided an approximately random variation in word size, and provided the total number of words is significantly greater than the number of letters in the longest word.

Why does this work? All you need is for any two arbitrarily started "word chains" to intersect somewhere, that is, have one word in common. After that point, of course, the word chains that have intersected must be identical. The longer the text, the more likely it is that any two word chains will come together that way.

But at first glance it seems miraculous. Such is the human propensity for magical thinking.

"I don't believe in God because I don't believe in Mother Goose." -- Clarence Darrow

The August speaker, Alan Dechert, is the founder of the Year Zero Campaign. Alan described himself as a person more interested in issues of the forest than the trees, more interested in the whole picture rather than details. In his campaign for president in 1986-87, he attempted to "mobilize the Greens on the bigger picture".

Alan started thinking (early 1996) about the Year Zero issue when, as a computer expert, he was contemplating the Y2K problem. Why not reset the numbering, and in the process, start with zero, not 1? The existence of the Internet to spread the idea made it possible.

Alan noted rhetorically that no one celebrated the first millennium at all. How many persons celebrated the beginning of the second millennium? The first proposal to number years based on Jesus [anno domini, in the year of our lord] came around 500CE. The first actual use came with Charlemagne (742-814 CE) near the end of first millennium; prior to that, the numbering was based on current emperor's reign. The Gregorian calendar (Pope Gregory, 16th century) eventually became adopted worldwide because it was the most accurate solar calendar.

Alan argues that the turn of century should permit a fresh approach to naming and numbering. He proposes naming it "Global Era" or GE. This is contrasted to the emerging practice of designating AD as CE (for "Common Era" [or "Christian Era", which is how the religious right came to support the new designation]).

There is no official calendar in the USA, nor is there a constitutional requirement or designated calendar. It is merely a de-facto standard. Some other countries have formal calendar laws.

Alan made the case that a large number of workers and very large blocks of activists are not needed to bring about his proposed calendar revolution. Rather, a small number of opinion-makers can move the market. He has been trying to make the

case since 1996, after favorable reaction to the proposal on the Internet. Many reporters are aware of it but are waiting for a better time. [Perhaps in the next century!]

Last April Paul Kurtz gave his endorsement. This helped to produce the negative reaction by the religious right to the idea of Year Zero, so maybe Alan is on to something.

Steve Knapp

Scientific American reports a surprising find: a science that Pat Robertson knows even less about than paleontology. The science is meteorology, and the reference was to the Robertson prediction of wrathful weather for Orlando because of the city's decision to allow gay groups to fly rainbow flags during Gay Days. The report appeared in Steve Mirsky's "Anti Gravity" column in the September 1998 issue. Mirsky was unimpressed with Robertson's prediction of hurricanes hitting Florida. He suggested some more difficult and precise predictions, including "because of some isolated pockets of freethinking, the Midwest will see a 90 percent chance of frogs this afternoon, with vermin...."

Last year, the California State Fair featured its first "Family Fellowship Day". This was a blatantly religious celebration, with Christian music and discounted tickets for certain religious groups. This year, there will be no repeat. Jerry Sloan, along with representatives of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (among other groups), met with State Fair officials and made the point that sponsorship of religious activity was in violation of the California Constitution.

Highway cleanup

Four hearty AOF members, Karen Abbe, Mynga Futrell, Paul Geisert and Don Knutson, braved hot, sultry conditions on a July morning to clean AOF's stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd.

We invested a good two hours in the effort but in order to do justice to the two cloverleaves and the two mile stretches north and south, we need at least ten members. So please consider joining us in this community effort and get some good exercise Sunday, September 20 at 8a.m.!

Peggy Lucas and Jody Craig want to revive the popular freethinkers' forum. They will be surveying the interest level in doing this at the September meeting.

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AOF
P.O. Box 15182
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Calendar of Events

Sunday, September 13, noon to 2:00 p.m. Dr. Joe Morrow

Sunday, September 20, 8:00, Highway Cleanup

Wednesday, September 23, 6:30 p.m. Board Meeting

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

AOF meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Sunday of every month from noon to 2:00 p.m. at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. After the meeting, join AOFers for lunch and conversation at a nearby restaurant.

Internet Website Address:

<http://www.rthoughtsrfree.org>