

New York City Atheists Inc.

October 2003

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

(212) 330-6794 PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013
<http://nyc-atheists.org> info@nyc-atheists.org

Events

Street Fair Tabling

Sunday, October 19, 10 A.M.-6 P.M.
Broadway (between 89th and 90th Sts.)
Visit our table, or e-mail info@nyc-atheists.org or call (212) 330-6794 to help volunteer.

October Atheist Meetup

Casual dining or drinks with your fellow freethinkers.
Tuesday, October 21, 7-9 P.M.
Manhattan and other locations; call (212) 330-6794 to confirm.
Locations chosen by registering and voting at <http://atheists.meetup.com>. Atheist Meetups in Westchester, Long Island, and northern NJ will be promoted in e-mail if enough people register.

October Meeting

Sunday, October 26, 1-4 P.M.
Guest speaker: Joe Fox, New Jersey Humanist Network, on the HumanLight holiday (<http://www.humanlight.org>)
352 7th Ave., 16th fl.
(Between W. 29th-30th Sts., just south of Penn Station)
Donation requested

November Atheist Meetup

Casual dining or drinks with your fellow freethinkers.
Tuesday, November 18, 7-9 P.M.
Manhattan and other locations; call (212) 330-6794 to confirm.

November Meeting

Thursday, November 20, 6:30 P.M.
Guest speaker: Bill Baird, reproductive rights activist
352 7th Ave., 16th fl.
(Between W. 29th-30th Sts., just south of Penn Station)
Donation requested

December Solstice Dinner

Sunday, December 21, 7 P.M.
Location TBA



Atheists in Foxholes Celebrated at September Meeting

Richard Cotter and Jack Pollard of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (<http://www.maaf.info>) spoke on how “There Are Atheists in Foxholes” to New York City Atheists at its September meeting, which was attended by 45 people, a new record, and which included male and female veterans. There was lots of interest in atheism in the military. Pollard’s presentation led to a question-and-answer discussion with almost everyone participating.

Cotter, an atheist currently in the Reserves, said that he noticed religious activities on base, and that he’d like to see more support for the numerous nonreligious in the military. He gave an overview of MAAF and some of its issues: dogtags, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Boy Scouts of America charter, the Freedom from Religion Foundation’s annual Lake Hypatia retreat and its military atheists memorial, Bob Schieffer of CBS’s public apology regarding atheists in foxholes, and about the atheist and humanist symbols approved on military headstones and those in Arlington cemetery.

Ken said he’s asked MAAF members to document being in combat situations in which they hadn’t fallen to praying to a god. Cotter, too, said he was interested in local atheists who had been in active combat. Cotter can be

contacted at president@maaf.info.

Asked how soldiers could handle fear in combat without religion, Cotter said that there was room for such counseling, though he himself was only involved with it [in the states].

When the group discussed the efforts of Kathleen Johnson, American Atheists’ director of Military Affairs, to protest chaplain-led invocations at the Naval Academy (see “Military Atheists Protest Prayer At Naval Academy” in September’s newsletter), were discussed, Cotter praised the “fantastic” progress of seeing that addressed.

Pollard described the grenades, mines, and other elements of his active combat experience on the Saigon River delta in Vietnam. He said he had long been offended by the “there are no atheists in foxholes” canard. Worse, “You can’t have foxhole in the mud,” he said. “It’s even worse; you can’t lay down flat in the water.” He discussed the fear of death in “foxholes,” and said that the closeness of death makes irrelevant religion, or awareness of your teammates’ religion or lack of religion.

He also discussed the lack of prevalence of chaplains on the front line, high-ranking atheists in the services, the activism of Kathleen Johnson, and alternatives to Alcoholics Anonymous (see “Twelve-Step Alternatives” elsewhere in this newsletter.)

Cotter, in closing, read the "Atheists in Foxholes" poem by Alice Shiver (see box).

Ken awarded Cotter a certificate of appreciation plaque to cotter for speaking, and noted that on this same day, in 1789, Congress voted to approve the bill of rights, later ratified by the states. He read the 1st amendment "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Ken introduced, to popular acclaim, a campaign to encourage atheist letters to the editor (see "Dollars for Letters to the Editor" elsewhere in this issue.)

Ken reported on NYC Atheists member Howard's alert that P.S. 41, on 11th Street and 6th Avenue, at 10:00 A.M. on Sundays, allows the New York Church of Christ to have services in its auditorium. American Civil Liberties Union legal counsel informs us that it is legal if the public school rents to "anybody," and that religious organizations cannot be denied equal access.

Members donated \$192 (see "Treasury Report" elsewhere in this issue.)

Ken also discussed paid advertising, especially his inquiries with *Our Time* and *Westsider*. Many members urged advertising in the *Village Voice*. The events magazines *New York Press* and *L* have been promoting our meetings regularly, at no charge. The *New York Times* has apologized for omitting our second advertisement with it. We are beginning to advertise in *The Onion*.

New York City Atheists may offer a promotional 2004 pocket wallet calendar.

The meeting voted to have a solstice meeting at a restaurant or other special place on the evening of Sunday, December 21. The location will be announced.

Immediately after the meeting, our first book discussion group, comprising up to eight people, met to explore *An Atheist Epic*, Madalyn O'Hair's personal account of how the Bible and prayers were removed from public schools of the United States. The group voted to meet every other month.

Atheists in Foxholes

by Alice Shiver

Written for the Freedom from Religion Foundation's Freethought Homecoming at Lake Hypatia, July 4, 1999

*Atheists in foxholes, some say they are myths,
Creations of the mind who just don't exist.
Yet, they answered the call to defend, with great pride.
With reason their watchword, they bled and they died.
They took Saratoga from the British crown,
Secured America's freedom at the Battle of Yorktown.
From Sumter to Appomattox, fields flowed with their blood.
When the cannons grew silent, the flag proudly stood.
From the Marne to the Argonne, in trenches and tanks,
They defeated the Germans — the whole world gave thanks.
They were bombed at Pearl Harbor, fought on to Berlin.
Many freethinking women served along with the men.
Still war keeps erupting — Iraq, Bosnia, and Kosovo.
Where is the peace that eludes people so?
It is broken by tyrants who bear crosses and creeds,
That overshadow reason with hate and cruel deeds.
So atheists prevail until your work is complete.
Mothers mourn, children cry, and bigots plan your defeat.
By air, land, and sea, you answer freedom's call.
Without god or faith, you seek liberty for all.*

HumanLight Holiday, and Abortion: Topics for Next Meetings

October's meeting — to be held on the last Sunday of the month, October 26, from 1 to 4 P.M. — features as guest speaker the New Jersey Humanist Network's Joe Fox, who will discuss HumanLight, "a new holiday celebrating humanist values. . . . Humanists are not comfortable with holidays based on supernatural concepts, but nonetheless wish to express their good wishes to others in a spirit of hope, love, and understanding." See the Web site <http://www.humanlight.org> to learn more about HumanLight before the meeting.

In November the guest speaker will be Bill Baird, the nationally known reproductive rights activist. Baird has long been a friend to atheist and other freethought groups. Come hear him on Thursday, November 20, 6:30 P.M.

Treasury Report

Having already won federal certification as a 501(c), tax-exempt educational organization, last month New York City Atheists became exempt from New York State sales tax, thanks to the hard work of members Ken and Mel.

Please consider donating to New York City Atheists. Membership and our monthly newsletter are currently free, but we depend on donations to maintain events and mailings. Donations, which are tax-deductible, are reported in this monthly treasury report, anonymously unless requested otherwise. Make your check payable to "NYC Atheists" and send it to NYC Atheists, PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013.

Mid-September's treasury balance was \$1,387.25. We spent \$195.53 to print and \$40.70 to mail the September newsletter, \$220 for the October 26 meeting room rental and \$180 for the November 20 meeting room rental, and \$44.28 on stationary. Members donated \$192 at the September meeting and \$1110 via mail. As of mid-October, the treasury balance is \$2,008.74, excluding the cost of this newsletter.

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NYC Atheists Invited to Buy Church

New York City Atheists has been invited to bid on a hundred-year-old landmark Christian Scientist church on the Upper West Side.

The First Church of Christ, Scientist, at 1 West 96th Street, was put on the market after its dwindling congregation merged with a neighboring Christian Science church.

A colorful brochure (see photos on this page) sent to New York City Atheists by Regency Capital and Insignia/ESG, which is brokering the sale, says that the opulent church's Beaux Arts design, featuring neoclassical elements, detailed decorative features, and heavy masonry, is comparable to that of the New York Public Library and Grand Central Terminal. 47,000 square feet of floor space includes a mahogany-paneled boardroom; 32 offices, including 6 with fireplaces; a duplex two-bedroom apartment; and a library. What the brokers call the "main auditorium," seats up to 1,900 people and offers soaring skylit ceilings. The interior features intricately detailed marble floors, soaring ornate vaulted ceilings, and gilded wood.

There are no religious symbols in the interior aside from the stained-glass windows, which include a prominent one entitled "Touch Me Not." Since the church is listed in the National Historic Register, no external changes can be made without the approval of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

"We are praying and trusting that it will be the perfect right space for somebody," said Catherine Byers, a church trustee.

The church building is expected to sell for approximately \$24 million. Donations to NYC Atheists, a nonprofit educational association, are tax-exempt. There are no plans to bid on the church. See the Treasury Report elsewhere in this issue.

Politicians Pray for School Success

Schools Chancellor Joel Klein asked for prayers as he prepared for the start of an academic year marked by major organizational restructuring. "I need you to pray for me, to pray that I have the wisdom and I have the ability to lead the system in the way that you want," Klein said from the pulpit of the Bridge Street AME Church in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, according to the September 8, 2003 *New York Daily News*.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's comments in the same article were strictly secular. But according to the July 3 edition of the *New York Sun*, Bloomberg invoked divine intervention in favor of the school system. "God is with us today. God sent us a message. The schools are going to get better."

Bloomberg has maintained such a nonreligious profile that when he began stressing his Jewish roots during his mayoral campaign, he earned snickers from the local Jewish religious newspapers the *Forward* and *Jewish Week*. However, at a July 2001 press conference, Bloomberg had called prayer in public schools — even the Lord's Prayer, which is Christian — "an excellent idea." "It's the way I grew up

and I didn't turn out so bad," he said. "Nobody wants to keep church and state more separate more than I do. But I don't have a problem if kids can say the Lord's Prayer, as long as you make sure that you're not, through social pressure or anything else, forcing people to pray or to say a prayer that they don't believe in." Later, Bloomberg said he favored a "moment of silence" or other organized prayer in public schools. But he added that he would have "no intention" of advancing his views in the city's public schools or through the state government.

To respond to Klein and Bloomberg's prayerful positions, you can write them, respectively: Chancellor Joel Klein, New York City Department of Education, 52 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007, chancellor@nycboe.net; Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, City Hall, New York, NY 10007, <http://nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html>.



Dollars for Letters to the Editor

Sanity pays. Be eligible to win up to \$100 for your published letter to a New York City area newspaper or magazine!

Eligible publications: Daily, weekly, or monthly print newspapers and magazines published and distributed in the New York City metropolitan area.

Awards: \$100 for a published letter in the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *New York*, or *Time Out*. \$75 for a published letter in the *Daily News*, *New York Post*, or *Newsday*. \$50 for a published letter in the *New York Press*, *Village Voice*, *New York Observer*, *The Sun*, or *The Resident*, or Westchester, New Jersey, or Long Island daily newspapers. \$25 for a published letter in other journals. \$100 for the best published letter of the year.

Rules:

- 1) You must be a member of NYC Atheists Inc.
- 2) The letter must be related to NYC Atheists Inc.'s purposes and goals:

To promote total and absolute separation of church and state

To educate and inform the public about atheism

To provide a forum for the inquiry and discussion of atheism

To develop and engage in educational, cultural and social activities that are beneficial to the members of NYC Atheists Inc. and atheism

- 3) An original, dated copy of your published letter must be submitted to NYC Atheists Inc., PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013.
- 4) The decision of the NYC Atheists Inc. board of directors is final.

Use this list of most major local print media (plus *USA Today*) to send letters. Letters should respond to a journal's specific article or general coverage, and opinion/"op-ed" commentaries should reflect a journal's general style. When writing, include your name, address, and daytime and evening phone numbers. The shorter the letter or commentary, the better the chance it will be used. All journals reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity. This list includes contact information, when available, "op-ed"

commentaries. Always check journals for the most current submission information and expected style. If the journal you want is not listed below, try the Web site <http://go-newyorkcity.com/media>.

Daily News

Letters to the Editor
The New York Daily News
450 W. 33rd St.
New York, N.Y. 10001
E-mail: voicers@edit.nydailynews.com

The Jersey Journal (Jersey City)

In Your Opinion
The Jersey Journal
30 Journal Square
Jersey City, NJ 07306

The Journal News (Westchester)

1 Gannett Drive
White Plains, NY 10604
E-mail: letters@thejournalnews.com
Web: www.nyjnews.com/contact/letters.php3?address=letters

New York Magazine

Letters to the Editor
New York Magazine
444 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
E-mail: NYLetters@primediagrams.com
Web: <http://www.metronewyork.com/index.htm>

New York Post

Letters to the Editor
New York Post
1211 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10036-8790
E-mail: letters@nypost.com
Web letters submission:
www.nypost.com/postopinion/letters/letters-editor.htm

New York Press

Letters to the Editor
New York Press
333 7th Ave., 14th Fl.
NY, NY 10001
E-mail: mugger@nypress.com

The New York Times

Letters to the Editor
The New York Times (or) The New York Times Magazine
229 West 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036
Fax: (212) 556-3622. E-mail (newspaper): letters@nytimes.com
E-mail (magazine): magazine@nytimes.com
Web forum:
<http://forums.nytimes.com/comment/>
Length: approx. 150 words
Op-Ed submissions: oped@nytimes.com

The New Yorker

The Mail
The New Yorker
4 Times Square
New York, N.Y. 10036-6592
Fax: 212-286-5047
E-mail: themail@newyorker.com

Newsday

Letters to the Editor
Newsday
235 Pinelawn Rd.
Melville, NY 11747-4250
Web: <http://cf.newsday.com/newsdayemail/email.cfm>
Viewpoints commentary submission:
oped@newsday.com

The Star-Ledger (Trenton)

Letters to the Editor
The Star-Ledger
1 Star-Ledger Plaza
Newark, N.J., 07102-1200
E-mail: elletters@starledger.com
Opinion: Richard Aregood, Editorial Department, raregood@starledger.com

The Sun

Letters to the Editor
105 Chambers St.
New York, NY 10007

The Times (Trenton)

Letters to the Editor
The Times
P.O. Box 847
Trenton, N.J. 08605
E-mail: letters@njtimes.com

USA Today

Letters to the Editor
USA Today
1000 Wilson Blvd., 22nd
Arlington, VA 22229
E-mail: editor@usatoday.com
Length: 250 or fewer words

The Village Voice

Letters to the Editor
The Village Voice
36 Cooper Square
New York, NY 10003
E-mail: editor@villagevoice.com
Web: <http://www.villagevoice.com/aboutus/contact.shtml>

The Wall Street Journal

Letters to the Editor
4300 Route 1 North
South Brunswick, NJ 08852
E-mail: editors@interactive.wsj.com



Atheists Still Fighting Against WTC Cross

WorldNetDaily.com, 9/9/03

Just shy of the two-year anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, an atheist organization is once again warning against using a steel-beam cross at the site of the World Trade Center disaster from being used in a permanent memorial to the victims who died there.

"Many people who died on Sept. 11 weren't Christian. There were Jews, Muslims and atheists who died," Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists, told the *Trentonian* newspaper. "This is a Christian religious advertisement, and allowing it to stay there is an insult to everyone who doesn't believe in that particular religion."

As WorldNetDaily reported, last year, the organization first spoke out about the issue after Ed Malloy, a board member of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, asked that the cross be made a permanent part of any future memorial.

The atheists said use of the cross in a government-funded monument "would violate the separation of church and state, be insensitive to those victims who had no religious beliefs and would incredibly pay homage to religion — the prime motivating factor in the faith-based attack of Sept. 11."

The Associated Press reports Johnson and her group, founded by the late Madalyn Murray O'Hair, is considering a lawsuit to prevent the cross from becoming part of any permanent memorial.

Construction worker Frank Silecchia happened upon the perfectly symmetrical cross in the midst of the WTC wreckage just a few days after the attacks. It was standing straight, 20-feet high, surrounded by many smaller crosses.

After the cross was discovered, construction workers, firefighters, police officers and family members began holding weekly Sunday services at the site.

The names of fallen police officers and firefighters were also scribbled on the cross, along with the message "May God forgive their evil," reported the Associated Press.

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the agency overseeing the rebuilding of the area, has made no decisions on what a Ground Zero memorial would include.

Report from the NYC Atheists Working Group

by Bob

Several members of NYC Atheists met as a working group on September 28 to explore possible ways to integrate the insights and contributions of all our members to enable us to be more effective with outreach. Recognizing that different folks have different slants on the same issues, we began by looking at vocabulary we might need.

The minutes of our first meeting follow. If you would like more information, please post a request to the members-only Yahoo discussion group <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nyc-atheists>, or call NYC Atheists at (212) 330-6794.

1. Purpose and focus. We discussed the need for a common vocabulary and other certain tasks. We also discussed how doing these tasks in tandem might be mutually helpful. For example, the design of a Q&A for use during tabling would need some common vocabulary — and writing a school syllabus or studies of "atheist ethical systems" might reveal the need to clarify key terms.

We also discussed reviewing traditional "differences of opinion." We'll try to find areas of agreement, allowing us to move on to other discussions and projects.

2. Procedures. We'll try to maximize the commonality of our findings; then, delineate as precisely as possible any remaining differences. We will then report our findings to

the next membership meeting for review. Together (hopefully) we'll find a formulation of the word, issue, or position that can be "adopted" — subject to any future revisions!

3. The first forays! After some discussion, we decided to start our discussion around "the need to establish common basic vocabulary." During the meeting, we sometimes strayed into more "pithy" discussions. The question was raised: Are we a work group or a seminar? As the meeting progressed, the switching between the two modes seemed to bear fruit. We discovered that at times, we needed to know exactly what a speaker meant by certain terms employed — and we would add the word to the list!!! The discussion of the meaning of key terms helped to clarify discussions. We compiled a list of terms and associate terms:

— Atheist, agnostic, freethinker, humanist, secularist, skeptic, heretic/unbeliever, ethicist

— Religion, faith, belief, spiritual, god(s), free will, supernatural

— Science, method, empirical, materialism, E=mc², TOE (theory of everything), naturalism

— Social Science, mind/brain, psychology, ethics/morality, reason/rationality, consciousness/cognition, experience/truth

4. Follow-up. Everyone is encouraged to find definitions for as many words as possible, relying on the dictionary and Web site suggested by Ken: www.wikipedia.org Now is the time to suggest the definition that is dear to your heart!!!! If you can, send me your list: I'll try to consolidate.

5. Name. We need a name: only suggestion so far is the C³ (cubed) committee [Cohesive (or Coordinated) Creative Consciousness].

Meetings: meet before members mtg.: Oct. 26 11:30, Mustang Harry's (same address as mtg).

Main task: Prepare a short report for the members to get reactions.



God and the Democratic Wing of the Democratic Party

By Lenni Brenner
Counterpunch, 8/29/03

We know that you are snickering about Alabama's Chief Justice Roy Moore's 10 Commandments rock. Now his eight associate judges have repudiated "Roy's Rock," and the state's Attorney General removed it. So all is well. Or is it?

On July 22, the House voted 307 to 119 for an amendment to an appropriations bill. It prohibits the use of federal money to enforce the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals previous ruling that "under God" has no business in the Pledge of Allegiance. The next day it voted 260 to 161 to prohibit funding of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals decision demanding the removal of Moore's monument.

Ninety-one of 199 Democrats voted to prohibit funding the "under God" decision, 50 out of 197 voted to ban US money for enforcement of the order against Moore. Cynics felt that this was just populist demagoguery, that they knew that the bill wouldn't get past the Senate. Except that the Senate had previously voted, 99 to 0 and 94 to 0, to denounce the 9th's ruling in nonbinding statements.

With Alabama's court and AG promising to get rid of the 10 Commandments stone, the Senate won't have to vote on that, but "under God" is still before the courts. As of now, no one has introduced the 11th Circuit Court amendment into the Senate, and it is possible that our Senators will cook up a parliamentary maneuver to evade binding a vote on the House's handiwork. But if they do, that only postpones the political

day of reckoning for our secular liberals until the 2004 elections.

Columnists in the *New York Times*, the *Nation* and other liberal journals now agonize over whether they are for Howard Dean or Dennis Kucinich. None of their ruminations mean a thing. Everyone familiar with those publications' previous endorsements knows that they will tell us to vote for anyone the Democrats nominate, even if they dig up Attila and run him as a peace candidate. But for the Hun's presidency to mean much, domestically, he's got to have a Democratic Congress to back him up. Which means that our secular Democrats will be on their knees the night before the election, alongside Moore, praying that all the House Democrats who voted for him, and all the Senators who stood up for "God" against you heathens, get reelected.

Win or lose, liberalism faces its terminal crisis. Secularist organizations are deeply troubled. Secularism was invented by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, the Democratic Party's founders. Library shelves sag under the weight of their warnings about mixing religion and politics. But every hypocritical Democrat's vote on behalf of Moore or "under God" was a weapon of mass deception aimed at Jefferson's great "wall of separation between Church and State."

God and the 10 Commandments may be what Judaism is all about, but even the American Jewish Congress, which wants continued support of both parties for Israel, called the House votes "assaults on the rule of law." Mock pious politicians may be 'good for Israel,' but their members live here and they fear that politically 'shrewd' pandering to the Christian right today can end us up with a Christian government on some tomorrow.

Secularist Democrats have fallen into a pit of their own digging. Ninety-eight, maybe 99 out of 100, share the cynicism of their party on other issues. For example, many secularists are privately for legalizing recreational pot. Yet they have no problem with Dean and Kucinich running like thieves from the issue, which isn't central to the secular world view. But they know that any Presidential candidate of "the democratic wing of the Democratic Party," will never denounce the congressional Democratic Jesus freaks and panderers to the freaks, and that the reason for their silence is exactly the same depraved vote counting reason they are quieter than Jerusalem Slim's

empty tomb re marijuana.

For all their populist rhetoric, "democratic wing" politicians operate on the basis of a great unspoken truth: Poor people got poor ways. Foolish voters outnumber the wise, not just in Alabama, but in every state in the union. Their strategy is to pander to those fools, black, white and otherwise, by commission or omission, by lying to them, or keeping quiet when their party colleagues do, all in the fools' interests, you understand.

Wannabe leftist candidates also must face that sobering reality. Pander or educate. But if you pander, you never convert anyone into a thinking political being.

Democrats are "crackpot realists." They know that 47% of Americans, 57% of Blacks, believe that God created the world about 10,000 years ago. They

James Madison to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822

Notwithstanding the general progress made within the two last centuries in favour of this branch of liberty, & the full establishment of it, in some parts of our Country, there remains in others a strong bias towards the old error, that without some sort of alliance or coalition between Govt. & Religion neither can be duly supported. Such indeed is the tendency to such a coalition, and such its corrupting influence on both the parties, that the danger cannot be too carefully guarded agst. And in a Govt. of opinion, like ours, the only effectual guard must be found in the soundness and stability of the general opinion on the subject. Every new & successful example therefore of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters, is of importance. And I have no doubt that every new example, will succeed, as every past one has done, in shewing that religion & Govt. will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together. It was the belief of all sects at one time that the establishment of Religion by law, was right & necessary; that the true religion ought to be established in exclusion of every other; And that the only question to be decided was which was the true religion. The example of Holland proved that a toleration of sects, dissenting from the established sect, was safe & even useful. The example of the Colonies, now States, which rejected religious establishments altogether, proved that all Sects might be safely & advantageously put on a footing of equal & entire freedom; and a continuance of their example since the declaration of Independence, has shewn that its success in Colonies was not to be ascribed to their connection with the parent Country. If a further confirmation of the truth could be wanted, it is to be found in the examples furnished by the States, which have abolished their religious establishments. I cannot speak particularly of any of the cases excepting that of Virga, where it is impossible to deny that Religion prevails with more zeal, and a more exemplary priesthood than it ever did when established and patronised by Public authority. We are teaching the world the great truth that Govts. do better without Kings & Nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by thie other lesson that Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of Govt.

court that religious Black vote and desperately pander to white Protestant born-again, pro-Zionist Orthodox Jewish believers in the Great Ham-hater in the sky, and similar powerful minds. They hem and they haw about gay marriage. But, in the 'real world' which they babble about without really examining, one in seven Americans now reject all religions, millions of sincere believers also believe in keeping religion out of politics, there are now over 19 million potheads, and tens of millions of straights accept gay marriage.

To be sure, as of now, no for-keeps revolutionary can get elected President. But a serious radical candidate in 2004 most assuredly can recruit a massive movement out of those already gigantic minorities. And always remember that the Democrats lost to Nixon in 1968 and 1972, yet Nixon lost the Vietnam war. That's because it wasn't Democrats Hubert Humphrey and George McGovern who organized hundreds of thousands into the antiwar movement. It was a few thousand Trotskyists and Stalinists who called the demonstrations.

And today no sane person expects Dean or Kucinich to call for an anti-war movement. Not here, and certainly not within the military in Afghanistan and Iraq and Saudi Arabia. That plain and simple truth automatically disqualifies them as genuine 'peace candidates'.

Lenni Brenner is the editor of 51 Documents: Zionist Collaboration with the Nazis, and a contributor to the forthcoming CounterPunch book The Politics of Anti-Semitism. He can be reached at BrennerL21@aol.com.

LISH Merges with CFI

To accelerate the grown and widen the reach of organized scientific rationalism in the New York City area, Long Island Secular Humanists (LISH), led by president Gerry Dantone, has merged with the Center for Inquiry (CFI). LISH has been the largest and most active community group for humanists and skeptics on Long Island. To increase its impact and ensure its long-term future, the group decided to become the Long Island operation of CFI, and Dantone will serve as CFI's Long Island coordinator. The merger officially took effect on August 1, and was marked by an August 10 celebratory beach barbecue in Huntington, New York.

Federal Court Rules on Inmates' Halal Meat

Meatingplace.com, 9/12/03

The 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower court's ruling that the state of New Jersey is not obligated to serve two Muslim inmates meals containing meat that is halal. The case is similar to dozens of others filed around the country. Pennsylvania inmate Henry Williams filed suit after he was disciplined for refusing to help prepare a pork meal while working in the kitchen at the Rockview state prison in 2001.

Last year, a prison review panel upheld his punishment, ruling that kitchen workers "are required to wear gloves and therefore do not 'touch pork,' technically."

The Solstice Season

by Madalyn O'Hair

When the first installment of a regularly scheduled, fifteen-minute, weekly American Atheist radio series on KTBC radio (a station in Austin, Texas, owned by then-president Lyndon Baines Johnson) hit the airwaves on June 3, 1968, the nation was shocked. The programs had to be submitted weeks in advance and were heavily censored. The regular production of the series ended in September 1977, when no further funding was available. The following is the text of American Atheist Radio Series program No. 30, first broadcast on December 23, 1968, which became known as "The Solstice Season Program" and was subsequently printed annually in the December issue of American Atheist during the years when it was a monthly periodical.

Someone stole something from me. I don't like it. What was stolen from me — and from you — was one of the most beautiful holidays in the world. Robert G. Ingersoll (an American Atheist hero of earlier days) was also angry about this theft. Let me read to you what he had to say about it.

He wrote a very famous "Christmas sermon." It was printed in the Evening Telegram newspaper, New York City, New York, on December 19, 1891. The ministers of the day attacked the newspaper and demanded a boycott of it. The Telegram accepted the challenge and set off an issue across the country. The paper printed the Rev. Dr. J. M. Buckley's attack, and Robert Ingersoll's answer. It developed into a real donnybrook.

Let's hear what Ingersoll had to say:

"The good part of Christmas is not always Christian, it is generally Pagan; that is to say, human and natural.

"Christianity did not come with tidings of great joy, but with a message of eternal grief. It came with the threat of everlasting torture on its lips. It meant war on earth and perdition thereafter.

"It taught some good things, the beauty of love and kindness in man. But as a torch-bearer, as a bringer of joy, it has been a failure. It has given infinite consequences to the acts of finite beings, crushing the soul with a responsibility too great for mortals to bear. It has filled the future with fear and flame, and made God the keeper of an eternal penitentiary, destined to be the home of nearly all the sons of men. Not satisfied with that, it has deprived God of the pardoning power.

"And yet it may have done some good by borrowing from the Pagan world the old festival we know as Christmas.

"Long before Christ was born, the sun god triumphed over the Powers of

Twelve-Step Alternatives

Agnostic AA is a secular alternative to Alcoholics Anonymous. In Manhattan it meets on Sunday and Thursday afternoons, and on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings. In Brooklyn it's on Saturdays at 11:30 A.M., and in the Bronx on Wednesdays at 7:00 P.M., all at various locations. For more information call New York Inter-Group at (212) 647-1680 and ask about Agnostic AA, or see their Web site <http://www.agnosticnyc.org>.

Moderation Management is another alternative. In Manhattan it meets on Tuesdays from 6 to 7 P.M. at: New York Spaces, 131 West 72nd Street, New York, and on Thursdays from 7 to 8 P.M. at the Harm Reduction Coalition, 22 West 27th Street, on the 5th floor. For more information about Moderation Management meetings, call 212-462-9469 or see their Web site <http://www.moderation.org>.

LifeRing Recovery is yet another secular alternative. It meets on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month, 1-2 P.M., at Cabrini Medical Center, 227 East 19th St. (between 2nd and 3rd Aves.) in Manhattan. For more information e-mail jsnow@panix.com or see their Web site <http://www.unhooked.com>.

Darkness. About the time that we call Christmas the days began perceptibly to lengthen. Our barbarian ancestors were worshippers of the sun, and they celebrated his victory over the hosts of night. Such a festival was natural and beautiful. The most natural of all religions is the worship of the sun. Christianity adopted this festival. It borrowed from the Pagans the best it has.

“I believe in Christmas and in every day that has been set apart for joy. We in American have too much work and not enough play. We are too much like the English.

“I think it was Heinrich Heine who said that he thought a blaspheming Frenchman was a more pleasing object to god than a praying Englishman. We take our joys too sadly. I am in favor of all the good free days, the more the better.

“Christmas is a good day to forgive and forget, a good day to throw away prejudices and hatreds, a good day to fill your heart and your house, and the hearts and houses of others with sunshine. “

Would you believe that such a warm Christmas sermon could cause religious people to launch a vicious attack on a newspaper for publishing it? Ingersoll used the word “borrow.” He said that Christians borrowed the Pagan holiday. I use a stronger word. They stole it. They stole the most beautiful holiday of man — and for what?

They claim that this is the birthday of Jesus Christ. Let’s look at their scholars and their history and see if this is a fact. You most probably all know of A. T. Robertson, the late professor of New Testament Greek at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He had written a standard textbook on the so-called Broadus Harmony of the Gospels, and it is used in every school of religion across the land. In this book is summarized all the findings of religious scholarship pin relationship to Jesus Christ and, among other things, the date of his birth.

After a lengthy explanation of when Jesus Christ may have been born, Dr. Robertson set the date at — hold on now — the summer or early fall of the year 6 B.C. or 5 B.C. Did you hear that? He set the date in the summer or the fall. Recently the idea of the first week in January has gained some following. But no one who is a religious scholar any more accepts or believes December 25.

One must calculate from the possible death of Herod, or the appearance of the so-called star in the East, which could have been a comet recorded by the Chinese or a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. But the Greenwich Observatory says that the conjunction appearing as a single star was very unlikely. Or one can judge the “time of the universal peace,” that is the “time of no war” about which the heavenly host sang. But there was never any stoppage of war in that time.

One can guess from the so-called ministry of John the Baptist, or the age of Jesus upon his entry into the ministry, or the building of the Temple of Herod, or the closing of the temple of Janus, or the so-called census of Augustus Caesar. All of these lead the poor theologians in ever-increasing directions away from the idea of Christmas and the year “zero” or “one” of our present calendar.

Actually, the idea of December 25 is untenable. All the ancients in Christian history had various days for Christ’s birth. Clement of Alexandria, who was closer to that alleged event in time, said it was May 20. April 20 and January 6 have always appeared as possible dates.

Why did the Christians want the twenty-fifth of December? Why that particular date? Why did they deliberately steal this very important date from the Pagans?

There are four points in our calendar which we use and which we call “Solstice” or “Equinox” points, two of each. The latter is easy: we say that the equinox is when the sun crosses the equator of the earth, and day and night are everywhere of equal length. The sun does not actually cross the equator; we all know that. But with the earth’s natural tip on its natural axis as it whirls around the sun, this seems to be so. Then, either one or the other part of our old ball of earth gets the most sun. But on these two occasions, the days are equal in length everywhere, and this occurs about March 21 and September 23 by our current calendar.

The Solstice is something different. We don’t go around the sun in a circle; we tour around it — on our earth — in an ellipse, which is a flattened circle, or oval. When we are in the points furthest away from the sun, we have another phenomenon. That, along with the 23° inclination of the earth, causes the solstices. Twice a year, when the sun is at its greatest distance from the celestial equator, about June 21 when the sun

reaches its northernmost point on the celestial sphere, or about December 22 when it reaches its southernmost point, we call these moments the solstice. The solstice in December is the time when the days of the year, in our hemisphere, are the shortest.

Primitive man and Pagan man were not idiots, you know. They saw this. Apparently at the first, they feared the days would get shorter and shorter and shorter and finally — what if there were only night! What a frightening thing, when the sun was so necessary for life, from common observation. So when the day came for the sun to overcome the darkness, and for the sun to cause the days to be longer — even if just a minute longer — it meant that there was not going to be eternal night. The sun had won a fight again. Darkness had had to recede and slowly the days would get longer and longer until spring and summer, with food growing again and the life cycle being renewed again, would be everywhere on the earth.

And so every primitive culture had a festival or a feast on this day. It was celebrated in China, in India, in South America, in Mexico, in Africa, in every single place where man could watch days and nights and seasons. There were presents given on this great day, exchanged as a symbol, for the sun had brought the most precious gift of all to man: the warmth needed for life and a recycle of the seasons again. The ancient men noticed other things too. Certain trees stayed green all year round, a promise of the abundance of spring and summer to come again after winter, a reassurance that all the greens would return in their seasons. The light of the sun and the twinkling light of stars became important in symbolism as well as in fact. The mysterious parasite, mistletoe, ever green, intrigued primitive man. It all needed to be celebrated, to be noted with awe. If one could not give life as the sun did — one could give else, such as a sharing of food or the precious few personal items one had. But, above all it was a time of revelry. Life had been renewed. It was the most joyous of all human occasions. There was universal singing and dancing and laughing and well-being. It was wild and wonderful, and human and warm. It was the best of all festivals. It was the gayest of all feasts. It was the warmest and best of all collective human activities.

The Christians were no fools. If they permitted the Pagan holiday to continue to exist, it could challenge the basis of the mournful Christian religion, with its great emphasis on death. First came

edicts outlawing the Pagan holiday. But nothing so wildly wonderful and natural as this could ever be outlawed. And then the solution came: incorporate it into the Christian religion. Oh, it took some time. It took many years to effect the change. It took much propaganda. It took many reprisals and sanctions against those who continued with the old festival. But, eventually the Christian religion won the day. There were changes in calendars too. When the Julian calendar was changed to the present-day calendar, Solstice — or Christmas — shifted a few days also, so that December 25, by our calendar, came officially to be designated as a Christian day.*

It took a thousand years, and more, to rob the people of the earth of this grand holiday and to replace it with a personalized myth story of a “new god born,” a god of a horrible, punitive, new religion called Christianity.

But, it is even easier now, with mass media. There are many of you in the listening audience old enough to remember Armistice Day. That was the day that World War I ended and it was celebrated for thirty years or more until a second world war broke out. After we veterans came home from that second war we found that there was no more Armistice Day. Instead, there was a Veterans’ Day. All the people in the listening audience tonight who are twenty-five years old or younger, never even heard of Armistice Day. They only know Veterans’ Day, for that is all that they were ever taught.

That’s how it is with Christmas. That is how it was with the Solstice. Finally, no one ever heard of the Solstice and its festivities — and everyone came to believe that the Christians were celebrating the birthday of Christ and that was all that this holiday had ever been.

But Bible scholars know better and Atheists know better and we celebrate that old and wonderful and joyous season. We even sell Solstice cards for this season of Solstice and the New Year (which, really, are both one day). Let me read to you what we print traditionally on our Solstice cards.

Joyful and cheerful, with mistletoe and signs of the season, the greetings are to wish one and all the glad tidings of a wonderful Winter Solstice season. The legend inside the card says:

“December 25, by the Julian calendar, was the Winter Solstice. This day, originally regarded by the Pagans as the day of the nativity of the sun, the

shortest day of the year — when the light began its conquering battle against darkness — was celebrated universally in all ages of man. Taken over by the Christians as the birthday of their mythological Christ, this ancient holiday, set by motions of the celestial bodies, survives as a day of rejoicing that good will and love will have a perpetual rebirth in the minds of men — even as the sun has a symbolic rebirth yearly.”

* In the Julian calendar, the winter solstice usually fell on 25 December. By the time that the change to the Gregorian calendar caused the solstice generally to move back to 21 December, Christmas had become an “immovable feast” (unlike Easter) and so it continued to be celebrated on the 25th. — Frank R. Zindler

Equal Time for Freethought

Equal Time for Freethought. Sunday evenings at 6:30 P.M. EST on WBAI-FM (99.5). A radio show produced by members of NYC area freethought groups. For audio and text notes, see the Web site <http://foody.org/freethought-radio.html>.

— Massimo Pigliucci, author of the book *Denying Evolution: Creationism, Scientism, and the Nature of Science*

— W. Sumner Davis, author of “Heretics: The Bloody History of the Christian Church”

— Harley Brown, president and founder of the New Jersey Humanist Network, and gay activist

— Betsy Reed, editor of “Nothing Sacred: Women Respond to Religious Fundamentalism and Terror”

— Thomas Clarke of the Center for Naturalism

— Narisetti Innaiah, Chairman, Committee on Child Abuse by Religions

— Doug Krueger, philosopher and author of *What Is Atheism? A Short Introduction*”

— Gerry Dantone of CFI-Long Island, on the racism of creationism

— Ann Druyan, writer and television producer, author of “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors,” and wife of the late Carl Sagan.

— Darlene Lieblich, producer of the TV film *Heart of the Beholder*

— Robert Price, biblical scholar and author of “Deconstructing Jesus”

— Daniel Dennett, philosopher, author of “Author of Freedom Evolves”

— Brian Whiteside, of the Association of Irish Humanists

— Eugene Carrington, of African Americans for Humanism

— Taner Edis and David Noelle, contributors to the book “Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?”

— Michael Martin, atheist philosopher

— Tariq Ali, historian, on Islam and on secularity in Islamic culture

— Ed Kagan, director of Camp Quest, the secular summer camp

— Beth Lamont and Mary Beaty, both of the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York and the Council of Ethics-Based Organizations, on the United Nations



— Ted Schick, author of “How to Think About Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age”

— Steve DeVries, journalist and playwright; author of “Steve DeVries Goes to Fundamentalist Islam Heaven”

— Barbara Ehrenreich, political essayist and social critic

— Paul Kurtz, of the Council for Secular Humanism, on humanism

— Beth Lamont, of the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York, on humanism, peace, Corliss Lamont, etc.

— Arnell Dowret, of the Secular Journey

— Michael Newdow, winning plaintiff in the “under God” pledge case

— Norm Allen, Jr., on African-American humanism

— Wendy Kaminer, agnostic author

— Michael Shermer, editor of Sceptic magazine and author of “Why People Believe Weird Things”

— Dan Barker, of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, on music

— Tom Flynn, editor of Free Inquiry magazine, on Christianity and Christmas

— James Haught, author of “Holy Horrors,” and “Holy Hatred,” and “2000 Years of Disbelief,” on religion-based wars and atrocities

— Ibn Warraq, author of “Why I Am Not a Muslim”

— Taslima Nasrin, fatwa-sentenced, former Muslim, Bangladeshi feminist/human rights activist, author of “Myebela: My Bengali Girlhood”

— Ellen Johnson, of American Atheists, on the Godless Americans March on Washington

— 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, on Tom Paine, Supreme Court cases, etc.

— 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,” genetics, etc.

— 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

— Call-in discussions

Also On the Air

Atheist Viewpoint. Sundays at 1:30 P.M. on channel 56 on Manhattan Neighborhood Network, Saturdays at 4 P.M. and Sundays at 6 P.M. on channel 35 on Staten Island, and Mondays and Tuesdays at 7 P.M. on channel 20 on Long Island’s Hauppauge and Brookhaven Cablevision. See the Web site <http://atheistviewpoint.tv>. If you are a member of NYC Atheists and want to be on the show to talk about current events and your own personal experiences relating to your atheism, e-mail Ellen Johnson (ej@atheists.org).

Humanist Perspective. Hosted by Joe Beck and aired on Cablevision Public Access, it can be seen on Wednesdays at 6:30 P.M. on channel 71 of the Woodbury system, and on Wednesdays at 7:00 P.M. on channel 70 of the Hauppauge and Brookhaven systems.

What Is Secular Humanism? Produced by Long Island Secular Humanists and aired on Cablevision Public Access, it can be seen on Tuesdays at 6:30 P.M. on channel 71 of the Woodbury system, and on Sundays at 2:00 P.M. on the Hauppauge and Brookhaven systems.

Next Street Tabling: Sunday, October 19

Our next street-fair tabling will be on Sunday, October 19, on Broadway between 89th and 90th Sts. E-mail info@nyc-atheists.org if you’d like to help volunteer in the morning or afternoon shifts. See several photos of our earlier tablings at <http://nyc-atheists.org/tabling.html>.

It’s fun!

