The Freethought Society News

Logo and website banner contest details inside. Submissions sought. See page 13.

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Don't let BSA recruit in your local public school!

by Margaret Downey

In 2001, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) declared themselves a "private" organization. As a private organization, BSA can maintain strict, bigoted membership policies. One of their policies states that members and volunteers must be "religious." BSA requires that all members and volunteers sign a "Declaration of Religious Principles (DRP)." The DRP is used to determine who qualifies for membership. The DRP states in part:

> *The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizenship without recognizing an obligation to God. In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise the member declares, 'On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law.' The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members.*

Principled nontheists and those who are not yet old enough to emphatically state that they believe in a god are faced with a dilemma — sign the DRP in order to become a member of the world's largest youth group — or be left out and possibly face being exposed as holding a minority non-religious opinion. A membership requirement of religious affiliation should disqualify BSA from entering public school settings to recruit. If BSA desires only religious children, they should limit their recruitment drives to religious schools only!

The "private" nature of BSA allows the organization to ignore federal anti-discrimination hiring laws. BSA hires only like-minded people. BSA ignores anti-discrimination state and local statutes across the nation. Those who are exposed as and admit to being nontheists are immediately fired. Concerned BSA members who question these policies and the enforcement of the DRP are also dismissed — whether or not they are nontheists themselves! BSA demands compliance "down the line" to all their policies. Opposing voices are silenced with a dismissal letter.

BSA school recruitment drives are typically conducted during the month of September. If you do not have a child attending a public school, the only way to discover if BSA has entered your public school system to conduct a recruitment drive is to make telephone inquiries directly to the office of the school superintendent or to your local elementary school principal. Sometimes, BSA will post lawn signs on the grounds of the public schools during their recruitment drives. Private organization who openly discriminate should not be allowed to stake signs on the grounds of a public school. Signs entangle the school into a question of endorsement and approval of BSA membership policies. If and when you see a BSA lawn sign on the grounds of a public school, please take note and commit to join in a protest effort highlighted in this issue of *The Freethought Society News*.

Several years ago, I noticed BSA recruitment lawn signs on the grounds of the Pocopson Elementary School. I pulled into the school and demanded to speak to the principal. I waited only a few minutes after telling the secretary why I had stopped. Claiming he knew nothing about BSA membership restrictions, the principal referred me to the school superintendent. After **Sally Flynn** and I visited with the Unionville School Superintendent **Sharon Parker**, BSA recruitment lawn signs were removed. The signs have not appeared since. My advice is that two people attend any meetings that take place. A witness to any discussion that may lead to a lawsuit is always recommended.

Some public schools have allowed a teacher or school official to distribute BSA recruitment literature before, during and after classes. The authority of a school representative is powerful, and when BSA recruitment materials are provided by someone with direct association to the school, the credibility of the BSA program is enhanced. Potential discrimination complaints and lawsuits can be avoided if BSA and its literature are simply not allowed on school grounds.

This issue of *The Freethought Society News* contains information to begin a BSA public school recruitment protest in your area should you discover an endorsement and/or entanglement. FS is asking that volunteers place important fact-finding phone calls. Questions are listed on page two of this newsletter. Depending on the answers, action might be needed to object to a BSA recruitment drive

Watch for more articles about BSA employment discrimination cases in future issues of Freethought Society (FS) newsletters.

Questions and Prep for School District Calls

Please look up the name and contact information for the public school superintendent located where you pay taxes. Make sure to have this list of questions handy and write down the responses. Include the date and make sure to properly identify the person who answers your questions. Please report your findings to **Margaret Downey,** chair of the Freethought Society's Anti-Discrimination Support Network at: margaret@FtSociety.org or P. O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366. Please contact Downey, should you need further activist assistance. Thanks in advance for your efforts.

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1. Does the school district have an anti-discrimination policy in place? If so, ask for a copy or link to see it.

2. Does the school district acknowledge that there are non-religious, gay and disabled members in the community?

3. Has the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) conducted a recruitment drive in the school district (usually done in elementary school settings)? If so, does it concern the superintendent, principals, teachers and school board members that a child may be discriminated against by BSA?

4. If BSA literature is allowed, will it fully disclose the possible types of discriminatory situations that might occur?

5. Have any teachers been involved with the distribution of BSA literature in or out of a classroom?

6. Is BSA allowed to stake recruitment lawn signs on public school property?

7. Will a BSA recruitment announcement be made over school PA systems? If so, does it state that while BSA information and literature will be available to ALL students, only religious and straight boys can join BSA?

8. Will BSA materials be placed on a table? If so, will it be staffed by school personnel?

9. If BSA materials are placed on a table, will there be a sign indicating that only religious and heterosexuals need apply?

10. If teachers are involved with the distribution of BSA literature, will the teachers make it clear that nontheists or gay youths and adults are not welcome in BSA?

11. Has the school district and its legal department reviewed the documents that BSA plans to distribute?

12. Would the school district allow a recruitment drive lead by a White Supremacist Youth Group or other private groups that openly discriminate?

13. Since the school district cannot fully protect non-religious and/or gay students from discrimination at the hands of BSA, is the school district aware that it will be setting up such youngsters for a psychologically damaging situation?

14. What does the school district expect will happen when a student receives BSA materials and discovers either at school or at home that as a nontheist and/or gay member of society he is unable to join the scouting organization?

15. How can the school district justify actively endorsing an organization that requires a signed religious affirmation and is known for discriminating against gays and nontheists?

16. Discrimination places the school district at risk of being sued. Taxpayers in the district do not wish to see their taxes spent defending a suit that can easily be avoided. Wouldn't taxpayers, principals, teachers and school board members desire to prevent avoidable legal expenses?

17. If the school district chooses to ignore these warnings and complaints, how could the school district defend its position if or when a lawsuit is filed?

18. Public schools are required, because of the provisions in the United States Constitution, to remain neutral with respect to religious practice and belief. How can the school district claim neutrality knowing that a "religious affirmation" is of foremost importance in the BSA?

19. If the school district approves the distribution of BSA materials, it may be construed to mean that the district is also showing total disregard for the nontheist community and those of a homosexual orientation. Does the school district desire to establish itself as a promoter of bigotry?

20. Wouldn't the school district be much more proud to have upheld the wall between religion and government simply because it was right — not because it was forced to do so by legal intervention?

Sample Letter to School District Regarding BSA

Please consider writing a letter/email of concern to your school superintendent regarding any BSA entanglement you may discover. Below is a sample letter that was sent to a Florida school district after it was discovered that BSA had discriminated against a disabled woman and her entire family. After an expensive legal battle, the **Rasmussen** family eventually lost the complicated suit. Reoccurrence of similar discrimination issues are of great concern, however. Rasmussen case details can be found at:

http://classweb.gmu.edu/jkozlows/RPLR/080306b.pdf

Please send a copy of your protest correspondence to **Margaret Downey,** chair of the Freethought Society's Anti-Discrimination Support Network at: margaret@FtSociety.org. Please contact Downey, should you need further activist assistance. Thanks in advance for your activist efforts.

Dear Brevard County School Board Members:

These comments are about the interest by the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) being allowed to recruit members through the tax funded public school system in Brevard County on Tuesday, August 11. 2009. On the surface, supporting BSA seems simple — perhaps innocuous.

Center for Inquiry Florida, however, holds that no taxpayer funded public governmental entity should support discriminatory organizations. The private status of the BSA was recognized on June 28, 2000, by the United States Supreme Court. The court stated that BSA has the right to exclude from membership anyone they choose. Yet, BSA continues enjoying special privileges and indirect (perhaps also direct) public tax support that should not be available to any closed-to-the-public organization.

Center for Inquiry Florida strongly opposes discriminatory organizations being allowed to receive public funds, especially in this time of economic hardship. The privilege (not a right) of being allowed to use the public school system to recruit members is one such unacceptable situation. You might have forgotten that BSA excludes, discriminates against, and publicly offends the non-religious people, the gay/LGBT community, and many disabled people; and with seeming pride, prevents them and others from joining and volunteering. Since these are well documented facts, Center for Inquiry Florida urges the Brevard County School Board to consider the following, and draw the obvious conclusion (note that these facts are presented from newspapers, magazines, public statements of BSA officials, TV and radio news sources online, and quoted with permission from the Anti-Discrimination Support Network):

1. Due to provisions in the United States Constitution and US Supreme Court cases, public schools are required to remain neutral with respect to religious practice and belief. If the school board approves distribution of literature from a youth group that will only accept religious, straight and able-bodied applicants, the school board is guilty of promoting discrimination. Allowing a group that openly and proudly discriminates creates an entanglement situation placing teachers and school officials as a party to discrimination practices.

2. Allowing BSA to recruit in your public schools, knowing that BSA openly discriminates is not prudent. To best protect taxpayer money from being spent on a possible discrimination lawsuit, the school board should prevent a BSA recruitment drive as a preventative measure. Tax dollars should be used to provide books and to maintain the school. Tax dollars should also be used to hire teachers and administrators who care about each and every student regardless of religion, sexual orientation or disability. If the school board does nothing to prevent discrimination, tax dollars may be wasted in the courtroom.

3. Preventing BSA from conducting a recruitment drive in the public school system of Brevard County, the Brevard County School Board can help send a message to BSA that their biased membership policy is unacceptable. School board members can take part in a stand for equal rights. Help us demand that discrimination of any sort is unwelcome. BSA must return to being an open-to-the-public organization that serves all youths and allows volunteer opportunities to all citizens regardless of religion, sexual orientation or disability or suffer the consequences. We expect each member of the Brevard County School Board to carefully examine their options, especially consulting with legal counsel, and make a logical public-interest decision before voting.

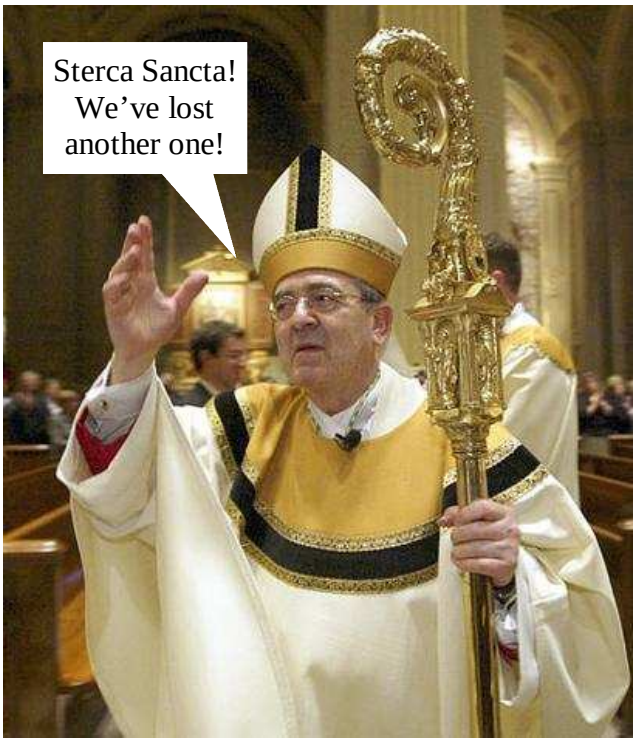
Cordially,

Fredrick Rea O'Keefe
Center for Inquiry Florida's Acting Executive Director

Declaration of Defection From The Roman Catholic Church

by Nicholas Stark

Following is the text of my Declaration of Defection from the Roman Catholic Church (Actus formalis defectionis ab Ecclesia catholica). The notice was sent on August 24, 2010 to **Cardinal Rigali** the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.



I, **Nicholas Stark**, do hereby give formal notice of my defection from the Roman Catholic Church, and I would appreciate written confirmation to testify to this fact. I want it to be known that I no longer wish to be regarded as a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and I have not attended church services since 2006.

I further declare that I am aware of the consequences of this act regarding the reception of the sacraments of the Church, including the Eucharist, marriage and the sick and also with regard to burial.

I undertake to make this decision known to my next of kin and to ensure that they are aware of these circumstances in the case of my being incapacitated.

For several years now, I have not been a practicing Catholic, and in fact have been an open atheist. However, it was not until recently that I became aware of the formal defection process. Not wishing to deceive either the Catholic Church or my fellow people, I would like all necessary records changed to reflect the reality that I am not a Catholic, despite being baptized and raised as one without choice.

I renounce the superfluous notion of deities. I renounce the unsupported claims of the existence of a supernatural realm. I doubt the historic existence, let alone the divinity, of **Jesus**, and I renounce the tenets of his transformation from Jewish carpenter to zombie. I renounce the Holy Trinity, Yahweh, and the divine inspiration of the *Bible*, which can be appreciated as a well-written relic of ancient mythological literature but is filled with mixed and on the whole indecent moral claims and owes much of its content to the myths of other civilizations from which it was plagiarized.

I am opposed to the Church morally, historically, and politically. The claim to absolute, objective moral authority is unacceptable and lacks any demonstration. The disdain with which the Church treats females, gays, sexuality in general, and non-religious or other-religious makes it an intolerably bigoted institution which I cannot in good conscience associate with.

Another charge must be added: greed. Whereas the Church has great wealth and displays just a portion of it in the form of the innumerable opulent cathedrals and sometimes even just churches across the world and the attire and style of the clergy, not to mention the pope himself, the Church is not content and places a moral obligation upon its people and parishioners to pay the entirety of its expenses, most notably with the rapid rise in collection efforts in light of the pope's design on visiting Great Britain.

All this hoarded wealth, best symbolized by the Vatican itself, stands in contrast to the poor and starving people in the hands of the Church across the world, which tends to prefer offering words and Bibles rather than food and shelter. This offering of "hope" is not moral compared to the wasted capacity of the Church to do so much more to directly help. Spreading a doctrine of masochistic acceptance of suffering in life in the hope of future pay off is convenient, not moral, and in fact is easily definable as immoral.

Historically, there is absolutely no evidence for most of the Biblical characters, including the central figure of Jesus, as having ever existed, apart from works written decades to centuries later and those demonstrably forged or altered by later Christian apologists. In addition, the Church's role in condemning progress is all too clear.

For example, **Pope Pius VI**'s Charitas on the Civil Oath in France promulgated 13 April 1791 opened the doorway to the Church's opposition to the greatest social, political, and economic progress in world history, followed by Church support for civil war in France in the Vendée region in particular, open war against the First French Republic, calls for civil war in Spain in 1807-1814, support for war criminals like King **Louis XVIII** and **Charles X** of France, the cruel and racist preachings of Hell to the Chinese throughout the nineteenth century, the alliance with western imperialists since at least the eighteenth century, the alliance with the forces of fascism in the guise of **Adolf Hitler**, **Benito Mussolini**, and **António de Oliveira Salazar** among others, the parasitic attachment formed to the poorer nations of world, the embrace and canonization of extremist reactionaries like **Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu**, and the open alliance with barbaric and totalitarian fascists of the past several decades

including the Duvaliers of Haiti and **Robert Mugabe** of Zimbabwe. All of these are within the realm of modern history, without having to use the popular recourse in detail of the many Inquisitions lasting into the nineteenth century and the crusades.

Politically, **Joseph Ratzinger**'s lifting of the excommunication of several right-wing extremists, including the infamous **Marcel Lefebvre**, will forever remain a stain on his reign and consequently on the Church itself. Furthermore, the role the Church played in the stripping of human rights from a whole sector of society and the decision to base humanity solely on its sexuality through supporting Proposition 8 in California is contemptible to the extreme. On the other hand, the Church's harboring of Anglican sexists who refuse to accept their sister preachers is deeply disappointing.

To confound the matter, the decision to impose "latae sententiae" excommunication on female priests is abhorred, defining a female priest as a worse offender than the average murderer or rapist, which brings up another issue.

On top of everything else, the role the Church hierarchy, all the way up to the current pope, in either performing or allowing the systematic torture and rape of children across the world is in itself enough to turn one away from the Church, but all the more so when combined with a mountain of other grievances. The Church buries itself beneath too much pretentiousness, racism, sexism, crime, slaughter, and gaudy opulence to be acceptable to a person of conscience.

I acknowledge that I make this declaration under solemn oath, being of sound mind and body, and in the presence of a witness, a man of impeccable character, who can testify as to the validity of this document and to the sincerity of my wishes.

Nicholas Stark was raised as a Roman Catholic and attended Catholic school from the youngest age through 12th grade. During that time, however, he came to refute the theological teachings, and by 8th grade he was Deist. He quickly became an atheist and humanist shortly thereafter. Honest evaluation and discourse enabled his transition when the realization of the absurdity of theology and dogma became clear to him. Honest discourse with friends from around the world as well as key works such as (surprisingly) the **Marquis de Sade**'s *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man*, **Richard Dawkins**' classic *The God Delusion*, and **Christopher Hitchens**' public debates demonstrated the superfluous and even undesirable nature of deities altogether. Stark is a Napoleonic and French Revolutionary historian and a Fellow of the International Napoleonic Society. He is currently an undergraduate student at West Chester University, where has a double major in History and French. Stark's future plans include earning a PHD in Napoleonic history.

Secular Celebrations

(Secular Ceremonies for the 21st Century)

Secular Officiant **Margaret Downey** is available to design and provide nontheist ceremonies to honor, celebrate and recognize life's passages, such as civil-unions, marriages, births, coming of age, divorce and death.

Special discounts are available to members of the Freethought Society.

Contact Information

Secular Celebrations
P.O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366

Phone:
(610) 793-2737
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(610) 357-9532

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(610) 793-2569
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Website: www.Secular-Celebrations.com

Attracting African Americans and Others to the Nontheist Community

by Naima Cabelle

In the July/August 2010 issue of *The Freethought News*, my article "African American Humanists in the Secular Movement: New Directions?" highlighted diversity problems within the secular/nontheist movement. I am following my overview with a few suggestions which I hope can be used to continue the discussion for creating the structures needed for more African Americans and others to become involved in the nontheist community.

There are hundreds of national and local secular organizations in the United States. I'm encouraging my fellow African Americans to become members in good-standing by, at a minimum, paying dues *and* volunteering for at least one task within a local or national organization.

Many African Americans are already involved in community volunteering. For example, we work in soup kitchens, collect canned goods, work in community gardens, participate in blood drives, support adult literacy projects, work for affordable housing, organize block clean-up projects, collect toiletries for homeless women and men, collect school supplies for needy children, volunteer as athletic coaches and tutors and answer phones during pledge drives.

There is a need for group activity rather than just individual involvement in the above short list of community-based projects. Christians, Muslims, Jews and interfaith organizations, work on community projects under their religious headings. The time has come for us to connect our individual community work, our activism and our humanist values to group efforts. This can only be done by making sure that we use designations which identify us as belonging to nontheist, secular or humanist organizations.

Nontheist volunteers should be *proud* to disclose their organization affiliations. Secular organizations need to determine how much time, energy and resources can be committed to community service projects. I suggest, however, that group service efforts take place at least once a month.

Let's recognize that many people have positive religious experiences through their places of worship. Many long-term relationships develop as a result of people sharing the same faith.

Relationships revolving around religion would likely be severed once a person rejects "the faith." When a person loses their religion, they may also lose many friends. The first question is, "Where do I go from here?" Leaving a faith can be a painful and very lonely experience.

Separating from one's religious beliefs often leaves people feeling very isolated, especially if they have attended the same religious institution their entire lives. They wonder what they will find when they seek out affiliations with the secular community. What will happen if they actually attend a secular meeting? Will they feel welcome? Will anyone bother to talk to them or to even make eye-contact?

The doors to the nontheist community are open, but I can tell you first-hand that not all newcomers feel welcomed. An unfriendly nontheist group is problematic. I think this is a solvable problem, but everyone in the nontheist community must play a role in solving it.

It takes time and interaction with people in order to develop relationships. Newcomers should not be met with an impersonal, indifferent attitude. It is not the religious doctrine which makes for positive relationships among people — it is seeing people on a regular basis, interacting with those you have much in common with, and the fact that human beings are social animals that will facilitate bonds.

Organized religion is way ahead of the game. They spend one or two hours, once a week, with each other. Furthermore, many people of faith have benefits of association. People of faith help each other with things such as emergency childcare, transportation to work and temporary housing. I think it would be foolish to overlook the psychological benefits which may come specifically as a result of relationships in which participants share a faith.

It seems that the religious community is far better at little things, such as remembering a person's birthday. Many religious people phone and check on fellow parishioners who are ill. They are often supportive during serious illnesses or in the event of the death of a loved one. I can't expect those things from people who don't even bother to make eye-contact with me. I find this happens often in secular settings.

Pulling away from a faith can be extremely difficult and create many hardships when a person is fully emerged in a faith community. People stay in organizations not only because of a cause which may be very important to them, but they also stay for friendship and deeper relationships. It would be foolish to overlook how important this is. Most people who have had those close relationships don't expect to replace them — they are often irreplaceable, but, it is not unreasonable for them to expect to be able to develop others.

In many religious settings people are asked to introduce themselves during a meeting or service. The tradition is a nice way to welcome people and for others to address them by name either during or after a service. The self-introduction tradition is a matter of simple courtesy and something all secular organizations should adopt.

I also suggest that after a secular meeting ends, new people should be asked if they need a ride or if someone can escort them to their car or bus stop. This too, is a matter of simple courtesy.

Unfortunately, many visitors to nontheist meetings are not acknowledged in any way. It may seem "church-like" to some, but we need a similar tradition. Most of the secular organizations I have joined host meetings that draw between 25-50 people in attendance. Very few of those attendees are friendly, talkative or helpful.

Many believers are taught that interactions with secularists (not necessarily atheists, but anyone who doesn't embrace the same religious beliefs and practices) will put their faith in jeopardy.

Religious doctrines teach them to separate themselves from the "unclean, polluters, idolaters, defilers" and "untouchables." These are not my words, but words I've heard used by members of the religious community. In religious communities, nontheists are also referred to as "swine, snakes, devils" and/or "dogs." According to religious doctrines, believers who mix, mingle, or marry the "un-righteous" have brought themselves a one-way ticket on the express train to hell.

Of course, nontheists say that these beliefs are un-reasonable. A doctrine that divides people into those who are worthy of life and those who are condemned to death is a doctrine that has been proven to be harmful to innocent human beings.

Since this article addresses the acceptance of African Americans into the world of nontheism, I ask, why would a reasonable nontheist reject members of their own organization just because they seem different from themselves? What would happen if someone greeted, shook hands, and/or conversed with someone of a different ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and/or nationality? Why are so many of us afraid to even attempt to befriend one another? Are we so small and fragile that we would be diminished by being friendly and open? Yes, this has been my experience and this is why I wrote this article.

Does this mean that members in the secular movement are expected to socialize with and befriend people whom they do not like? Absolutely not! If I joined an organization and couldn't stand the sight of anyone in it, I would re-evaluate my reasons for joining in the first place! Frankly, it's unethical to solicit membership and accept membership dues from the general public if the leaders and members of such organizations know that only a very narrow and select group of people would be welcomed.

Because of the way that many people's lives are structured, it is possible to not have many friends outside of work and/or outside of your faith. Many of our neighborhoods discourage interaction between residents to the point that people living next door to one another rarely meet. Organizations, however, are ways to connect with people. When people join a place of worship, they are hoping to find human connections.

When people join secular organizations, I think that they are also looking forward to meeting others who share some of their same interests. These interests can be explored in a variety of ways, some of which I mentioned earlier. Members of the secular movement who are dissatisfied with the level of interpersonal interactions or in many cases, the complete absence of interpersonal interaction, need to do something about it. The secular movement will need to find ways to address social needs — even if it seems "church-like" to some. It is going to take the personal actions of each of us to build an inclusive community.

African Americans seem to be the ones who most openly express a feeling that the nontheist community is not welcoming. There are a few things that can be done with little effort to help change this.

Secular organizations could make it a point to ask visitors (including new members) to introduce themselves at the beginning or end of each meeting. African American nontheists should make a point to introduce themselves particularly to other African Americans who may be coming to a meeting for the first time. African American members should be sure to exchange contact information with other African American visitors. No one should be too shy to ask about the interest level a visitor has and we should offer to communicate about any given topic.

Sometimes people attending a meeting are not actually nontheists, but they may have come to the meeting at the invitation of a friend. They may also have attended because the topic or guest speaker is of interest to them.

Providing printed information about national nontheist organizations is helpful in making people feel more secure in their decision to attend a meeting. Some people may have no idea of how to find national organizations or what those groups have to offer. We must include information about African American nontheists if the goal is to attract blacks and keep them interested. If we are going to promote activism and membership, we should make it easy by having comprehensive information available.

I've often heard people tell visitors that they should "go on-line" for additional information. If we are truly interested in creating a welcoming atmosphere, telling people to "go online and look it up" is not too helpful! A personal one-on-one follow-up is much better!

While I have never attended a Freethought Society (FS) meeting in person, I understand most of my suggestions highlighted in this article are already implemented by FS officers and board members. At FS monthly meetings, new attendees are asked to stand and introduce themselves. This tradition takes place after a brief overview of the group is provided. In 1995, FS started a Helping Hands Committee to assist their members in need. Newcomers to FS are sent welcome letters, asked about their date of birth and solicited for their input. FS cares!

FS should go further, however. If a person is interested in learning more about nontheism, the group should offer a regularly scheduled discussion day and time on the subject.

While FS encourages community service, it should focus on one or two specific community projects that meets its goals of humanitarian outreach.

The suggestions in this article are meant to inspire readers to be involved, friendly and active in their nontheist group — if the goal is indeed to attract more African Americans and others to the community.

Pictured above is **Naima Cabelle**. She is a resident of Washington, DC and is keenly interested in freethought issues. Cabelle attends as many freethought events as possible and enjoys reading and writing. She visits her local library often. Please watch for more articles from Cabelle; she has many ideas to share.

Movie Review: *Agora*

by Dennis Middlebrooks

I consider the 2009 film *Agora* as one of the finest tributes to rationalism and freethought in the face of religious oppression that I have ever seen. Although it is a Spanish production directed by **Alejandro Amenábar**, it was filmed in English. This is not surprising since most of the cast is English speaking. The film was nominated for a total of eleven Goya and Cinema Writers Circle Awards and won seven. *Agora* has recently enjoyed a limited release in the USA in major markets such as New York and Los Angeles. Given the "controversial" theme of the film (i.e., reason over superstition), it is unlikely that *Agora* will go into general release in this country and (needless to say) the film was ignored at this year's Oscar ceremonies.

The film depicts the story of **Hypatia**, the brilliant 5th Century C.E. female philosopher and mathematician from Alexandria, Egypt. Hypatia, portrayed by **Rachel Weisz**, has brains, beauty and bravery to spare. She presides over a group of acolytes at the Agora, the name of the temple where great thinkers gather. Her pupils, all male, are in awe of her, and when one (**Orestes**) proposes marriage, she rejects him by presenting him with a piece of cloth drenched with her menstrual blood in front of all the others.

This rejection has serious implications later on in the film, since Orestes becomes a prominent local official in the Roman Empire and is the person Hypatia must rely on for protection against the growing misogynistic cult called Christianity.

Agora shows Alexandria at this time to be a hotbed of religious antagonisms. The once dominant pagans (with whom Hypatia is identified) clash violently with the Christians, who eventually rout the pagans and then clash violently with the Jews. To the credit of the film, no one side is absolved of guilt, and the theme of religious intolerance is prevalent throughout.

One of the most memorable scenes of the film takes place when the pagans, who take sanctuary in the Great Library of Alexandria against a mob of Christians they had attacked, are given a few hours by the Roman Emperor to clear out and leave the Library to the Christian mob. Hypatia and her allies frantically rescue what manuscripts they can in the limited amount of time allotted, but only a fraction of the wisdom of centuries can be saved. It was painful to watch the aftermath.

The Christians, led by a fanatical charismatic rebel-rouser called **Ammonius**, pour into the Library and burn or tear up hundreds of ancient manuscripts in an orgy of wanton destruction.

As time goes on, Hypatia is confronted by the newly established Christian authorities, who include some of her former students! In one moving scene, she is summoned to a meeting with other prominent pagans and ordered to kneel before the Christian leadership. Instead of complying, she storms out to roars of outrage. In another scene, when the authorities ask her if she believes in God, she replies, "I believe in philosophy!" This act of defiance ultimately seals her fate.

At the end of the film, Hypatia, who is known to have studied circles and ellipses and was familiar with the work of **Aristarchus**, a Greek astronomer who proposed that the Earth revolves around the Sun (instead of the reverse), must deal with a dilemma. Since the Sun changed size during the course of the year, that ruled out a circular orbit for the Earth. The circle was considered to be a perfect form, and it was assumed that all orbits must be circular. That ruled out the Sun changing size. But Hypatia hits upon the notion that if the Earth's orbit is an ellipse, then that would explain everything. It was not until 1,200 years later that **Johannes Kepler** would discover just that.

Of course, we do not know what exactly Hypatia may have learned, since her work was destroyed by the Christians. Hypatia herself pays a horrible price for her rationalism and feminism. Accused of witchcraft by a Christian version of the Taliban, she is abducted in broad daylight and taken to a local church. Once there she is told that she would be skinned alive.

One of Hypatia's abductors, however, is a former student (**Davus**) who always adored her despite his conversion to the Dark Side. He convinces his pious fellows into stoning her instead. While they are outside gathering rocks, he "gently" smothers Hypatia to spare her a more horrible death.

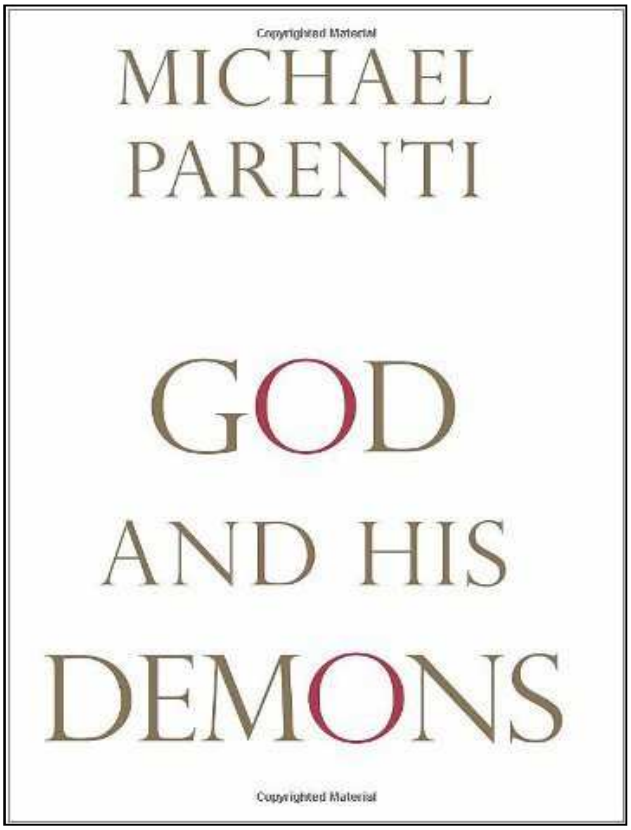
For political reasons, Orestes (the student, mentioned earlier, who wanted to marry Hypatia), failed to protect her. At the end of the film the Christians became too powerful. Had Hypatia married Orestes, she would have been un-touchable. Orestes was a high-ranking official even though he was a declared pagan.

This is one part of the movie I have a problem with — as Hypatia was indeed skinned alive and literally torn into pieces by a Christian mob in the streets of Alexandria. I think the manner of this great woman's death should have been graphi-cally depicted with no holds barred. I also think the film should have been entitled "Hypatia" rather than *Agora*.

Agora is a must-see for all freethinkers. If you miss this film in the theatres, make sure to rent or purchase the DVD. ■

Review of Michael Parenti's *God and His Demons*

by Michael Judge



In the first few pages of *God and His Demons,* **Michael Parenti** writes that the 'objects of his critical attention' are, in addition to God, 'intolerant, furiously proselytizing, and often corrupt and evil adherents.' He later describes the God of the Holy Bible as, 'ferociously vindictive, neurotically jealous, intolerant, vainglorious, punitive, wrathful, sexist, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, sadistic, and homicidal.' Parenti obviously knows how to win the heart of an atheist and he certainly won mine.

Clearly Parenti has issues with religion. His title can be misleading; he is not referring to demons that attempt to torment God in some way but to the demons that are unleashed by God, or more accurately belief in a god, on human civilization.

Arguments for or against the actual existence of God and the truth of the scriptures are ignored as they are irrelevant to his purpose. Instead, he bombards the reader with lists of the adverse consequences of religious doctrine and practices.

Parenti reviews all the obvious and blatant crimes and tragedies. Examples include centuries of persecuted Jews blamed for killing Christ, women kept in perpetual servitude, burned and tortured heretics, deceitful faith healers, super wealthy televangelists living off of deluded poor peoples' money, condoned slavery, creationism and intelligent design keeping half the population ignorant of science, pedophile and rapacious priests and ministers preying on the weak, confused and young and many others. He even skewers **Mother Teresa** and evangelist **Pat Robertson**; self promoted paragons of self righteousness and moral superiority. Parenti points out how Mother Teresa frequently refused anesthesia for patients undergoing surgery and had her staff tell them that, 'Pain is Christ kissing you,' while she, on the other hand, always received the best medical care that money could buy.

Robertson's crazy quotes could fill volumes, but Parenti colorfully relates Robertson's assertion that feminism 'encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.' On the other hand, Robertson has always been one of the best arguments for atheism.

While Parenti pushes his point with these concrete examples, he adroitly reveals even more insidious and sinister underlying causal influences. He goes into depth relating God's numerous homicidal and genocidal actions in the Old Testament. He also lists many of the 'laws' of the *Bible* such as the requirement to kill homosexuals, blasphemers, and raped women that were too terrified to scream. In addition to exposing the myth of the good and saintly Mother Teresa, he reveals, at length, the truth of the hypocrisy of the perception of Tibetan Buddhist monks and the **Dali Lama** as peace loving and charitable.

These issues have little obvious relevance in everyday life. After all, the stories of God's atrocities are ancient history and probably mythical anyway. However, an individual's attitudes and behaviors can be heavily influenced by what they believe are the dictates of absolute truths.

Consequently, the faithful are prone to believe that killing is frequently justified, women are secondary human beings, the religious are morally superior to the secular, certain activities, such as homosexuality, are inher-ently and morally wrong and that it is not only right but required to condemn and correct such behavior, etc, etc. The 'absolute truth' of one's doctrine can always justify the means to whatever end 'God' wants.

Parenti's writing is serious, clear and direct, but he still manages to occasionally sprinkle his text with very subtle and light humor. For example, when an exposed gay priest claimed that he was only 'investigating' the gay world, Parenti visualized that he 'ventured undercover to probe and penetrate the ranks of homosexuals, looking for openings to expose, getting close the gay men in order to erect a treatment that would rectify their ways.'

Parenti doesn't pretend to be even handed, and while he asserts that 'organized religion too often serves as a demonic tool,' he also states that 'Religion can be a wellspring of merciful charity and kindly devotion, bringing out the best in some people.' *God and His Demons* is well documented and makes an excellent reference source. It won't tell the well informed secularist much that isn't already known, but this book is an excellent compilation of arguments for why human beings would be better off without religion. ■

My Religious/Atheist Life, and the Questions It Has Raised

by Cheryl Huber

I was brought up as a Lutheran in a small town. The church was the social hub of town and we participated in church activities as often as they were offered. My dad taught Sunday School. He had an Engineering degree, and therefore had (to my young mind) a logical explanation for everything religious, so I accepted his words. Here's an example: in reconciling free will with God being all-knowing, he said that we do have free will, but God knows ahead of time what we will choose. Now, that doesn't sound like free will, but back then, it did.

I began piano lessons at the age of 6, and continued with them, becoming a musician by profession. I was caught up in the beauty of liturgy and I learned to play the organ. In fact, I still do, because it's a paying job. Now, every service I find things that don't make sense. Here's an example: the pastor says "You need to be baptized to be saved, but God loves you anyway, even the unbaptized." Huh?

I got my bachelor's degree at a Lutheran college. Everyone had to take at least one course in religion. For a course in Comparative Religions, we went to Jewish and Muslim services and read the writings of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Wait — they can't all be true! How do I know which is? If there is a God, would he send people to hell just because they sincerely believe a different religion or never heard of him? These were my first real questions.

I met my husband **Carl Huber**. By the time we met, he wasn't religious, but hey, he was brought up Catholic, and all Lutherans know Catholicism is wrong, so it made sense to me that he left the church. We married in a church, but God was not mentioned in the ceremony we wrote. By the way, we have been married for 33 years.

When our daughter was born, Carl agreed that it was OK to bring her up religious. This way she would know about religion and know the stories that are so much a part of Western culture. Perhaps, looking back, somewhere deep inside, I knew I no longer believed, and so, as a last-ditch effort to be a believer, I threw myself into church work. I became the organist and choir director. I also taught Sunday School and helped with Vacation Bible School.

During my day job as an elementary music teacher, while teaching the history of musical instruments, I showed a video that began with the Greek gods, leading to the god Pan and his flute. The video narrator disclosed that in ancient times, when people didn't understand something, they said it was the "work of the gods." One day, I sat down in my teacher chair and thought, "Then, why do we believe in gods now? We know what causes thunder and lightening, tsunamis and earthquakes." More questions.

Soon after, I stopped teaching many Christian-based songs, replacing them with a variety of songs from around the world. In both cases, the songs were always used to a musical, not religious, end.

In 1988, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and endured a mastectomy and chemo. I read part of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, and what I took from it was: "Now that this has happened, where do I go from here?"

Comedian, **Gilda Radnor** had cancer at the same time and she died — I lived. OK, God, she'd have been able to raise much more public awareness and funds for cancer than I. Why did she die and I live? Perhaps so I could help humanity in some way?

Ten years later, I was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. The chemo caused bone pain and I lost my hair. I continued to direct the church choir. One Sunday, the pastor came up to me after the service, laughing because he thought I looked really funny in the hat I was wearing to cover my bald head. That incident didn't help me like pastors very much. Around this time, I noticed that the most important thing about Sunday services for many people was the refreshments afterward and the fellowship during that time.

I also became aware that I had no feeling or indication that there is a spiritual being present when I prayed or when I took communion. Others talked about it, but I didn't have "it." I stopped praying at home.

Around 1999, our daughter and I resolved to read the entire *Bible* together. We ploughed through many fantastical stories, when one evening we came to the story of the man whose daughters got him drunk and then had sex with him. I stood up, threw the *Bible* on the floor and said, "This just isn't true. It's a book of stories and mythology!"

Our daughter said, "Mom, I never did believe in it. That's why I didn't go to confirmation class."

After that, we tried a service at the Unitarian Congregation in York, Pennsylvania and decided even its mixture of many traditions didn't take us far enough from Christianity. A few weeks later, at the York Street Fair, we stopped to talk to people at the PANonbelievers (PAN) booth, and signed up.

Through this entire journey, I had avoided telling my parents how I was changing. I kept thinking they would eventually get old and die, and I could avoid the issue. Gradually, it became obvious that none of that would happen, so I "came out" to them. They were appalled at first, but when they realized I wasn't going to turn evil, they more or less accepted me as the nontheist I had become.

A few years later, I read a story by **Mark Twain**, that told how the first priests probably claimed power by guessing when there was going to be a lightening strike and then claiming <u>they</u> caused it. Those who succeeded gained power and respect. That story explained how religion might have originally begun, and showed that ancient priests were just lucky, and gained respect through the use of superstition.

I feel as though religions, no matter the size, are cults, that take the children and inculcate them to keep the church going. Most religious people probably actually believe the message, because they have been brainwashed — usually from birth. The struggle to break free took me about 30 years.

Carl and I have attended several conferences (in Boston, D.C., Long Beach and Iceland) where atheists, agnostics and

humanists meet to discuss what they do or do not believe, and why. Nontheist conference conversations also revolve around why government should not involve itself in religious matters. I have attended speeches by **Richard Dawkins**, **Christopher Hitchens**, **Sam Harris**, a great-grandson of **Charles Darwin**, people who were at the trial about Intelligent Design, people who try to keep religion out of the public schools, and many others.

My personal atheism is this: while I can't be 100% sure, I have no evidence or emotional conviction that there are gods, angels, devils, heaven, hell or an afterlife and I don't think there are ghosts or souls.

Notice that I'm not saying I don't believe in God: what I'm saying is that I don't think God or any other spirits exist. My husband says that if they do exist, they don't affect our lives in any way. Since I do go to church at least once a month to play the organ for various services, I know that neither prayer nor the sacraments cause any change in me that makes me feel there's a spirit or god listening or trying to influence me. When I listen to the scripture readings, they sometimes sound ridiculous, sometimes contradictory and sometimes like mythology. I have never once thought about becoming a believer again.

Below are some things I have thought about over the years that helped me decide God isn't likely to exist. Many of these ideas are not original to me, but having heard them, they have stuck in my mind, and I have pondered them. They are couched in Christian terms because I was a Christian for many years. I was brainwashed to not believe in any other religions. Consequently, I don't think in those other terms.

Many Christians say God is all-powerful. If so, he could stop floods and terrorist attacks, and could pick up people and move them so they are safe during an earthquake.

*Many Christians say God is all-good. If so, why is there bad in the world, such as incurable diseases, birth defects and destructive human behaviors. And, if God created everything, why did he create Hell? So he could send his bad children there for eternity? Loving parents don't do that! If **Satan** created Hell and is in control there (the only place where God isn't, I've been told), wouldn't he reward his followers for doing his bidding rather than punish them?*

If a god would be all-powerful and all-good, wouldn't he by definition have to get rid of or alter everything that is bad?

Christians are told God answers prayers, and "Where 2 or 3 are gathered, there he will be also." As a child, I prayed very sincerely for years for my mother's friend to have a baby, but none ever came. I know that Christians will tell me it was the will of God, or "God moves in mysterious ways" or God knows better than I do, but rather than believing that God answers prayers, I now believe that life is random. Some events are lucky (including the ones people call miracles) and some are horrid, but no one is actually in control. Has anyone ever checked on the percentage of people who were healed when someone prayed for them vs. the percentage healed when no one prayed for them? I'm thinking the percentages would be the same.

Would an actual God kill his children or tell his followers to kill their children? The Bible says God destroyed entire nations. Is that love? If gay and lesbian people are born with their sexual orientation, wouldn't that mean that preachers and priests who are so horrified by them are telling God some of his creation is bad?

What is this soul Christians talk about? If it is there from the moment of conception, what happens to it when twins develop? Does one twin get the soul and the other doesn't? Or does the one soul split? I think of the soul being the breath, and nothing more. When the person dies, the breath ceases.

What would heaven be like if it would exist? I've been told that when you die, you will be with all the people you love. What if they don't want to be with you? Then is your heaven their hell? And will that be your loved one when he was 30 or when he was 90? Do people have bodies in heaven? And, if they don't, how do you recognize them? This line of thought comes from thinking about my brother, who is very religious, but is married for the third time. He is very worried that he won't see me in heaven.

*Religious historians say that about 2,100 years ago, there were believed to be several heroes or gods who were born of a virgin, performed miracles and were crucified. **Mithra** is one. Did this sort of thing actually happen back then?*

*I've read that when **Jesus** returns, all those who have died will return to life. With what body? The body is long decayed. Or does just the soul return to life? No, wait, the soul never dies. I'm so confused.*

Does it make sense that God created me to think for myself so he could punish me for doing just that and deciding he doesn't exist? Shouldn't God reward me for using the brain he gave me?

I now spend the time I once devoted to church activities working for equality and opportunity for all. I am secretary of the York Chapter of the National Organization for Women. Of the very active members, five are atheists. I am a singing member of the Central PA Womyn's Chorus. I support the Human Rights Campaign, working for rights for GLBTQ citizens. I work for musical opportunities for children as a member of the York Symphony Education Committee. I volunteer for the American Cancer Society. I'm a Silent Witness, and, of course, I'm active with PAN.

All this activity is my attempt to ensure that all people are treated equally — no matter their beliefs. Why do my husband and I try to help people, even though we don't think God will punish us if we would do wrong? Because helping people is the right thing to do!

I don't think I am the evil person many people seem to think of when they hear the term "atheist." I am fortunate to still be alive and to be able to help my fellow human beings. I also don't think there is an afterlife, so I am doing the best I can in the life I know I have here on earth.

2010 Robert G. Ingersoll Oratory Contest

Robert G. Ingersoll, known as "The Great Agnostic," was a famous 19th century orator and outspoken critic of religion. He was an advocate for racial equality, birth control, women's rights, **Charles Darwin**'s theory of evolution, free speech, and voting rights for Washington, DC.

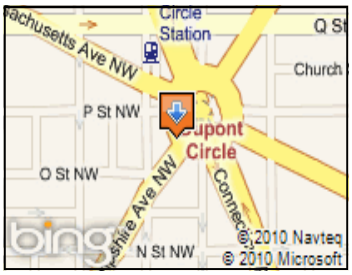
Ingersoll delivered over 1,200 speeches to packed houses across the country in the late 1800s. All of his speeches are documented in a 12-volume set of his works.

After he moved his family to Washington, DC in 1878, he lived, worked and spoke in the area for seven years. He was a Civil War veteran and a very successful lawyer and political speaker. Ingersoll is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, yet he has been neglected and largely forgotten.

To revive the Ingersoll message a **free** and **open-to-the-public** event sponsored by the Washington Area Secular Humanists, Center for Inquiry DC, American Humanist Association, and the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum will take place on **Sunday, October 24, 2010** at **noon**.

Please look for the public gathering at Dupont Circle in Washington, DC. Bring a blanket or chair and applaud your favorite selection or speaker (chairs will not be provided). In case of rain, the contest will still be held nearby at:

James Hoban's Irish Restaurant & Bar
One Dupont Circle, NW
Washington, DC



Up to 15 contestants will each deliver a brief excerpt from Ingersoll's works while a panel of judges evaluate and award prizes for the best performance. Judges include **Tom Flynn** and **Margaret Downey**. The contestant registration deadline is October 17, 2010. Contestants pay a fee of $20. Please visit the contest web site listed below for rules and additional details.

http//www.ingersollcontest.wordpress.com

For answers to your questions, please contact the event coordinator, **Steve Lowe.**

Email: Ingersoll@wash.org
Phone: (202) 657-6346

Contest Prizes are:

* First Place:	$150
* Second Place:	$100
* Third Place:	$75
* Fourth Place:	$50

Other items may also be awarded. All contestants will receive a certificate of participation. For additional details, please visit the contest web site at :

http//www.ingersollcontest.wordpress.com

Below are some of Ingersoll's most famous quotations:

"The man who does not do his own thinking is a slave, and is a traitor to himself and to his fellow-men."

"The notion that faith in Christ is to be rewarded by an eternity of bliss, while a dependence upon reason, observation and experience merits everlasting pain, is too absurd for refutation, and can be relieved only by that unhappy mixture of insanity and ignorance, called 'faith.'"

"The hands that help are better far than the lips that pray."

"The liberty of man is not safe in the hands of any church."

"Wherever the Bible and sword are in partnership, man is a slave."

"Few nations have been so poor as to have but one god. Gods were made so easily, and the raw material cost so little, that generally the god market was fairly glutted and heaven crammed with these phantoms."

"Courage without conscience is a wild beast."

Freethought Society Logo Contest

Now that the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia has adopted the new name of the Freethought Society (FS), the organization is in need of a new logo and website banner. The use of the Liberty Bell was fine when the name reflected the geographical location of Philadelphia, but the outreach area is now much larger. A new logo can be very general in nature because no geographical location needs to be indicated. The Logo Contest prize is a lifetime membership to FS (valued at $1,000).

Here are two new logo entries from **Carol Everhart Roper**:

A Chapter of the Freedom from Religion Foundation

The Freethought Society

• Committed to Education, Investigation and Understanding •

P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366 • 610.793.2737 • info@FtSociety.org

The Freethought Society

A Chapter of the Freedom from Religion Foundation

P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366 • 610.793.2737 • info@FtSociety.org

• Committed to Education, Investigation and Understanding •

Freethought Society Logo Submission

Name: _____

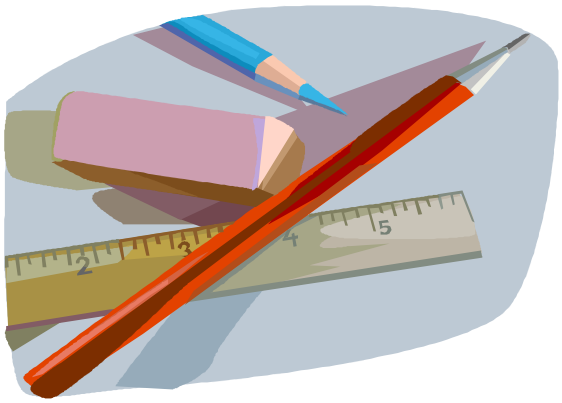
Email Address: _____ Phone: _____

Send this form, logo submission and any design information to:

Freethought Society
Logo Contest
P. O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366

A scan can be sent via email to: Margaret@FtSociety.org

Fax designs to: (610) 793-2569



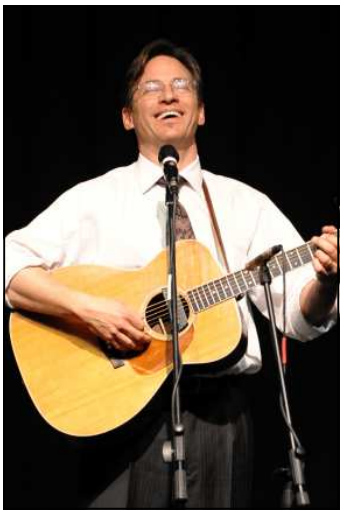
The Freethought Society's (FS) 2010 Three-Month Activities Calendar

September 15

Are you tired of being ignored by politicians because you are an Atheist? Would you like to curb the stress created living in a society seemingly ruled by a majority?

Please attend the **Wednesday, September 15, 2010** FS meeting when **Ellen Johnson** addresses these important topics and more. Her speech "Let's Play Hardball" will start promptly at **7:00 PM** at the **Norristown Public Library.** The address of the library is 1001 Powell Street, Norristown, Pennsylvania. For information about public transportation visit please see the following website: ***http://www.septa.org/stations/rail/norristown.html***

October 20



Please make plans to attend the **Wednesday, October 20, 2010**, **Roy Zimmerman** concert at **Doc Magrogan's Oyster House**. The address is **117 East Gay Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania**. The concert starts at **7:30 PM**. The suggested donation is **$15**. The student discount price is **$10**.

Wednesdays are "All You Can Eat Crab Legs" night at Doc Magrogan's. If you plan to eat before the concert, reservations are recommended. The phone number for the restaurant is: (610) 429-4046.

The concert will take place in an upstairs room that will only seat 50 people. Please reserve your concert tickets through email at: tickets@FtSociety.org.

Zimmerman's humorous and entertaining songs are about ignorance, war and greed. CDs can be purchased on-site the night of the concert or at:

http://www.royzimmerman.com/store.php

The *Los Angeles Times* says, "Zimmerman displays a lacerating wit and keen awareness of society's foibles that bring to mind a latter-day **Tom Lehrer**."

Joni Mitchell says, "Roy's lyrics move beyond poetry and achieve perfection."

October 21

On **Thursday, October 21, 2010** at **7:00 PM** the Freethought Society and Contemporary Issues (a West Chester University student group) will host California attorney **Michael Newdow**.

Newdow is a separation of religion and government activist and an emergency room doctor**.**

The Newdow presentation entitled, "The Bard of Disregard" will take place in a West Chester University room known as the **Philips Autograph Library (700 South High Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania)**. The room is located in a building on the corner of **High Street** and **University Avenue** on the campus of West Chester University. The building looks similar to a Renaissance castle and is easily identifiable. Nearby parking is located at Rosedale Avenue and High Street. The West Chester University campus is accessible via SEPTA using routes 92, 104 and 306.

A justice of the Supreme Court has written that the United States Constitution "permits the disregard" of a religious minority. Can you imagine a Supreme Court justice writing that the Constitution "permits the disregard" of some racial minority?

Interestingly, that same justice has written that classifications based on religion are to be subjected to the same scrutiny as classifications based on race. Can you guess which religious minority the justice referred to? Can you guess which justice was quoted above? Attend the Newdow presentation to find out the answers to these questions.

November 15

On **Monday, November 15, 2010**, the Freethought Society will host Richard Fallstich, who is a triple organ transplant recipient. Fallstich will talk about his transplant experience, and how it relates to his Humanist life-stance. His talk will dispel myths surrounding both organ and tissue donations.

The Fallstich presentation entitled "The Living Proof and Truth About Organ and Tissue Donations" will start promptly at **7:00 PM** at the **Norristown Public Library**. The address of the library is **1001 Powell Street, Norristown, Pennsylvania**. For information about public transportation visit please see the following website:

http://www.septa.org/stations/rail/norristown.html

Supporters Added and Renewed

Marjorie Appleman	East Hampton, NY
Philip Appleman	East Hampton, NY
Dean Brooks	Philadelphia, PA
Richard Cunliffe	Haddonfield, NJ
Lisa M. Matriccino	West Hazleton, PA
Mercedes Para Foundation	Washington, DC
Bernard Shapiro	Philadelphia, PA
John Wolff	Lancaster, PA

Donations

Bob Kay	$100
Marshall Martin	$25

Let the Bidding Begin!

On November 10, 2009, Dr. **Robert J. Weiss** of Wilmington, Delaware donated a time-share in St. Croix to the Freethought Society (FS). The time-share is always available the eleventh week of the year (second week in March). The St. Croix beach cottage is available from Saturday to Saturday.

This fantastic week-long use of the cottage in St. Croix is officially up for bids. Interested bidders can email their bid to StCroix@FtSociety.org.

To view a 360-degree slideshow of the Chenay Bay Beach Club and view a slide show that includes views of the beach, the clubhouse and the cottage interior, please go to the following link:

http://www.travelcontentsolutions.com/affiliates/af1005.asp?hotelId=95&pageType=hotel&cid=53&order=1

The FS cottage has a bedroom and sofa sleeper. It is 100 feet to the beach and just as close to the pool. Guests at Chenay Bay Beach Club can snorkel, scuba, golf and enjoy many other amenities nearby.

Bidding will began on September 29, 2010, but the first person who bids $2,011 will automatically win the use of the cottage. If a bid for that amount is not received by October 30, 2010, use of the property will auctioned off at the Freedom From Religion Foundation's (FFRF) conference. A share of the winning bid will be given to FFRF. The winning bid amount and the name of the bidder will be announced in the January 2011 newsletter.

The winner is responsible for all transportation to and from the resort, and any taxes or applicable fees. The time-share constitutes access to the condo and the resort amenities which are a standard part of the time share benefits. Food and other vacation items are the responsibility of the winner.

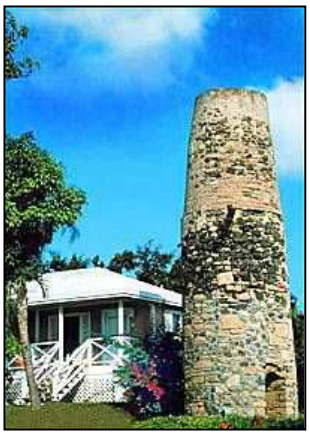
The resort, itself offers many activities. All activities on the Chenay Bay Beach Club property are free.

Chenay Bay Beach Club Activities

local musicians and singers
snorkeling lessons
snorkeling equipment
weekly beach dance party
diving lessons
beach beds and chairs
cabanas
kayaking
poolside bar
sunfish sailboat
massage therapy
basketball court

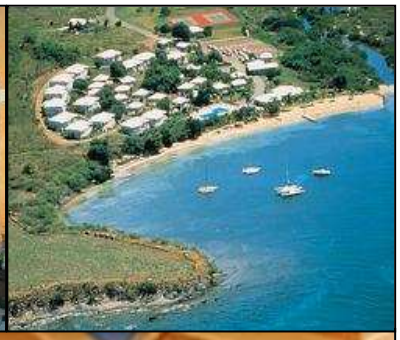
Island Businesses

local restaurants
sunset sail cruises
power boat rentals
sports fishing charters
jet ski tours and rentals
Buck Island reef tours



Local sites include Buck Island National Park, Big Beard's tour, Point Udall, Divi Divi Hotel and Casino, Botanical Gardens the Cruzan Rum Factory, a rainforest, and shopping in Christiansted, St. Thomas and St. John. Shuttle and ferry services are available.

The Schooner is a local grocery store eight minutes west of the resort. Resort residence purchase food items there for convenient use at the cottage.



The Freethought Society (FS) is a chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and is a member of the Atheist Alliance International (AAI). FS members are committed to the advancement of Freethought and issues of religion and government separation. FS activities and services are supported by donations. A list of activities and services can be found at the FS website (**www.FtSociety.org**). Please help finance FS's endeavors to promote freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of choice and freedom from religious intrusions by donating via the website.

Yes, I want to:

( ) become a supporter of FS (includes PDF newsletter): **$30** basic, **$35** family supporter, **$20** student and email newsletter recipient. Please make checks payable to the **Freethought Society**.
( ) join FFRF: **$45** individual membership or **$50** family membership. Please make checks payable to the **Freedom From Religion Foundation**.

Name _____

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Dedication

This issue of *The Freethought News* is dedicated to **Warren Goss**. He was born on September 11, 1923. Goss died on August 19, 2010. He was a tennis player, educator, freethinker, Humanist and accountant. Goss was the treasurer of The Humanists of Greater Philadelphia and a friend to the Freethought Society. He will be missed by family and friends.