

Atheist Coalition

AN INVASION OF ARMIES CAN BE RESISTED, BUT NOT AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

JANUARY 2005 VOLUME 15 NUMBER 1

Founded 1991 • An Independent Democratic Atheist Organization • Member, Atheist Alliance • American Atheists

The Newsletter

by Jeff Archer

“What does throwing a knuckleball have to do with atheism?” someone asked me a couple of meetings ago. “Nothing,” I replied. The query came from an Atheist Coalition member about one of our newsletters in which I wrote an article about learning how to throw a knuckleball in 1979 and another article concerning steroids.

Prior newsletters, and subsequent ones, consisted mostly of articles written by me under my nom-de-plume Malcom Lagauche. All these were to send a message. I thought the baseball and steroids issue would have solidified the message, but I was wrong.

I will now delve into our newsletter and discuss many aspects. Let me set one thing straight: I will be very critical, but I place much of the blame on myself for allowing us to get to the current state of the newsletter.

When I became president of the Atheist Coalition in 1996, the newsletter was in fair shape. We had a couple of members who consistently contributed articles and I could always count on C.W. Dalton for a piece consisting of how many words I requested. Today, Dalton is 94 years old and is fading fast. He can no longer write. By 1997, the few writers who had contributed moved out-of-state.

Even with the loss of contributors, we produced a superb product. Craig Kelso, a former Atheist Coalition vice-president, was a prolific writer and he encouraged fellow students from SDSU to write.

Let me give you an example of how dynamic the newsletter was. I once wrote that at a future meeting, I would be speaking about “The Atheist Country at Our Doorstep,” and how Cuba’s education and health systems were among the world’s finest. I then would tie in how they were developed entirely devoid of religious influence.

A week later, I received a letter from an atheist teacher in Pennsylvania. She was aghast that I should talk about Cuba because “Fidel Castro is a communist.” I printed her letter and subsequently received six letters criticizing her for using Cold War thinking. A dialogue began. For months, we ran articles from various sides about atheism, Cuba and education. It was a vigorous experience. The teacher finally called a truce and sent me a poem that she had personally written in calligraphy style and said we could all agree on the subject. It was a great piece describing how children are brain-washed by religion.

By 1999, Kelso had gone. Many the student contributors had graduated and left the area. The newsletter was suffering.

I am a professional writer and I did not want to write all the articles and make it appear that I was egotistical and only wanted to see my name in print. I had already seen my byline hundreds of times.

I began to ask our members to submit articles. Mostly, I was greeted with a smile and a lukewarm promise to try. The following year, my message was the same and the answers were the same. Occasionally, a member would submit an article.

This lack of interest has been going on for about five years. I am frustrated because the articles I did receive from members were mostly excellent. If they were trash, I would not have been so upset.

For about two years, when I speak of the newsletter, it is like a standing stale joke. Smiles and snickering all around. The issue in which I wrote about baseball and steroids did nothing to change the attitude.

For the past week or so, I have been thinking about the newsletter and I am irate. An incident occurred at our annual potluck dinner that made my frustration turn to exasperation.

A member told me that upcoming events for other free-thought groups should be included in every issue. Great. I told him to get me the information and I would insert it. At least a half page would now be added to the publication. Then, he told me that the information about meetings of outside groups was more important than articles. That was enough. I knew then that something must change.

First of all, I agree that information about groups who share similar ideals to the Atheist Coalition is important. However, there is no way that any outside group is more important than an article written by an Atheist Coalition member. They outsiders take second place in the order of things. And, I am sure these groups think along the same lines.

For a while now, I have been hearing about the accolades of other San Diego free-thought groups while our own group has been snubbed. This will stop. I welcome information about other groups or occurrences, but not at the expense of Atheist Coalition members.

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A group's newsletter is its calling card. It is to show the world what it stands for. It's not merely an 11" x 17" folded piece of paper that is published only because of obligation. Ours has degraded to this.

The Humanist Association of San Diego (HASD) has fewer members attending meetings than we. However, it has a six-page newsletter with articles from various writers; all within the group. Each month it has more articles than space. It is great and the members take pride in the publication. I design and print the HASD newsletter, so I know.

I also edit and design monthly newsletters for the Alpine Chamber of Commerce, the Alpine Community Center and the San Diego Turtle and Tortoise Society. In addition, I edit and design a nationally-known wrestling publication called *Wrestling Then & Now*, a 16-page newsletter that has twice won an award as the "best sports zine" in the U.S.

I am paid to produce these newsletters because the groups or publishers want a quality product to showcase themselves. Then, I look at the Atheist Coalition newsletter and I am saddened.

First of all, I am making an appeal to everyone who has any writing skills at all to submit articles. Your opinion is immaterial. I do not have to agree or disagree. As an editor, it is my job to edit and design. In the nine years of my editorship of the Atheist Coalition newsletter, I have only refused to publish one article. It was sent by someone from Los Angeles and it was virtually a primer on female sexual body parts and how they tie into atheism (but, the words in the article were the seven dirty words George Carlin spoke of, plus many more, multiplied many times over). If someone wanted this information, he/she could have gone to the library and checked out

a book on gynecology.

You do not have to be Shakespeare. I will copy-edit the articles. Your opinion is as valuable as anyone's, so don't be afraid someone will take you to task. I do not see a problem with any of our members writing a blatantly racist or homophobic article, but if I receive one, I may not run it. Or again, I may publish it just to show how ridiculous these views are.

I have written hundreds of articles about secularism and religion, so I don't need another byline. I would love to be able to edit the newsletter and not write a word, with the exception of an occasional editorial. But, that's not reality at this time. If necessary, I will continue to publish my articles in the newsletter just to keep it afloat. Under no circumstances will I repeat rehashed articles from other publications. To me, an article written with mediocrity by an Atheist Coalition member is superior to a hundred written by outside authors. I have this much pride in our organization and I think our members should as well.

Many Atheist Coalition members do not realize that the newsletter does not only go to the local membership. For instance, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin is a regular subscriber. The Society puts each issue into its archives to relate the history involved with the publication. *Zine World* receives each issue and reviews it. Then, the reviews are read by hundreds of thousands of people. In its heyday, our newsletter had subscribers from all over the U.S. because of the reviews given it by *Zine World*. With the newsletter's demise, the subscribers eventually did not renew. Today, I am embarrassed by the reviews given us by *Zine World*. On the upbeat, however, each issue is treated as a unique entity and if we again produce a quality product, we will quickly ascend in the eyes of the public. We are not just a local publication.

Eugenie C. Scott speaks in San Diego

by Heather Campbell

Where on Earth do you stand? Your concept of humanity's relation to the natural world falls somewhere on a wide spectrum of possible worldviews, according to Eugenie C. Scott, executive director for the National Center for Science Education. Dr. Scott spoke to a packed house on January 10th at Sumner Auditorium on the UCSD campus, during a lecture sponsored by San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry (SDARI).

Although some would portray possible worldviews in dichotomized or even "us vs. them" terms, Dr. Scott showed that the spectrum shades from flat earthers and geocentrists on one end, through young earth creationists, old earth creationists, theistic evolutionists, and finally materialists on the other end. The old earth creationists and theistic evolutionists have their own subdivisions as well. For example, old earth creationists might believe that a deity periodically stepped in to affect evolution at certain times such as the Cambrian explosion — or they might believe the deity continu-

ally directs the course of life as a process.

Scott noted that Catholic doctrine now states that there is no conflict between science and the Christian bible; both evolution and special creation are fully valid. Somewhere along the line of hominid development, God infused a soul into one Homo Sapiens to create the first true human.

Scott also defined the term evolution, here emphasizing "descent with modification" — the more similar two species, the more recently they shared a common ancestor. Among the illustrations she shared was a wonderful line drawing of the ancient Hebrew cosmology, showing Earth as a kind of island floating over the waters of the deep, with sun and stars moving inside of a dome called "the firmament".

She also referred to several surveys of worldview that show that far more Americans accept the special creation of humans worldview than do either scientists or citizens of advanced countries such as Europe and Japan. Interestingly, since the '80s the percent of Americans at large who agree with the statement "Humans developed from lower animals; God had nothing to do with it" has steadily crept up from 9% to 13%, at the expense of those respondents who said they had no opinion.

With her clear voice and low-key approach, Scott promotes rational discussion in the midst of this polarized social debate. However, as an atheist, I would like to see a bit less accommodation and a bit

more convincing outreach. I commend her for studiously avoiding inflammatory rhetoric, but there is no reason to not be persuasive. All it takes is to try to see things from the other person's point of view.

For instance, during both the lecture and in questioning, Scott mentioned the scientific consensus on evolution. Unfortunately this approach can play into the hands of conspiracy theorists who claim that there is an ivory-tower oligopoly that wants laypeople to fall in with the party line. A better approach would emphasize that all the evidence we have found so far supports deep time and evolution. It is the evidence, painstakingly accumulated by thousands of scientists in different fields for more than 100 years, that leads us to this inevitable conclusion.

Another issue that could score points with a school board is a possible doctrinal disagreement between Catholics and Protestants. The creationist/Intelligent Design position differs from Catholicism's

acceptance of evolution. Most Americans who might be unmoved by a scientific argument can immediately relate to the desirability of public schools avoiding any Catholic versus Protestant involvement.

For those who feel that all areas of human endeavor should be prescriptive, rather than descriptive as is science, it helps to have a few words that resonate and appeal. One such term would be simply "truth"; were Scott to repeat this word several times she would create some positive associations in the minds of some of her listeners.

Scott and the National Center for Science Education are out there fighting the good fight and I encourage anyone who cares about scientific literacy to support this fine organization (ncseweb.org). Kudos to SDARI for organizing this event so well on such short notice.



Scott (l) with Atheist Coalition vice-president Heather Campbell

IF YOU SEE YOUR MEMBERSHIP DATE HIGHLIGHTED ON YOUR ADDRESS LABEL, YOUR MEMBERSHIP HAS EXPIRED. PLEASE RENEW

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Atheist Coalition of San Diego will be held on Tuesday, January 25, 2004 at the North Park Recreation Center, 4044 Idaho St., San Diego at 7:00pm. Our guest speaker will be Dr. David Archibald, Professor of Biology and Curator of Mammals at San Diego State University. See page 5 for more about his career and published works.



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Lagauche Is Right

- More than 30,000 words of irrelevant irreverent information
- The ludicrous ideas of creationism
- Are dinosaurs in our midst? Some people say "yes."
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- And much, much more



Only \$5 for Atheist Coalition Members

2004 Archives of Secular Writing by Malcom Lagauche

Only \$5 for Atheist Coalition Members

It's finally here — Malcom Lagauche's online essays from 2004 concerning secular issues.

This first edition will be available at the Atheist Coalition meeting of January 25, 2005.

Lagauche has a readership of about 2,000 from 25 countries. He is known for his prolific and insightful writing on the subjects of religion and secularism.

Lagauche will be on hand for autographs.

San Diego Atheist Coalition: Upcoming Events

(notice date: 1/05)

**Tuesday January 25th Paleontologist David Archibald will be speaking at our monthly meeting
North Park Recreation Center 4044 Idaho St., 92104**

From Interstate 805, take the El Cajon Boulevard exit and go west. Take El Cajon Blvd. to Idaho Street and turn left. Look for the center on the right hand side.

Dr. J. David Archibald is Professor of Biology and Curator of Mammals at San Diego State University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in 1977. He has written 150 articles, essays, reviews, and monographs on the systematics and evolution of early mammals, biostratigraphy, faunal analysis, and extinction. His field work has taken him from the American West to Middle Asia. His 1996 book *Dinosaur Extinction and the End of an Era: What the Fossils Say* (Columbia University Press) documents what we know of the fossil record at the time of dinosaur extinction. In February 2005 his edited book with Ken Rose *The Rise Of Placental Mammals: Origins And Relationships Of The Major Extant Clades* (Johns Hopkins University Press) will appear.

February's monthly meeting (Feb. 22):

Speaker: Rowena Oesting of the La Jolla meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). She has been a Quaker for over 30 years. she will give an overview of the doctrine and history of Quakerism, and some discussion of the future direction of the religion. For example, a current debate among Quakers is how "christocentric" they should be.

Book Club

The next selection will be *Collapse* by Jared Diamond who will be speaking in town this month (see below). Copies are now available from the city library. The on-line magazine Salon published a review of *Collapse* this month.

Related Events

Next meeting of the **The San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry (SDARI)** will be: **SUNDAY, February 27, 2004:** Speaker: Kevin LaChapelle Topic: The Special Investigations Agency. See <http://sdari.org/schedule.html> for more info.

January 29, Natural History Museum: Jared Diamond
The author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* promotes his new book, "*Collapse*."
\$8 3:00-5:00 or 6:30-8:30

March 3-4, 2005 Kyoto Laureate Symposium, no charge
"The Kyoto Prize: 20 Years of Celebrating Outstanding Human Achievement"
Advanced Technology Presentation, 9-11 a.m., Dr. Alan Curtis Kay, SDSU
Basic Sciences Presentation, 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m., Dr. Alfred G. Knudson UCSD
Arts and Philosophy Presentation, 3- 5p.m. Prof. Jürgen Habermas, USD
<http://www.kyotoprize.org/symposium.htm>

March 19th, UCSD extension 1-day class:
Socratic dialog - Sa, 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m \$75, see: <http://www.extension.ucsd.edu/Schedule/index.cfm?vAction=singleCourse&vCourse=GI\NT-81111>

ATHEIST COALITION

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES [BYLAWS, ARTICLE 2, SECTION 1]

The primary objectives and purposes of this organization shall be:

To promote separation of government and religions, which means to educate the public about the value of secular government, alert the community to government/religion separation violations, and work in all lawful ways to ensure separation of governments and religions;

To promote atheism, which means to educate and inform the public about atheism, presenting it as a worthwhile, life-affirming, and wholesome point of view, protect the civil and constitutional rights of atheists, clarify and explain atheist ideas for atheists and non-atheists, and develop opportunities for atheists to learn more about each other, and;

To coordinate activities with other groups to achieve common goals and objectives, in affiliations which do not compromise the autonomy of ATHEIST COALITION;

To educate means to disseminate ideas and materials by publication, lecture, broadcast, tape.

I am an atheist. I have read and agree with the objectives and purposes of the ATHEIST COALITION and hereby apply for membership. My annual dues for \$20 are enclosed.

Membership becomes effective at the meeting following the meeting at which the application is completed and dues are paid.

[A "low income" applicant may pay annual dues of \$10 in lieu of the standard dues by sending a letter or any other document showing "low income" status. A majority vote of the Board of Directors approves a "low income" dues application.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

TELEPHONE (DAY): _____

SIGNATURE _____

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FIRST CLASS