

New York City Atheists

November 2002

Serving the tri-state area ■ An affiliate of American Atheists

(212) 330-6794 PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013
<http://foody.org/atheist.html> atheist@foody.org

Events

November meeting

Sunday, November 24, 2002,
1-5 P.M.

Source of Life Conference Center
352 Seventh Avenue, 16th floor
(between 29th and 30th Sts.)

Guest speaker: Ron Barrier, from
American Atheists, on the Godless
March and other atheist activism.
Plus we'll hear from members who
marched, and see their video clips!
Donation requested



After the March: What Next?

Come to November's meeting of New York City Atheists, where Ron Barrier, national spokesperson for American Atheists, will discuss the Godless Americans March on Washington and opportunities for atheist activism. We'll also hear from members who marched, and see video excerpts. Free refreshments will be served; donation requested. Sunday, November 24, 2002, from 1-5 P.M., at the Source of Life Conference Center, 352 Seventh Avenue, 16th floor (between 29th and 30th Sts.).



March Was the Meat of October's Meeting

In a Halloween mood, we began with a slide show of Inquisition tortures, based on photos from Amsterdam's Torture Museum and on engravings from "Thumbscrew and Rack," an American Atheist Press booklet about a torture exhibit seen in Manhattan by Col. Robert Ingersoll in the 1870s. Nineteen people attended, including a student journalist.

After the slides, we discussed religious torture and abuse in the past and the present, such as Muslim sharia stoning and amputations, and clergy abuse of children. Some said the Inquisition needs to be publicized, since many Christians wouldn't believe its extent. One member suggested a nationwide traveling exhibit. The slide show will be added to New

York City Atheists' Web site.

But most discussion focused on the Godless March on Washington. Several members planned to attend the march, some from via chartered bus from Penn Station. Some suggested a second national march centered on New York City.

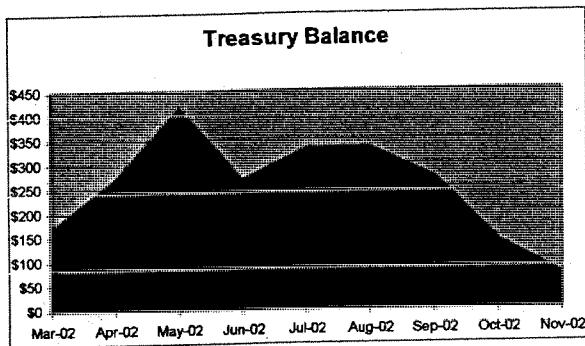
Two members agreed to consider sponsoring the *Atheist Viewpoint*, American Atheists' public-access cable TV show, in Manhattan and Brooklyn. We also discussed recent news about a religious group proselytizing in public schools, a federal court's approval of a New Jersey eruv, and new protection of religious practice in the workplace. See elsewhere in this newsletter for that and other news.

New York City Atheists

Donations Urgently Needed

by Josh

The solstice season is the peak fundraising time for all groups, secular and otherwise. If you haven't yet donated to help New York City Atheists grow, please consider a major donation for the coming year. If you



attend meetings, please consider donating more generously. Income is not matching our new expenses of over \$200/month. I, your still unemployed director, am still willing to work dozens of hours a month to organize us. But I can never assume fiscal debts for it.

If New York City Atheists members -- who pay nothing for membership, which comes with no more obligation than adding a name to a mailing list -- don't wish to pay for rented meeting space, then the next meeting will be back in the diner, and it will be an election for new leaders to write and mail the newsletter, and to host meetings. I will resign -- and unlike February, when I tried to resign but remained when no one else wanted those duties, I will not remain. Thanks to Jake's generous and free printing of the monthly newsletter, it is now twice its old length, and is mailed to all 108 members and friendly organizations who have supplied full postal addresses. (The mailing list now totals 182 names.) Before, we spent more money printing *and* mailing the newsletter to the 45 members and friendly groups who lack e-mail. Ileen has desktop-published it for us since March; thanks to both of them for their hard work. Anyone who joins our mailing list receives the newsletter at no charge.

But the newsletter is driven by our meetings, as are also our e-mail alerts, and our liaising with other local freethought groups. New York City atheism should be a social practice, not a solitary one.

We had voted in our meetings of December 2001

and July 2002 to leave the Moonstruck diner on Third Avenue and 31st Street. The diner was remote from mass transit and was slow to serve us, even when we agreed to meet as late as 3:30. Some people refused to attend meetings because they didn't want its food, or any food at that hour. Being stuck behind tables meant little chance for mingling, or for hosting speakers without interruption. The new conference center is friendly and convenient to trains. We had also checked libraries, YMCAs, and other community centers, public and private. Most were more expensive. Some refused to do business with us. Others were in remote neighborhoods, had no elevators, or were unclean.

Our September meeting room cost \$112 but was cramped; 21 attendees donated \$111 then. October's larger meeting room, and TV (for the Inquisition slide show), cost \$175; 19 attendees donated \$77 then. November's meeting room and TV (for GAMOW videos) will cost \$195, and future meetings should cost that or less. These are great rates for four-hour meetings -- actually five-hour; you can show up earlier. If each attendee paid the price of a movie, we could afford it. But monthly rented space is not affordable on average donations at meetings of four to five dollars, plus one or two checks mailed to us per month. One solution might be to hold meetings only after mailed donations accumulate in response to the newsletter.

New York City Atheists should be able to evolve beyond being unwelcome diner patrons. If it can't, a new, more capable leader must make that possible. If you can help, please send a check to New York City Atheists, PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013. It must be made out to "Josh Karpf" since an organizational bank account requires incorporation, which is extra work that was advised against at our June meeting. But all donations received, which are reported in the Treasury Report, are for organizational expenses alone. All labor is donated. If you have any questions, or ideas for increasing donations or decreasing expenses, please write to that address or to atheist@foody.org. And thanks, in advance, for your support.



Treasury Report

Mid-October's balance was \$314.50. We spent \$39.96 on postage for October's newsletter; and \$13.25 on cold drinks for October's meeting. (That meeting's \$175 room and TV rental fee was paid in early October.) Members donated \$77 at the October meeting and \$100 (\$50 + \$50) by mail. We spent \$195 for the room and TV rental for the upcoming November meeting. As of early November, the treasury balance is \$68.29, excluding the cost of this newsletter's postage.

Halloween Horror, Unreal and Real

Holiday news became predictably silly around Halloween, with media relaxing even minimal critical standards to exploit public superstition. *Newsday* credulously reported signs of a ghost haunting the nineteenth-century Merchant's House Museum on East 4th Street. "We've had a number of parapsychologists and experts in the paranormal, as well as psychics, who have come through and told us their theories on why [the ghost] is here," said the museum's executive director. *USA Today* published a glowing appraisal of John Edwards and his television show *Crossing Over*, in which Edwards "relays messages from the deceased loved ones of random audience members."

Justifying the supernatural by associating it with the tools of science, the *Daily News* prominently profiled the New York Ghost Chapter, a "small team of investigators wandering in the dark and searching for spirits . . . armed with electronic equipment that includes digital cameras, infrared video, tape recorders, motion detectors, and specially designed electromagnetic field meters." The article did quote an editor of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine. Showing its preference in credentials, the *Daily News* didn't identify the journal as being published by CSICOP, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, although it did note that the Ghost Chapter's

leader "has a 'Ph.D.' in parapsychology from the Florida-based University of Celestial Visions Metaphysical Art."

The *New York Times* similarly featured the Atlantic Paranormal Society, a New England-based group with an identical pseudo-scientific mission. "Human spirits can lift only about 3 to 10 pounds. . . . Never believe anything you hear from an inhuman haunting" said the society's leader. The article did not quote a skeptical expert, and it closed by describing an evangelical member of the society reading a Christian blessing in a house that the parapsychologists did not find to be haunted, but felt they could not leave without comforting the house's residents.

A mother "uncomfortable even with the idea of [her] son dressing up as a devil" asked the "God Squad," *Newsday's* priest-rabbi pair of advice columnists, for "spiritually correct costume ideas." (See September 2002's newsletter report of our successful protest of their recent attack on atheism.) The God Squad noted the risk that such a costume is "likely to seduce your child into the ways of Satanism," and instead suggested the trappings of a priest and rabbi, or "firefighter, policeman, doctor, nurse," etc.

In real-life horror, two Newark, New Jersey men were charged with desecration of graves and possession of stolen property today after a police search of their home revealed a cauldron holding human skulls and other bones that may have come from recent grave and mausoleum robberies. Both men are adherents of Palo Mayombe, a Santeria-like sect which, to cast spells, invokes the spirits of the dead in rituals that often involve drinking a liquid in which human bones have been boiled. One investigator called Palo Mayombe "a cult and a money-making operation." A *New York Times* article quoted a priest of the related Yoruba religion; he called Palo Mayombe a "composite of Christianity and misguided readings of traditional West African religions," and claimed that orthodox Yoruba practice emphasized salvation rather than spells.

Sources: "Don't Let Devil Horn In on Fun," *Newsday*, 10/26/02; "Serenade For A New York City Ghost," *Newsday*, 10/24/02; "Connecting with the Dead," *USA Today*, 10/11-13/02, Weekend:6-8; "Spirit Catchers," *Daily News*, 10/20/02; "Don't Say Ghostbuster, Say Spirit Plumber," *New York Times*, 10/31/02; "2 Accused of Storing Stolen Remains for Rituals," *New York Times*, 10/9/02; "Voodoo Furor in Body Snatch," *New York Post*, 10/10/02.

Preaching in Public Schools

The New York City Education Department has ordered a Missouri-based anti-violence hip-hop group, "Rage Against Destruction," to stop proselytizing in city schools. "You may not proselytize during the assemblies, nor may you in any way use the assemblies as a vehicle to induce students to attend . . . other religious concerts or meetings." Rage Against Destruction had been inviting students to an off-campus event that addressed "the role Jesus plays in nonviolence." The city apparently has not banned the group from public schools.

Source: "Booted Off Bully Pulpit: City: Anti-Violence Group Pushed Christ in Schools," *Daily News*, 10/17/02.

AA Confession Is Evidence -- This Time

A federal appeals court has reinstated a double-homicide conviction that was based on the testimony of the suspect's fellow Alcoholics Anonymous members, to whom he had confessed the murders. A lower Westchester County court had previously ruled that AA conversations were confidential religious communication that enjoyed the same protection as sessions between priests and parishioners. (See the August 2001 newsletter or foody.org/atheist/insanity0801.html#aa.) But in July 2002, the U.S. 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan overturned the decision, saying that the court record of the case failed to establish that the suspect had communicated with fellow AA members to seek spiritual guidance. The ruling is too narrow to reduce the religiously protected status of AA conversations in future cases.

Source: "Court, in AA Case, Upholds Conviction in Doctors' Killings, Associated Press, 7/17/02.

More Religious Privileges at Work

Gov. George Pataki, surrounded by local Long Island religious leaders, signed into law a bill strengthening an existing state law that requires employers to accommodate their workers' sabbath and holiday observances, unless it would impose an undue hardship on the company. The new law, called the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, more explicitly defines "undue hardship," and also requires employers to accommodate any distinctive religious dress, such as a turban, yarmulke, or headscarf. Such law not only increases the burdens on business of special accommodation of religious practices, but also duplicates federal law that serves the same purpose, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act -- which requires accommodation of religious beliefs of not only employees, but of potential employees.

Source: "Boost for Religious Freedom," *Newsday*, 10/14/02.



City Loses Eruv Suit

Tenafly, New Jersey officials discriminated against Orthodox Jews when they refused to allow them to create an eruv, a federal appeals court has ruled.

An eruv is a continuous outdoor religious border marked by attaching cords or plastic strips, usually to utility poles, to broaden from a home to a neighborhood the Talmudic definition of a Jewish "private domain." Without an eruv, observant Orthodox Jews may refuse, on the sabbath, to carry keys or reading glasses, push baby strollers, use wheelchairs or canes, or perform other everyday "work" outside their homes.

Eruvs, including one encompassing the White House and Capitol Hill, are in place in most American major cities. Britain's Orthodox Jews succeeded in erecting their first eruv this past August, in London, after a decade of public debate and opposition. But to create and maintain such a border demands municipal support, entangling church and state, since it is a religious use of public property.

Tenafly officials, after learning in 2000 of the eruv's creation by local Orthodox Jews without permission from the city (although with permission from utilities), had ordered it removed. In 2001 a federal district court agreed, ruling that the utility poles were not public forums, adding that "public property should not be permanently allocated to a religious purpose."

But last month's unanimous decision by three judges of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit reversed that district-court decision. Rejecting the argument that allowing the Orthodox to attach the unobtrusive strips to poles was an improper government endorsement of religion, the court said that while a Tenafly law did forbid private groups from attaching items to utility poles without permission, enforcement was regularly ignored when the poles were used for house numbers, church signs, Christmas wraths, holiday lights, and protest ribbons.

"Even if there is some slight risk that a reasonable, informed observer might 'misperceive the endorsement of religion,'" the court wrote, "there is a much greater risk that the observer would perceive hostility toward Orthodox Jews."

Tenafly lawyers said they were considering an appeal, either to the entire Third Circuit Court or to the United States Supreme Court. If the town does not appeal, the case returns to the United States District Court in Newark.

Eruv supporters say the case has established precedent that will discourage future lawsuits against eruv elsewhere in the United States.

Although local and national Orthodox organizations support the eruv, it is opposed by some local Jews. Eruv supporters say such opposition represents anti-Semitism by non-Jews and anti-Orthodox feelings among non-Orthodox Jews. A spokesperson for the Tenafly eruv association said that residents with school-age children opposed the eruv because it might attract Orthodox families who send their children to private day schools and vote against public school budgets.

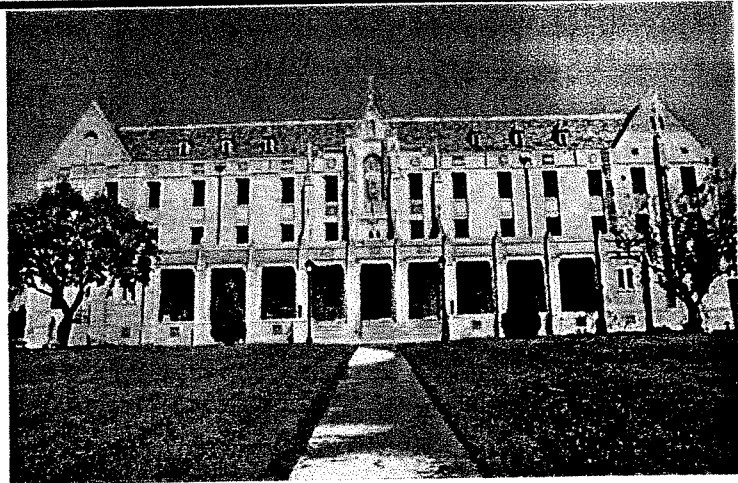
See the January 2002 newsletter or foody.org/atheist/insanity0102.html#eruv for previous coverage of this case.

Sources: "After Decade of Debate, Britain's Orthodox Jews Get First Eruv, Allowing Freer Sabbath," Associated Press, 8/20/02; "Symbolic Enclosure Is Allowed, Judges Rule," *New York Times*, 10/25/02; "Court: Tenafly Officials Can't Bar Congregation from Marking Utility Poles," Associated Press, 10/24/02; "Out of Bounds on Eruv," *Jewish Week*, 11/01/02; "In N.J., Sabbath Fences Make Good Neighborhoods," *Forward*, 5/3/02.

Press Shames LI Bishop over Mansion

Bishop William Murphy, leader of 1.5 million Catholics in the nation's sixth-largest Roman Catholic diocese, last month moved into the top floor of St. Agnes, a former convent, but not quietly. *Newsday* led local media in an expose that revealed that renovation bills for the 5,000-square-foot new residence ran to almost \$1 million, and that the local parish was upset over the ejection of a shrinking order of ascetic nuns who had previously lived in the building.

Newsday's photo-studded article dwelled on the opulent interior design, "which includes the addition of a three-car garage. . . . There also is a new fireplace with an oak mantel, and a large vaulted ceiling was lowered and coffered, so a chandelier could be hung over a dining table. An additional \$120,000 was spent on appliances, fixtures and furnishings, including three large Oriental rugs. . . . Murphy is pleased with his new home. In what



he refers to as the private wing, the bishop's suite has a bedroom with marble bath, a sitting room and a large study. . . . The [public wing's] furnishings include three newly purchased Oriental rugs covering the restored original oak floors, an antique reproduction side table with a design that captures the cathedral's Gothic spires and a bar cabinet by upscale furniture manufacturer Baker. . . . The kitchen also was overhauled, with top-of-the-line appliances, including a side-by-side Sub-Zero refrigerator and freezer unit and a six-burner Viking professional range. An adjoining pantry has an under-counter temperature-controlled wine-storage cabinet that can hold about 50 bottles."

Newsday also discussed the relocation of the nuns, the parish's reaction to their displacement, and other cost overruns in the diocese. Jimmy Breslin, in a column titled "Biggest Waste of Money, Bar Nun," said, "The amount of money that Murphy is spending on rooms for himself is an embarrassment. One thing he doesn't have to worry about is feeling ashamed. He is devoid of that. . . . You've got to be crazy to give the place any money. When you go past St. Agnes, clutch your purse or keep your hands in your pockets. . . . Once again, keep your money clear of this man." Breslin suggested that Murphy's decadent new home was big enough also to accommodate pedophile-protecting prelates Cardinal Law of Boston and Bishop Daily of Brooklyn.

"It is important for the diocese to have a fixed residence for the bishop," said Murphy, who added that the imposing Gothic-inspired structure would be a place to welcome influential churchmen. "The convent was already under renovation, and it was close to the cathedral, which of course is my cathedral, and it makes sense that if I could be close to my cathedral, I should be."

Eventually he apologized for the cost overruns, and acknowledged that the project was a public relations "disaster," but still defended his decision to live there. Murphy also used the Long Island Catholic, the official newspaper of the diocese, to answer his critics. An editorial there suggested that the bishop was selflessly choosing luxurious quarters closer to work instead of a simpler apartment farther away, and that the top-notch kitchen appliances were "suitable for preparing meals for large groups."

The Long Island chapter of Voice of the Faithful, a national lay group seeking church reforms, has created a special fund so Catholics can give donations directly to the same charities favored by the bishop, but with a financial accounting of how each dollar is spent, which the diocese does not offer.

Source: "The Bishop's Place: Costly Renovations Turn Former Convent into Residence," *Newsday*, 10/6/02; "Biggest Waste of Money, Bar Nun," *Newsday*, 10/8/02; "Bishop Issues an Apology," *Newsday*, 10/10/02.

CFI-Manhattan Summit Discusses Unity and Lack of Unity



The Center for Inquiry (CFI), whose two major branches are the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), plans to open a Madison Avenue office by early 2003. To announce those plans and to explore local

support, CFI held a brunch meeting on October 17 for local freethought leaders. Ironically, this freethought summit was held in the Unification Church-owned New Yorker Hotel, which that day also hosted a large New Age convention.

The Center for Inquiry has a few offices nationwide, the closest of which is in Montclair, in northern New Jersey. The new Manhattan office will offer publishing and publicity, a speakers' bureau, a small library, and eventually meeting space, said Austin Dacey, the CFI organizer who organized the brunch. He said it was not yet another membership organization seeking members or money.

Everyone was enthusiastic about the prospect of working together, but there was imperfect consensus on what issues that a broad freethought effort, comprising diverse groups with diverse members, should address. Most felt that such a coalition should avoid partisan politics -- Palestinian statehood, reproductive rights, local bond issues, and antiwar activism all surfaced as examples, the last prompting strong and sometimes strident debate at the brunch.

One organizer insisted that humanism demanded politically specific actions to address social problems. Another preferred a focus on "science, reason, and nonreligion." Humanism should embrace people no matter what their politics are, said another. Another described music to suggest how criticism of religion could be necessary to distinguish humanism from religion (see "The Problem with Humanist Music" elsewhere in this issue).

"Rationalists need to find common ground. . . . Since our diversity is not going away, it should be our strength," said Dacey, tabling discussion of specific issues.

Besides debating appropriate issues, the meeting talked about "preaching to the converted" versus outreach to potential new members, and local freethought groups' struggle for relevance in a very secular region.

Group leaders discussed their seasonal events. Some address Halloween: CFI stages a Superstition Bash (www.csicop.org/superstition) where people can smash mirrors and step on cracks. The New Jersey Humanist Network, with CFI, has offered an increasingly popular HumanLight party (humanlight.org) as an alternative to Hanukkah and Christmas. CFI and Long Island Secular Humanists are eager to observe Darwin Day (www.darwinday.org) in February.

Television outreach was also discussed. LISH produces a regular public-access cable show, *What Is Secular Humanism?*; American Atheists produces the *Atheist Viewpoint*, and CFI helped produce a show, *Critical Eye*, for the Discovery Science Channel.

Meeting attendees: Representing the Center for Inquiry - NY, the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York, WBAI's *Equal Time for Freethought*, Long Island Secular Humanists, the New Jersey Humanist Network, New York City Atheists, the Secular Humanist Society of New York, and the Secular Journey, were Arthur Harris, Harley Brown, Conrad Claborne, Austin Dacey, Gerry Dantone, Arnell Dowret, Joseph L. Fields, Josh Karpf, Sara Kaye, Beth Lamont, John Rafferty, Barry Seidman, Susan Seidman, and Arthur Urrows.



HELP NYC ATHEISTS GROW

Our monthly meetings and newsletter are free, but we depend on donations to keep them going. Donation amounts are reported in the monthly treasury report, anonymously unless requested otherwise.

Donations are non-tax-deductible, and checks must be made out to "Josh Karpf." Mail to New York City Atheists, PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013.

Atheism's Emancipation

by Paul

Gods, gods, what are they? Where are they? The philosophers are in agreement that the conception of gods originated from fear and curiosity. Primitive man, unable to understand the phenomena of nature and its violence and the changing saw in every terrifying manifestation some sinister force expressly directed at him; and as ignorance and fear are the parents of all superstition, the troubled fancy of primitive man wove the god idea.

It is common knowledge that all religions, with their demigods, their prophets, their messiahs, and their saints, were created by the prejudiced fancy of men who had not attained the full development and full possession of their faculties. Consequently, the religious heaven is nothing but the mirage in which man, exalted by ignorance and faith, discovered his own image, but enlarged and reversed -- that is, divinized. The history of religions of the birth, grandeur, and the decline of the

gods who had succeeded one another inhuman belief, is nothing, but the development of collective intelligence and conscience of mankind.

The God idea revived and readjusted and enlarged or narrowed, according to the necessity of the time, has dominated humanity and will continue to do so until man will rise his head to the sunlit day, unafraid and with an awakened will to himself. How far a man will find his relation to his fellows will depend entirely on how much he can outgrow his dependence upon God.

In our new times there are indications that theism, which is the theory of speculation, is being replaced by *atheism*, the science of demonstration, the one hangs in the metaphysical clouds of the Beyond, while the other has its roots in the soil. *It is the earth, not heaven, which man must rescue, if he is to be truly saved.*

The decline of theism is most interesting whatever their brand. How to bring the masses back to the God idea, the spirit, the First Cause, etc. -- that is the most pressing question to all theists. Inasmuch as religion, Divine Truth, rewards and punishments are the trademarks of the largest, most corrupt and pernicious, the most powerful and lucrative industry in the world. It is the industry of befogging the human mind and stifling the human heart.

Perhaps humanity senses the fact that it is growing weary of the hundred and one brands of God.

It is characteristic of theist "tolerance" that no one really cares what people believe in, just so they believe in or pretend to believe. They try not to kill each other any longer, instead have gatherings of all denominations, and forget that they have different gods. The unbeliever, humanist, atheist is never invited.

Atheism the philosophy has its roots in the earth, in this life. Its aim is the emancipation of the human race from all Godheads, be they Judaic, Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhist, Braministic, or what not. Mankind has been punished long enough for having crated its Gods: nothing but pain and persecution has been man's lot since gods began.

But there is a way out of this blunder: man must break his fetters which have chained him to the gates of heaven and hell, so that he can begin to fashion out his reawakening and illumined consciousness a new world upon earth.

Beauty as a gift from heaven has proved useless, Man must find the beauty of life here on earth, where he lives and in nature itself. There is no other place, science has shown us where we came from and where we will go. Man's affirmation of man through man, the yea to life, purpose and beauty. It is so simple and so easy.

The Problem With Humanist Music

By Gerry Dantone

Reprinted from the Long Island Secular Humanists *Inquirer*, September 2002

Last year the New Jersey Humanist Network held a Humanist Song contest, seeking good new "humanist" music. This writer was fortunate to win the contest, but some have expressed the concern that there was too much "negativity" towards religion and not enough positive messages among the entrants. Here's the problem, and I think I have a handle on it since I've been a serious songwriter for many years.

If one does not mention or criticize religion in a song and merely states some positive idea, it is unrecognizable as "humanist" music, even if it is completely secular and humanistic in nature.

For example, practically the entire Beatles catalogue of songs is both secular and humanistic, yet no one considers it explicitly "humanistic" music. If it were so considered, a search for humanistic music would not have been necessary. What, exactly, is NOT secular and humanistic about "All You Need Is Love," "Here, There and Everywhere," "Nowhere Man" or "Eleanor Rigby." How about their final lyrics of their final recorded album (Abbey Road): "The love you take is equal to the love you make"? It is completely humanistic and secular, but without giving a contrary example of an inferior religious ethic, it cannot be labeled explicitly as humanism. If I am wrong, why was the contest necessary? If I am wrong, we have all the humanistic music we need.

Christians have no trouble embracing the Beatles music and message, generally (except when Lennon made the "we're more popular than Jesus" remark, now largely forgotten). They do not acknowledge or realize or want to admit that John Lennon and even Paul McCartney were basically nonbelievers and humanistic if not outright humanists. The reason that they can do this is because, as Beatles, they never offered negative images of religion, they kept mostly to the positive, primarily promoting human love, both idyllic and romantic. Lennon *did* paint a darker picture of religion as a solo artist which is why "Imagine" is well known as a humanist song, and is hated by the likes of Pat Robertson. It is the negative connotations of heaven and hell in the song "Imagine" that clearly thrusts it into the humanist camp.

There is a comparison that can be made with religious music. It isn't religious music until God, or the supernatural is introduced. However, since most religions make claims of improved or superior morality on the part of believers, mere mention of God or Jesus equates, in their minds, to a positive message. Humanists cannot make such a claim. Being a secular humanist does *not* make one's character better than others, for that reason alone; we as humanists admit that. Merely stating one's secularism or humanism is not a positive message in the way many a believer thinks mere belief is positive in and of itself.

The burden of humanists is therefore different: Since humanism, in a sense, only allows ethics and character to grow and be nurtured without the baggage many supernatural systems lay on their followers, our message is necessarily different. It is one of being "freed" from the harmful and antisocial practice of condemning the infidel, or believing that one group is blessed and another cursed or that we are to be judged by our beliefs.

Humanism "allows" us to care about others without artificial and mythical constraint. Humanism, in large part, clears the emotional way for caring for others regardless of beliefs, or race, etc. Yes, caring is a huge positive that humanists need to promote, but we need to explain that those religious reasons for NOT caring about others, such as non-conformity, heresy, non-belief, a person's

sexual orientation, etc., are wrong and immoral and lead to human misery. Promoting caring alone would not mark a song in anyone's mind as humanistic. Does the average person realize "All You Need is Love" is humanistic or do they think Jesus inspires it? Do you ever wonder how many religious persons love the song "All You Need is Love" and are homophobic or anti-Semitic on account of their religious training? To make "All You Need is Love" a clear humanist anthem would require a statement that you *don't* need religion to love others. In other words, a negative statement is needed.

For those who are concerned about "negativity" I'd like to see what they consider examples of songs that they think are on the right track. I'd say that worse than negativity would be humanistic chauvinism that merely proclaims the positive aspects of humanism just as Christian "praise and worship" songs chauvinistically claim some kind of moral superiority for their beliefs. Don't just tell me humanism is good or better than religion: Show me!

Gerry Dantone is founder of Long Island Secular Humanists and a member of the band Universal Dice and won the New Jersey Humanist Network contest with the song "Love Is the Only Priest." For info on their two CDs, "My Name Is Thomas," a rock opera, and "Mostly True Stories" go to www.UniversalDice.com.

OTHER LOCAL GROUPS

Atheists, Agnostics and Freethinkers (NYU)

"An official student club at New York University. To provide an open forum for the discussion of a wide range of controversial issues of philosophical, social, and political interest. . . . To raise awareness of various issues related to Atheism, Agnosticism and free thought including the separation of Church and State."

Student Event Center, 5 Washington Place, Room 405, New York, New York

Contact: rdv206@nyu.edu

Web site: www.nyu.edu/clubs/atheists

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (local chapter)

New chapter forming.

E-mail: TMC629@aol.com

Center for Inquiry - Metro NY (Council for Secular Humanism)

"A permanent gathering place for East Coast skeptics and secular humanists ... convenient to but just outside New York City, in northern New Jersey. We present lectures, seminars, and other events as we seek ideas, support, and funding to maintain a permanent humanist/skeptical center in northern New Jersey."

Phone: (973) 655-9556

Fax: (973) 655-9561

Mailing address: 89 Walnut St., Montclair NJ

E-mail: cfimetry@aol.com

Web site: www.cfi-metry.com

City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (Society for Humanistic Judaism)

"If you consider yourself a secular Jew whose identity is primarily cultural or intellectual, but not religious, you may not feel at home in a traditional congregation. . . . We lead our lives independently of the will of a supernatural deity."

Phone: (212) 713-5031

Meets: Village Community School, 272 West 10th Street, Manhattan.

E-mail: info@humanistjew.org

Web site: www.humanistjew.org

Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York (Corliss Lamont Chapter of the AHA)

"Meets approximately twice per month - generally on the evening of the second and fourth Tuesdays, usually with a speaker followed by a discussion."

Meets at the Moonstruck East diner, upstairs room, 449 Third Avenue (corner of 31st Street).

Mailing address: 777 United Nations Plaza (lobby floor), New York, NY 10017-3521

Phone: (914) 588-5284

E-mail: info.hsmny@corliss-lamont.org

Web site: www.corliss-lamont.org/hsmny

Long Island Secular Humanists

Several events per month.

Address: LISH, Box 119, Greenlawn, NY 11740

E-mail: LISecHum@aol.com

Web site: nyhumanist.org/lish.htm

New Jersey Humanist Network

Meetings on the 4th Wednesday of the month at the Somerset Bridgewater Library. Call the library at 908-526-4016 for directions.

Address: P.O. Box 51, Washington, NJ 07882.

E-mail: hbrown@mac.net

Web site: members.freecspeech.org/njhn/

Secular Humanist Society of New York

Meets occasionally for lectures and discussion.

Address: P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150

Phone: (212) 861-6003

E-mail: jarents@bestweb.net

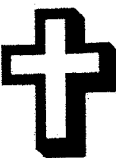
Web site: nyhumanist.org

LISTEN TO "EQUAL TIME FOR FREETHOUGHT"

Sunday evenings at 6:30 P.M. EST on WBAI (99.5 FM). See the Web site foody.org/freethoughtradio.html for online audio and text details of past programs, which include:

- Taslima Nasrin, fatwa-sentenced atheist Indian activist
- Ellen Johnson, of American Atheists, on the Godless Americans March on Washington
- Beth Lamont, of the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York, on humanism
- Bill London, of the National Council against Health Fraud, on alternative medicine
- D. J. Grothe, of Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists, on gays and freethought
- Margaret Downey, of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia
- Ed Buckner, of the Council for Secular Humanism, on the Godless Americans March, the Christianity of America, and the Center for Inquiry
- Richard Dawkins on childhood religious "programming"
- Paul Kurtz, of the Council for Secular Humanism, on humanism
- Ron Barrier, of American Atheists, on atheism
- Annie Laurie Gaylor, of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, on the pledge, priestly pedophilia, and women in freethought
- Norm Allen, Jr., on African-American humanism
- Call-in discussions

To urge WBAI to expand the show to a full hour, contact WBAI's program director, Bernard White, by calling (212) 209-2800, or write him at WBAI, 120 Wall St., New York, NY 10005.

INT   L  R  N  C E

Join a National Group: American Atheists

Atheists should join both local and national groups. National activist groups favoring freedom from religion include American Atheists (www.atheists.org), Atheist Alliance (www.atheistalliance.org), the Council for Secular Humanism (www.secularhumanism.org), the American Humanist Association (www.americanhumanist.org), the Freedom from Religion Foundation (www.ffrf.org), and, to a lesser extent, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (www.au.org).

You might want to consider membership in one of them to support and learn more about their work. So far, NYC Atheists, an independent local group, has had no formal membership requirements or dues, but it has few resources. More established national groups have many resources, and keep you better apprised of national and international issues. This column will introduce one national group each month.

American Atheists has been the premier organization laboring for the civil liberties of atheists, and the total, absolute separation of government and religion. It was born out of a court case begun in 1959 by Madalyn Murray O'Hair that challenged prayer recitation in the public schools. That case -- *Murray v. Curlett*, which became one of three cases combined as *Abington v. Schempp* -- was a landmark in American jurisprudence on behalf of our First Amendment rights.

NYC Atheists members are eligible for a 20% discount on national American Atheist memberships, 20% discounts on American Atheist materials over \$50 ordered through NYC Atheists, and reduced convention registration fees.

Membership Application for American Atheists Inc.

Last name: _____

First name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

This is to certify that I am in agreement with the aims, purposes, and the definitions given by American Atheists inside the front cover. I consider myself to be an A-theist (i.e., non-theist) or Materialist and I have, therefore, a particular interest in the separation of state and church and the efforts of American Atheists Inc. on behalf of that principle.

As an Atheist I hereby make application for membership in American Atheists Inc., said membership being open *only* to Atheists.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Those not comfortable with the appellation "Atheist" may not be admitted to membership but are invited to subscribe to the *American Atheist* magazine or the *American Atheist Newsletter*. Both dues and contributions are to a tax-exempt organization and may be deducted on income tax returns, subject to applicable laws. (*This application must be dated and signed by the applicant to be accepted.*) Memberships are non-refundable.

Membership in American Atheists Inc. includes a free subscription to the *American Atheist Newsletter* and all the other rights and privileges of membership. Please indicate your choice of membership dues:

- Individual, \$35/year, \$45/year International.
- Couple/Family, \$60/year, \$70/year Internat. (Please give all names above).
- Distinguished Citizen (Age 65 or over), \$25/year, \$35/year International (Photocopy of ID required).
- Student, \$25/year, \$35/year International. (Photocopy of ID required).
- Wall Builder, \$150/year.
- Life Membership, \$1,500.

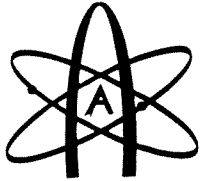
Upon your acceptance into membership, you will receive a handsome membership card and your initial copy of the *American Atheist Newsletter*. You will be notified of all national and regional meetings and activities, and you will receive the special members' codes with which to benefit from discounts offered from businesses participating as American Atheists Savings Partners.

The *American Atheist*, a quarterly journal, is available separately for \$20.00 per year, \$25.00 International.

- Sign me up for a one-year subscription to the *American Atheist*.

**American Atheists Inc., P.O. Box 5733
Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733**

Telephone: (908) 276-7300 • FAX: (908) 276-7402



American Atheists Inc.

is a nonprofit, nonpolitical, educational organization dedicated to the complete and absolute separation of state and church, accepting the explanation of Thomas Jefferson that the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was meant to create a "wall of separation" between state and church.

American Atheists is organized

- to stimulate and promote freedom of thought and inquiry concerning religious beliefs, creeds, dogmas, tenets, rituals, and practices;
- to collect and disseminate information, data, and literature on all religions and promote a more thorough understanding of them, their origins, and their histories;
- to advocate, labor for, and promote in all lawful ways the complete and absolute separation of state and church;
- to act as a "watch dog" to challenge any attempted breach of the wall of separation between state and church;
- to advocate, labor for, and promote in all lawful ways the establishment and maintenance of a thoroughly secular system of education available to all;

• to encourage the development and public acceptance of a humane ethical system stressing the mutual sympathy, understanding, and interdependence of all people and the corresponding responsibility of each individual in relation to society;

• to develop and propagate a social philosophy in which humankind is central and must itself be the source of strength, progress, and ideals for the well-being and happiness of humanity;

• to promote the study of the arts and sciences and of all problems affecting the maintenance, perpetuation, and enrichment of human (and other) life; and

• to engage in such social, educational, legal, and cultural activity as will be useful and beneficial to members of American Atheists and to society as a whole.

Atheism is the *Weltanschauung* (comprehensive conception of the world) of persons who are *free* from theism - *i.e.*, free from religion. It is predicated on ancient Greek Materialism.

Atheism involves the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a life-style and ethical

outlook verifiable by experience and the scientific method, independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority and creeds. An Atheist is free of belief in supernatural entities of all kinds.

Materialism declares that the cosmos is devoid of immanent conscious purpose; that it is governed by its own inherent, immutable, and impersonal laws; that there is no supernatural interference in human life; that humankind - finding their resources within themselves - can and must create their own destiny. Materialism restores dignity and intellectual integrity to humanity. It teaches that we must prize our life on earth and strive always to improve it. It holds that humans are capable of creating a social system based on reason and justice. Materialism's "faith" is in humankind and their ability to transform the world culture by their own efforts. This is a commitment which is in its very essence life-asserting. It considers the struggle for progress as a moral obligation that is impossible without noble ideas that inspire us to bold, creative works. Materialism holds that our potential for good and more fulfilling cultural development is, for all practical purposes, unlimited.

American Atheists Inc., Membership Categories

Wallbuilder	-----	\$150/year
Life Membership	-----	\$1,500
Couple*/Family	-----	\$60/year, International \$70/year
Individual	-----	\$35/year, International \$45/year
Distinguished Citizen**	-----	\$25/year, International \$35/year
Student**	-----	\$25/year, International \$35/year

*Include partner's name

**Include photocopy of ID

All membership categories receive our monthly *American Atheist Newsletter*, membership card(s), and additional organizational mailings such as new products for sale, convention and meeting announcements, etc.

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Telephone: (908) 276-7300 • FAX: (908) 276-7402 • E-mail: info@atheists.org • Website: <http://www.atheists.org>
American Atheist on-line edition: www.americanatheist.org

