

Atheists and Other Freethinkers Newsletter

December 1998

December Meeting

In December, AOF'ers will celebrate the winter solstice. It will be a time of celebrating freethought. This will be an opportunity for you testify in the name of free thought! Perhaps you could share a favorite quote, or describe how you came to be a freethinker. So that many have the opportunity to speak, please keep it under five minutes.

Internet site of the month

www.csicop.org

This is the site of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

November Speakers

The November speakers were Hank and Cleo Kocol, recounting their "freethought pilgrimage" to New York last July. It started at the Center for Inquiry. As Hank and Cleo tell the story:

The Center for Inquiry, Amherst, NY, is located across the street from the SUNY, Buffalo campus. The Center is the joint headquarters of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and of the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH). The two organizations are devoted to the defense of critical thinking, reason and science, and freedom of thought. Both organizations were founded by Dr. Paul Kurtz. The building housing CFI has grown from modest beginnings by the construction of two additions to serve the growing needs of the Center. Currently the building is a rambling structure on two floors, the top containing offices, conference rooms, reception area, and areas devoted to the activities of the two organizations housed there. The bottom floor contains the library and warehouse and shipment areas.

We arrived at CFI on the morning of July 14, being greeted by Ms Jo Ann Mooney, Director of Humanist Community Development for CSH. Ms Mooney, among other duties, maintains an e-mail communications service to all associated organizations,

including AOF, wherein exchanges of information occur on topics such as humanism, freethought, organizational development and expansion, current issues in the media, action items for local and national groups, and promotion of freethought. Ms Mooney gave us a tour of CFI during which time we met some of the other staff members present that morning.

Mr. Tim Madigan, Chief Operating Officer of CSH, introduced us to the wide variety of programs under his purview. He is the current contact for expansion of groups under the CSH umbrella. One of his important current projects is the Campus Freethought Alliance, a counterpoint to the Christian college and university organizations which are used throughout the country as proselytizing tools. CFA chapters have been formed at many colleges and universities in the country. Chapters are located at universities in the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, and Ukraine. In California, chapters have been formed at UCLA and Irvine, but none at all yet in northern California, including the Sacramento area. At all campuses, the organization must be begun by the students themselves.

Mr. Matt Cherry is the Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism. One of his current projects is the promotion of "secular celebrants" in place of clergy for the performance of ceremonies celebrating life passages such as birth, naming, coming of age, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, and death. In many European countries, such secular celebrants are available as alternatives to religious celebrants. In this country, the program is just beginning. A secular celebrant is somewhat analogous to the "Humanist Counselor" program which has been part of the American Humanist Association for years, but without the term "counselor" which may lead practitioners and clients into believing the person so designated is a licensed therapeutic counselor. Mr. Cherry is looking for volunteers who would be willing to perform in this capacity, and has some booklets published concerning secular death and wedding ceremonies. Of course, individuals who would be accepted into the program must have exceptional personal skills enabling them to deal sympathetically with others at some very difficult times of life.

Mr. Tim Binga, Director of Libraries, led us on a very interesting tour of the CFI library. The collection, housed on the bottom floor of the building, contains the reputedly largest collection in the world of freethought literature, some 20,000 cataloged books plus perhaps another 30,000 awaiting cataloging. The collection contains an almost complete collection of the "little blue books" of E. Haldeman-Julius discussed at our June 1998 meeting by Hal Verb.

Mr. Joe Nickell, a Senior Research Fellow for CSICOP, described for us the scientific work done by that committee in investigating paranormal claims. His was the only office with the semblance of a laboratory where he could perform simple experiments to test some of those claims.

CFI publishes two journals, Skeptical Inquirer and Free Inquiry, both of which are familiar to many members of AOF. In addition, CFI also publishes various small

pamphlets concerning humanism and freethought, introducing the subjects to those who may know little or nothing about them.

950 BCE. It was completed around 500 BCE.

The NT was written around 50 CE to include Jesus. The NT was reinterpreted, supplemented or rearranged until around 400CE.

So from 500 BCE to 50 CE allows over 500 years for people to read the old Hebrew Scriptures, learn local traditions, have revelations, then come up with their messiah. It took over 500 years but "Eureka, the Son of God" materialized and the NT was written. Since it was written after Jesus was dead, they couldn't even ask him if all this was true. The Jews still don't believe they have the right guy.

Betty Simonsma

Nicaraguan Relief

AOFers showed their clear magnanimity last month by donating more than \$800 to El Porvenir in AOF's name for Nicaraguan relief. El Porvenir, a Sacramento-based non-governmental organization, has worked for ten years providing materials and technical support for isolated Nicaraguan villages to dig their own potable water wells. This effort provides a basis for the development of a local economy beyond subsistence. Our donation will go to repair damage to existing projects from Hurricane Mitch. Unlike most NGO's working in Central America, El Porvenir is strictly secular

Don Knutson