

Atheist Coalition

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

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A Common Cause?

by Paul Wenger

Recently, on the UCSD TV channel, John Shelby Spong, retired Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, New Jersey, gave an interesting lecture titled, "The Terrible Texts of the Bible."

Bishop Spong discussed how the Bible treats women as property, promotes the killing of gays, witches, and disobedient children, and supports slavery and genocide. He reasoned that, since his god is a god of love, these Bible texts cannot be the word of God. To demonstrate that his god is a god of love, Bishop Spong quoted from the Bible: a source he had just argued was unreliable. (At this point, I want to say that Bishop Spong is a passionate and sincere speaker, and made many interesting points that I have not discussed here. I highly recommend his lecture.)

Bishop Spong's circular reasoning illustrates what must be a quandary for many religious people. Demonstrating that the Bible is an unreliable source of information is child's play: literally. I did it when I was a child.

If the religious can't use the Bible as their source of information on the nature of God, then how can they know who or what God is? For someone who believes in God, but not the Bible, the only source of information on the nature of God is the natural world. What would the natural world tell us about God (if he/she did exist)?

Mark Twain has a lot of fun speculating on this question in *Letters from the Earth*.

It is wonderful, the thorough and comprehensive study which the Creator devoted to the great work of making man miserable. I have said he devised a special affliction-agent for each and every detail of man's structure, overlooking not a single one, and I said the truth ... I will remark in passing, that he always has his eye on the poor. Nine-tenths of his disease-inventions were intended for the poor, and they *get* them. The well-to-do- get only what is left over. Do not suspect me of speaking unheedfully, for it is not so: the vast bulk of the Creator's affliction-inventions *are* specially designed for the persecution of the poor. You could guess this by the fact that one of the pulpit's

finest and commonest names for the Creator is "the friend of the poor." Under no circumstances does the pulpit ever pay the Creator a compliment that has a vestige of truth in it. The poor's most implacable and unwearying enemy is their Father in Heaven. The poor's only real friend is their fellow man. He is sorry for them, he pities them, and he shows it by his deeds. He does much to relieve their distresses; and in every case their Father in Heaven gets the credit of it.

Just so with diseases. If science exterminates a disease which has been working for God, it is God that gets the credit, and all the pulpits break into grateful advertising-raptures and call attention to how good he is! Yes, *he* has done it. Perhaps he has waited a thousand years before doing it. That is nothing; the pulpit says he was thinking about it all the time. When exasperated men rise up and sweep away an age-long tyranny and set a nation free, the first thing the delighted pulpit does is to advertise it as God's work, and pour out their thanks to him for it. And the pulpit says with admiring emotion, "Let tyrants understand that the Eye that never sleeps is upon them; and let them remember that the Lord our God will not always be patient, but will loose the whirlwinds of his wrath upon them in his appointed day.

They forget to mention that he is the slowest mover in the universe; that his Eye that never sleeps, might as well, since it takes a century to see what any other eye would see in a week; that in all history there is not an instance where he thought of a noble deed *first*, but always thought of it just a little after somebody else had thought of it and *done* it. He arrives then, and annexes the dividend.

WENGER from page 1

Bishop Spong, comedian Bill Maher (who insists that God doesn't write books), and all the others who believe in God but reject the Bible, have something in common with us. For Bible-believers, the Bible is an absolute authority that relieves them of the difficult and demanding task of deciding for themselves what is moral and ethical. (Even with the Bible as their guide, the moral and ethical values of the Bible-believers seem to fluctuate with the whims of their religious leaders. On Monday, their leaders preach that slavery is good, women are property, and God wants us to beat our children. By Friday, the same religious leaders are claiming, "We've always told

you these things are wrong. In fact, we were at the forefront of correcting these injustices.")

But if you reject the Bible as an authority on morals and ethics, on what do you base your values? What sources of information are left? The answer is: family, friends, community, country, world, and our own reason and experience. Atheists, agnostics, and Bible-rejecting believers must decide what is right and what is moral using their reason, with the natural world as their guide. For all of us, the natural world is our only reliable source of knowledge. Some of these Bible-rejecting believers could be valuable allies in our efforts to make this world a better place for everyone. It's worth considering.

This Is the Kind of Stuff We Have to Endure

by Jeff Archer

We atheists are always complaining about the propaganda put forth by the opposition. Much is false and just a bunch of crap. However, many articles are written by non-professionals and they appear on the Internet and incite atheists to want to become involved with acts of violence toward them. To me, that just is part of the territory of "free speech" that we also are inclined to support.

But, when so-called "professional" journalists twist facts or outright lie, that's another matter. There are basic rules of journalism that apply to anyone who puts finger to keyboard, whether the author is conservative, liberal, radical, religious, atheist, or of any other subjective persuasion.

As a journalist, I get upset when I see another scribe break these laws. And, not only conservative writers. I have lambasted more than one leftist writer for using absolutes or tweaking the facts.

Usually, I find most of this breaching performed by those believers who write in defense of their causes. Recently, Steve Yuhas of KOGO Radio ran the following article. I then wrote to him and appealed as journalist, not as an atheist. His response evaded every journalistic point I brought up. Here is his story, followed by my initial response, his answer to me, and a final statement to him.

San Diego City Council: We're here, we're atheist, we're corrupt & indicted - Get used to it

by: Steve Yuhas

The fight over whether or not the City of San Diego will transfer one of the best known and most beloved landmarks in the city is probably over and like in most issues of whether or not a city can honor veterans who served their nation with plaques and a cross - the cross lost and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) won.

Most people don't remember when the fight began, but in 1989 two atheists who were offended, presumably because they could see the cross if the sky was clear and they drove thirty miles and up a hill in order to look at it, believed that a memorial to fallen San Diego servicemen was so dangerous that it was unconstitutional.

Nobody actually asked the atheists why they were offended by something they had to work in order to see and could easily avoid,

but in true ACLU spirit the Mount Soledad Cross, San Diego landmark since 1954, lost what was probably the last vote of its life.

In a 5-3 decision with the majority: Michael Zucchet and Ralph Inzunza (fighting for their lives in federal court after being indicted for corruption) joined by Toni Atkins (the atheist lesbian who claimed to be an altar boy), Donna Frye (the man-like failed mayoral candidate and according to the equally atheist City Attorney, Mike Aguirre, a stupid woman) and Scott Peters (who claimed to be keeping with the will of the people) and Tony Young (the newly elected (and absent) man who replaced another indicted councilman who had the foresight to die before his federal trial began: Charles Lewis) the San Diego City Council voted against donating the land to the federal government in order to keep the memorial that has stood proudly for half a century.

In a normal city, councilmen who were indicted or people openly hostile to religion would recuse themselves from voting on such a matter (sort of like the demands that a Supreme Court Justice recuse himself from any matter that deals with the Vice President because they went duck hunting together), but not in the faithfully mishandled and nearly bankrupt San Diego.

In San Diego all roads of the Council lead to political corruption and only those not involved in any: Mayor Dick Murphy (barely), Councilmen Brian Maienschein and Jim Madaffer voted to at least try to keep the monument and transfer the land to the federal government.

The hearing took six hours and each member of the group who voted against the monument prefaced their remarks with how they were altar boys in the past or that they wanted to keep the cross, but didn't want to try because the equally religiously hostile city attorney advised them that the plan would not meet constitutional scrutiny.

People actually worried that the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals (the most reversed federal appeals court in the nation) would disagree and none wanted to wait for the outcome of the Ten Commandments case that was heard last week. Nope, the cross had to go as soon as possible because the eyes of the atheists were burning just thinking about it.

With the touch of a button five people - all of them with questionable conflicts of interest - decided that they would not transfer the land to the National Park Service (a provision inserted by local

Congressmen Duncan Hunter and Randy “Duke” Cunningham and signed into law by President Bush last year) that simply required the Council to transfer the land. The federal government takes land from individuals and governments all the time – this would have been a transfer of land to keep a monument that has become a symbol of the city that honors veterans.

When five corrupt councilmen vote to remove a city monument at the behest of a couple of judges, the ACLU and atheists it certainly calls into question the notion of whether or not the will of the people is truly being served. At the very least the councilmen who are not in federal court fighting for their lives because they are accused of being politically corrupt should not be permitted to vote on issues unless they are cleared of the charges – their conviction should result in every vote since their indictment last year being nullified and forcing this issue again to the full council and their replacements.

The ACLU and atheists go out every day hoping that they will find a cross or some representation of religion in order to be offended. It makes no difference to them if they have to drive up a hill, go through a forest, fight a raging river or fly over it in a passenger jet – if they can see it the only answer is finding an ACLU attorney and a judge hostile to religion and demanding the removal. One has to wonder what happened to these atheists that made their lives so empty that they have to run around southern California (indeed the nation) looking for reasons to be offended.

What is it about religious symbols that cause atheists to be offended in the first place? Is there any evidence that one atheist found any other religion based upon looking at a religious symbol? Do their eyes glaze over and palpitations follow each time they gaze upon a cross or Menorah? (Luckily, they don’t have any problems with Islamic symbols – those are perfectly alright because like terrorists they identify with symbols of oppression). Exactly what is the injury that comes from looking at a cross or other religious symbol like the Ten Commandments or a Menorah?

When you press them about their “injury” they simply point to the “constitutional” argument about the separation of church and state, conveniently leaving out that no such language exists in the U.S. Constitution. The language they talk about comes from *one* letter written by Thomas Jefferson to Danbury Baptist Association in 1802 in order to explain why he did not declare a national day of thanksgiving and fasting (as was common practice until he was President).

This one letter has had more effect on how the U.S. Constitution and the Establishment Clause concerning the prohibition of Congress from creating a national religion has been interpreted than the actual language in the Constitution itself.

It doesn’t matter that it was not the intent of the Founding Fathers and that they are probably turning in their graves at the thought that religious symbols are being systematically removed from the public square using the language of a letter instead of the language in the actual Constitution, but so long as friendly judges,

an unfaithful ACLU and atheists who look for offense can find a religious symbol – they will do what they can to quash it.

Using the logic of the ACLU and some of the courts, President Bush could take down the fictitious wall of separation by writing a letter to another church declaring a national day of thanksgiving and prayer, thus reversing the imaginary wall that was erected by a simple letter in the first place.

The ACLU is a dangerous, pro-criminal, anti-American, pro-terrorist and anti-religious organization and five members of the San Diego City Council who share their love for the same sided with them instead of looking at the issue through the historical lens that it demanded. The Mount Soledad Cross is as much a religious symbol as any other veterans’ memorial that uses a Star of David or Christian Cross to represent the ultimate sacrifice of men and women who gave their lives for their country. It is only a matter of time before veteran cemeteries are raided to cleanse them of their offensive symbols.

It is not surprising that the five members who sided with the ACLU, who began this journey, but didn’t finish it, did – after all that is what birds of a feather do. They nest with one another and sit on things until something happens; in this case the something is the removal of a memorial to veterans; it is unfortunate that San Diego is being run by probable felons, a former altar boy lesbian and a manly and angry mayoral candidate who lost.

The losers here are the veterans who were memorialized in the park, but lucky for the City Council of San Diego there will be other memorials to follow and now the three right thinking members of the group can get back to cleaning up the mess created by those whose biggest win for the year was removing a cross honoring the sacrifice of men who served their country.

Three cheers for the San Diego City Council: silence

Dear Steve,

Your thwarting the facts and use of illogic in your column about the Mt. Soledad Cross is stifling, so much so that it would take me about 5,000 words to address all the variances from the truth. Let me list just a few.

Statement: You mention, “Nobody actually asked the atheists why they were offended ...”

Reality: In 1991, while editor of the *East County Weekly* newspaper, I interviewed Howard Kreisner and Philip Paulson. My first question to both was, “Why are you offended by the cross?” In fact, both are veterans, and Kreisner is a retired U.S. Veterans Affairs worker, while Paulson saw much combat duty in Vietnam, serving in the same unit as Congressman Duncan Hunter. His war record is long and impressive.

Statement: “ ... the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals (the most reversed federal appeals court in the nation) ... “

Reality: The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals is one of the LEAST reversed federal appeals court. When the decision about the “under

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

God” section of the Pledge of Allegiance came up, opponents immediately made the statement that the 9th Circuit was the most reversed. This is a concocted fable that passed into the folklore of the issue. Just check out the facts (they are on government Internet websites) and you will see that it is one of the least reversed. As a journalist, you should check your facts before making statements.

You mention the transfer of land professed by Duncan Hunter and Randy Cunningham. Yet, you fail to mention the stealth-like manner in which they inserted the addition to the bill. I called Congressman Hunter’s office and asked about the measure. First I was told that Hunter made his intentions public a week before the bill was voted on. Within two minutes, the assistant told me that Hunter did not have time to tell the public about his intentions. When I asked which statement was true, the assistant began mumbling and told me that he could not speak for the congressman. So much for consistency, let alone truth.

You bring up one’s physical traits in calling Donna Frye “man-like.” Unless you have seen her in the nude and can attest she has a penis, this is a ridiculous statement. I have gone to your website and, believe me, you’re not exactly Clark Gable. If one criticized you for your physical appearance, I am sure you would (justifiably) find the statement despicable.

I could to on and on, but I have a question for you. A question I have asked many proponents of keeping the cross atop Mt. Soledad. The cross was erected in 1954, yet it was not until after the ruling of the court came down in 1991 that a memorial service was held there on either Memorial Day or Veterans Day. Not one. In other words, for 37 years, the only services held were at Easter, not on the days to commemorate veterans. To me, this shows that the intent of the cross was for a Christian religious service, not for one for veterans. Why was there no service held for veterans from 1954 to 1991?

In addition, Toni Atkins may be a lesbian, but she is no atheist. You should check your facts before you put your opinions in print. And, I can not see how her sexual preference can warp her mind and allow her to vote against keeping the cross in place. She voted in such a manner because she thought it was right. Just as those who voted to keep the cross in place did for the same reason.

One more item: you mention the haste in coming to a vote. This issue has been in operation for 14 years. To me, having a vote after this time is not exactly rushing to a conclusion.

I am sure you have heard the statement, “Opinions are like assholes. Everybody’s got one.” I fit into that category as well. However, as a journalist, I check out facts to use to support my opinions. This is called basic journalism.

Sincerely, Jeff Archer

Jeff: I wrote my opinion about the cross. I notice that you didn’t write when I wrote critically about the City Council and the finances of San Diego. I’m Jewish and cannot imagine anyone walking past the cross or seeing it in the distance and being offended when they have a bunch of money in their pocket with the awful word G-d on it. Amazing. As for reversal - I didn’t make-up the 9th US Circuit being the most reversed, it is - in proportion to certs granted it is the most reversed. As for Frye being manly - she is; as for Atkins being an atheist - she sure seems that way as her only public reference to G-d was during the debate about the cross - or at least that I could find when I did a Lexis on it. As for the rest of your issues, I’m sorry you disagree, but just because someone is a veteran (Kreisner and Paulson) it doesn’t make them right. I’m a veteran too - and a 100% rated disabled one at that & paraplegic - does that somehow elevate me over them and allow me to speak for veterans? It was my opinion and nothing more and was meant to inflame to show the absurdity of removing a cross that does not do harm to anyone - not a Jew, Christian, Muslim or atheist. It is a symbol of sacrifice just like when they are on public lands anywhere else. I suppose you’d like them removed from public cemeteries too? You could have written 5,000 words because the 700 you wrote really didn’t address anything.

Take care,
Steve Yuhas

Dear Steve,

I see that you evaded most of my input, but that’s okay because I have been through this many times on this issue. However, you said “Nobody” asked why the atheists were offended, and I showed that as an untruth. As a journalist, we learn not to use absolutes unless we have proof. When you say I didn’t address anything, this is incorrect because of the statement I just made. I did address an untruth. And, still the big question that no one has been able to answer all along, “Why was there no service held for veterans from 1954 to 1991?” As a veteran, I would think you would find this quite contradictory when someone mentions the issue today.

I guess we see journalism in a different way. To me, whatever one’s opinion or political views, professionalism comes first. I have run afoul with some politically like-minded friends when I find an issue is different from the way they perceive it after using journalistic techniques in determining a story. But, again, I write reports and features as well as opinion pieces, so I can’t hide behind a banner of “that’s my opinion,” if I am challenged on facts.

Jeff

Keeping Religious Insanity Out of Public Policy

by Tyson Gill

Do you have to be insane to believe in God? The punch line is “no but it helps.” It may not be particularly sensitive or wise to openly question the sanity of religion, but it is definitely an elephant in the closet.

The most classic and obvious symptoms of insanity are a belief in beings that do not exist and a refusal to believe objective reality.

Clearly, religious people meet both these criteria. They believe most ardently in the objective reality of a god and a literal host of other supernatural beings. At the same time they deny the reality of clearly demonstrable facts such as the age of the earth and a process of evolution.

What insulates religion from being considered mental illness is the fact that so many people have believed in some form of religion for so long. But can a mass delusion become sane simply by infect-

ing enough people for a long enough period of time? Would a pandemic be no longer considered a disease after it affects the majority of people long enough?

Religion is somewhat analogous to aging. So many people have experienced aging for so long that it is generally accepted as normal. However, much of the medical community recognizes that aging is nevertheless a disease.

“The changes of aging are like disease. They have all kinds of symptoms and problems that lead to disorders, malfunctions and difficulties for us,” says the nationally known ethicist who heads the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Bioethics.

Aging hasn’t been defined as disease because it’s considered universal and natural, he explains. He disputes both. “It isn’t always universal, because it happens to different people at different rates.” And it isn’t natural but rather a process that “just got designed into us,” he says.

Similarly, religious belief is a form of insanity. It manifests symptoms that lead to disorders, malfunctions, and difficulties for us. Religious belief hasn’t been defined as insanity because it’s considered universal and natural. But it isn’t universal, because it only happens to some people and at some times. And it isn’t natural but rather a dysfunctional thought pattern that is learned by some people.

But even critics of religion might maintain that insanity is too strong a characterization. Religious belief is more like brainwashing, simple deception, or mistaken conclusions. You don’t have to be insane to be bamboozled by a con artist, especially when all your friends and relatives are investing in the same vaporware.

However, if a child continued to believe in Santa Claus into adulthood, we would all consider them somewhat insane. If someone is brainwashed into thinking that aliens will teleport them up to their mother-ship after they die, we would consider them insane as well. If someone buys the Brooklyn Bridge and centers their life on their ownership of the bridge, society would have to question their sanity. Neither deception nor brainwashing nor gullibility insulates religious belief from insanity.

Even if one accepts that religious belief technically meets the definition of insanity, one could argue that it is a benign insanity. Since it does no harm there is really no point to label it as such. In fact, if a person clearly needs the psychological crutch of a religion, it is a beneficial and healthy insanity for that person. There is no point in labeling something healthy as insanity.

Old Alonzo Quixano could not tolerate “life as it is.” Eventually he invented a reality in which, as Don Quixote, he had a far more fanciful and noble role. Was he insane? Yes, but only because he did not adopt a more widely accepted insanity. Had he adopted the insanity of the inquisition and fancied that God spoke to him, he might have been sainted.

“But it is a gentle delusion,” said the tolerant padre in defense poor Alonzo’s insanity, “what harm does it do?”

However, the family soon found that Alonzo’s insanity did have ramifications. He drew his old friend Sancho in to help support his illusion. As Don Quixote he drew his sword against people who did not share his madness. His holy calling to right all wrongs brought

havoc to La Mancha. Eventually, sadly, his delusion had to be broken by rational people for the good of all.

The Man of La Mancha mirrors the social impact of religious belief. Believers do not merely adopt a benign delusion, but the very nature of their illness causes them to adversely impact the society around them.

Like Don Quixote, their zeal touches others. Sometimes, as with Aldonza, that touch is healing. More often, however, it is destructive. The mind of the deluded person must struggle constantly to maintain a fragile view of reality that is in conflict with the real world. The easiest way to do this is to convince as many other people as possible to share and reinforce their delusion. This creates evangelical zealots who are compelled to convert others to their world view or destroy them.

These seemingly complex machinations of the mind are actually trivial exercises for it. The human mind has evolved two major modes of reasoning. The first is the deductive mode in which the mind assimilates evidence and changes its view of reality to conform to objective evidence. This is the thought process of the scientist.

The second is the rationalizing mode in which the mind takes all observable information and finds a way to fit it into a preconceived conclusion, using some and discarding the rest as needed to create a fit. This mode is essential to pattern recognition and survival. It gives us the ability to quickly draw conclusions from sparse information.

This rationalizing mode is extremely powerful. It lets us spot a possible tiger in the trees and respond quickly, even though we might usually be wrong. As one extreme example, brain lesion victims can lose the ability to perceive half of their own body. Their mind quickly and completely fabricates a complex set of “facts” to explain the obvious inconsistency of their observations. Their fabricated reality allows them to survive in a world of perception that is confusing, incomplete, and inconsistent.

Religious belief is this second type of thinking. The human mind is easily capable of fitting facts into its religious world view and of filtering out the rest. Experiments have shown that our unconscious mind filters out 90% or more of perceived information which it considers extraneous or uncomfortable. Religion seems just as reasonable and fact-based to religious people as the missing side of their body is to those brain lesion victims, after the unconscious filters the information to meet the expected construct.

Some people tend to think more scientifically. They might tolerate the ambiguity of perceiving half a body until they obtain more evidence to explain it. Others, like President Bush, tend to favor rationalization. They start with simple conclusions and filter and fit information to support it. It is no surprise they tend to be religious as well. Their inclination is to fabricate rationales to fill-in the unknowns of our human condition rather than tolerate that ambiguity until more facts are learned which would lead to a valid objective conclusion.

The other interesting thing about those brain lesion victims is that they may be perfectly rational and reasonable in other areas, apart from the fact that they insist they only have half a body. In the same way, religious people aren’t <completely> insane. Their insanity can be coexist quite happy with normal sane reasoning in other conceptual areas that do not conflict with their worldview.

I knew a professor who was my grad school advisor in chemistry.

I learned a great deal about scientific thought from him by osmosis. Just observing how he reserved conclusion, examined evidence, questioned assumptions, and reached conclusions shaped my thinking as a scientist.

It turned out that during this period my wife and I had some strange goings on in our apartment. We were being bothered by what could only be described under the generic description of a “ghost.” My wife, being somewhat religious, was worried about the ghost being demonic or malevolent. I maintained that we knew nothing about it and had no basis to jump to any conclusions regarding its origins or intentions. We could just as easily assume that it is merely curious, or even helpful, I said.

One day while waiting for an experiment, I was chatting with my advisor and decided to mention the story. I hadn’t shared it with anyone else because I knew they would freak. But surely my advisor, rational thinker that his is, would offer interesting scientific perspectives. Instead, he freaked. He stiffened, blanched, mumbled some comments about devils and demons, and we never had the same relationship again.

This illustrates that people can be highly logical and reasoned in some areas, yet think in an entirely irrational fashion in other areas. In situations where we are so fearful of the unknown, even logical minds shift to rationalization to make them feel comfortable. This explains how creationists can find otherwise credentialed scientists who somehow support irrational positions regarding evolution. It explains how the Greeks and Norse created gods to explain the unknowns in nature that frightened them, and how we continue to create gods to explain frightening unknowns in our basic existence.

Again, fact-analysis and fact-filling modes of thought can coexist quite happily. I had one friend who was an intelligent engineer and man of logic. He maintained that you can only come to know god through logic and careful study of the Bible. His mind told him that his pursuit of god was perfectly logical and reasoned.

Once we were walking together and I observed that man’s psychological need for religion has not changed one bit over the centuries. We still have just as strong a need to invent gods to explain away the unknown I said, and added that everyone rationalizes that their religion is the only reasonable one.

My friend agreed whole-heartedly. He restated that yes, those OTHER religions, unlike his logical approach to knowing god, are all need-based and delusional. THEY all worship false gods.

This not only illustrates the power of the mind to ignore reason in the face of personal belief, but also points out a major social ramification of this insanity. By its nature, everyone believes that their religious thinking is perfectly sound and rational, while everyone else’s beliefs are delusional or sadly misguided. It necessarily makes them feel superior to everyone else. This is why most every church, no matter what nice sounding guitar songs they play, eventually reveals a core of intolerance, superiority, and disdain.

It is a fundamental requirement to maintain their worldview that believers cannot acknowledge other religious views. To do so would implicitly concede that those other religions have credibility as well.

If that were the case, and since they all can’t be true, that would undermine their own personal constructs. The maintenance of their worldview demands that others join into it or be discredited.

Is it any wonder that religions must do battle, physically or verbally, not only against non-believers but between each other? It is the social impact of this basic drive to maintain a fragile worldview that makes it dangerous to simply tolerate religion as a “benign” insanity.

This raises the question, should a religious person, suffering from a form of impaired judgment, be allowed in any position of authority? Can you trust any conclusion made by a person whose reasoning is so compromised? Could we ever trust the rationality of someone who believes in UFOs in important governmental issues? Would you trust nuclear launch codes to someone who believes that the rapture must come as soon as possible?

The first line of protection we have in America to ensure that religious insanity does not impact the country and the world in catastrophic ways is the separation of church and state. We obviously cannot prevent all people who believe in religion from holding office. Nor would we want to prevent them from doing so as they may be very logical and well-reasoned thinkers in other areas. That being the case, it is only the separation of church and state can limit the extent to which their irrational religious thinking can impact public policy.

But with religious people fundamentally compelled to validate their thinking by imposing it on others, how do we prevent them from breaching this separation between church and state?

The first defense is through organizations that champion the separation of church and state with the same resources and strategy that the ACLU employs to protect individual freedoms. Americans United for Separation of Church and State is one such group already in place. You can find them at www.au.org.

But these groups should go beyond simple direct opposition of religious groups. They must maneuver the religious population into a position in which they are forced to assist them in this effort. They should make use of the fact that every religious person believes that every other religion is either crazy or less enlightened. They must convince religion groups to support the separation of church and state in order to prevent those “other” religious crazies from imposing their false beliefs. We must convince religious people that it is better for them to relinquish governmental control than to risk those other false religions obtaining it.

For example, if the religious right fights to have creationism taught as an alternative to evolution, these groups should fight them in court. Failing in their defense, however, they should then sue to have, for example, Hopi and Hindu legends of creation given equal time in the classroom. In this way, religious groups will come to learn that even if they win their battle, it might not be in their best interest to risk opening the door to give competing religions those same rights.

It is imperative to support atheist, humanist, and watchdog groups working to protect this and future generations from the insanity of religion.

San Diego Atheist Coalition: Upcoming Events

March's monthly meeting:

Jeff Archer, president of the Atheist Coalition, will speak about his upcoming book that will be released in June 2005: *The Sledgehammer and the Ant — The 15-Year U.S.-Iraq War*. In his research, Archer has come across many facts that contradict those given to the U.S. public by three administrations as well as the lapdog media. He will discuss many of the lies put forth over the years as well as debunk many of the myths about Iraq and its people.

April's monthly meeting (Apr. 26):

Speaker: The current president of the Atheist Alliance. The Atheist Alliance is holding its annual conference in LA in March.

Earth Day Fair (May 1st)

The Atheist Coalition will be staffing a booth again this year as a community outreach activity. Volunteers are always welcome.

Book Club

The next selection will be *Collapse* by Jared Diamond. The club meeting will be in April after tax day. Copies are now available from the city library. The on-line magazine Salon published a review of *Collapse* in January.

Related Events:

March 25-27, Atheist Alliance Annual Convention in LA.

Penn & Teller will be present to accept an award. \$195 per person. Child care available. It's a convenient train ride up there. See www.atheistalliance.org for more information.

Next regular SDARI Meeting: March 27, 2005. *Speaker:* Milton Saier, Professor of Molecular Biology at UCSD — *Topic:* Human Impact on the Environment. 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm, at the *Joyce Beers Uptown Community Center*, on Vermont Street in Hilcrest.

Center for Inquiry International meeting in San Diego:

San Diego Frontline Briefing, Saturday, April 2, 2005, Holiday Inn on the Bay - San Diego, CA

Center for Inquiry staff will host an all-day meeting and will discuss the exciting developments under way. Participants are given the opportunity to share their ideas and learn more about the Secular Humanist and Skeptic movements. Lunch will be included in the \$69 registration fee.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Atheist Coalition of San Diego will be held on Tuesday, March 29, 2005 at the North Park Recreation Center, 4044 Idaho Street, San Diego at 7:00 pm.

Our speaker will be Jeff Archer, president of the Atheist Coalition. Archer will speak about his upcoming 350-page book to be released in June 2005 called *The Sledgehammer and the Ant: The 15-Year U.S.-Iraq War*. He will discuss his research for the book as well as the various individuals whom he has interviewed or spoken to over the years. His conclusions may surprise you because they run contrary to what has become U.S. folklore. For instance, (1) Iraq did not gas the Kurds in 1988. It was cyanogen gas used by the Iranian military (2) Saddam Hussein was captured in a fierce fight against U.S. troops in a friend's home near Tikrit, not in a "spiderhole" (3) The only weapons of mass destruction in Iraq are those used by the U.S. against the Iraqi public: napalm, phosphorus bombs, depleted uranium, and others (4) Hundreds of ballot boxes were thrown out in the recent "election" in Iraq because most of the votes were write-in ballots for Saddam Hussein (5) Ba'athist Iraq was a secular country that led the Middle East in the areas of education, health care, engineering and equality for women.

After 15 years of close research on the subject, Archer has written a book that contradicts almost all of what the U.S. government stated about its former number-one adversary.

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 _____

Atheist Coalition
P.O. Box 4786
San Diego, CA 92164-4786

FIRST CLASS

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