

The Nine Commandments? At Least, It's an Improvement

Co-President's Message



With the unrelenting nonsense about posting the Ten Commandments in our schools, and with the convoluted reasoning of some recent court decisions, I've been thinking. Suppose the Ten Commandments were going to go up on public property, but we as freethinkers, representing about ten percent of the population, had the opportunity to omit one. I know what I'd want deleted as perhaps the only truly harmful commandment. And it's not the one you think.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me," does little or no harm. We all outgrew that admonition, didn't we?

The unenforceable mind control, keeping magic days "holy" and refraining from "coveting" wives or asses, are just plain silly, though they may not be completely benign when exposed to impressionable young minds.

I will go on record as agreeing with the religious right that school children should not commit adultery, but I suspect it's as irrelevant to them as the one about graven images. (Personally, I would love to work in a school where no one in

authority wore icons.)

As a teacher, I know that high school kids are less likely to take the name of their lord in vain than they are to use extremely unpleasant Anglo-Saxon terms for bodily functions. Maybe forbidding the god words would bring them back into popularity as expressions of anger.

"A child might, in fantasy or in reality, escape an abusive parent, but the child will never escape a god."

Then we come to the ones which are, in fact, generally good laws: Don't kill, don't steal, don't bear false witness. These have been incorporated into our legal system without any freethinker complaints. They certainly are not the invention of religion.

So, finally, we come to the one which is most objectionable, arguably the only really harmful commandment in the set: "Honor thy father and thy mother." This is a stellar example of how a good idea can make a terrible law.

Honoring our parents, if we take the word honor somewhat

Continued on page 2

June General Meeting

Sunday, June 25, 2000

California Politics

The June 25 meeting of Atheists United will feature Stuart Bechman's speech, "Making a Difference in the Legislative Arena." It will cover how the legislative and lobbying processes work, what resources there are for keeping abreast of legislative issues, current bills of interest to the freethought community, and what freethinkers can do to have a larger say in the political arena.

Stuart, an investment banker in Simi Valley, is perhaps the most active freethinker in Southern California. A member of the AU Board, he is also on the board of the Secular Humanists, and is involved in their transfer to the Secular Volunteer Organization. He is an active supporter of the Simi Valley Atheists and the Freethinkers of Ventura County. He has long been active in California politics, particularly in matters of church-state separation.

The meeting will be in the Center for Inquiry West, 5519 Grosvenor Blvd., in the Marina area of Los Angeles.

The board meeting will start at 11:00 a.m., with members' concerns the main item on the agenda. (Another board meeting will convene at CFIW at 11 a.m. on the second Sunday of each month. This month that will be June 11. Members are welcome to attend that meeting.)

The social period will begin at 12:30.

The meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. announcements and the speaker, followed by a break. Questions and answers will follow the break. We'll have discussion and reports, then sound-off before adjourning. Those who wish will reconvene for after-meeting eating at Dinah's, 6521 S. Sepulveda Blvd., L.A.

L'Atheists Work

By Steve Gage

Join Team Atheists United for a day of volunteering at L.A. Works Day 2000. L.A. Works is an organization that creates and conducts volunteer projects all throughout the year. L.A. Works Day is their yearly big event to raise money and awareness by conducting large scale volunteer projects throughout the city. AU has had a team at this event for the last 5 years.

It all happens on July 15, 2000 as a thousand volunteers

revitalize community service agencies in the neighborhoods of Venice and Santa Monica from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. After work, we'll join together again for lunch, music and a chance to share what we've done!

We will be painting, planting, creating murals and improving facilities for the American Red Cross, Venice Family Clinic, People Assisting the Homeless, Westside Food Bank, WISE Senior Services, Head Start centers and more! Participants will get an event T-shirt, breakfast, lunch and the satisfaction of knowing you've made a real difference!

If you want to join this group of caring atheists, contact Steve Gage at (818) 586-4700.

Co-President's Message

Continued from page 1

loosely to mean respect and appreciate their efforts, is a very good idea, even for those of us who did not have very good parents. Respecting our parents and appreciating their efforts, however inadequate or misguided they may have been, is a part of coming to terms with ourselves. Even children of unconscionable abuse must, if they are to lead normal lives, come to understand their parents' behavior as human failings and an expression of human pain— not as a powerful evil force.

I don't like the religious term forgiveness, which suggests that victims must decide that it is somehow unimportant that they were victimized. But recovery from any wrong must include letting go of anger, and putting the crimes against us in some larger perspective. This is especially true when half of our DNA came from our abuser.

Many victims of child abuse never go through this process, even in adulthood, and I believe religion is largely to blame for this. No one is more isolated than the abused child, who has usually been told that the abuse is the child's fault. This guilt is intensified by the fact that virtually all religions set up a family hierarchy, with a god as the final enforcer of childhood behavior. A child might, in fantasy or in reality, escape an abusive parent, but the child will never escape a god.

And now they want to put a sign on the school room wall to state just that, thus making life more difficult for our most pathetic citizens. In any classroom, in any state, there is likely to be one or more abused children. In such a society, is it any wonder that so many abused children grow up to be abusers and other criminals, unable to control their rage?

Is it any wonder that the United States, the industrialized world's most religious country, is its most crime ridden?

Join us this Fathers' Day-Solstice Sunday, as we find a noncoercive way to honor our parents.

Bobbie Kirkhart

Atheists United, Inc.

Officers:

- Co-presidents: Jon Nelson & Bobbie Kirkhart
- Treasurer: Bruce Hemphill, Jr.
- Corporation Secretary: Harvey Tippit
- Corresponding Secretary: Henry Farber
- Directors: Stuart Bechman, Ken Bonnell, Monica Davis, Steve Gage, Jeff Goldberg, Mark Rockoff, Rachel Sene
- Office Manager: Marguerite Farber
- Newsletter Editor: Bobbie Kirkhart
- Newsletter Layout: Monica Davis
- Newsletter Distribution: Henry and Marguerite Farber and The Mailing Committee
- TV Outreach: Lauren Peck And Dwayne Walker
- TV Outreach Chairperson: Lauren Peck

ATHEISTS UNITED is a 501 (C)(3) not-for-profit educational organization with two purposes: 1. Preserving the separation of church and state; and 2. Promoting atheism, primarily through education.

The *Atheists United Newsletter* is published monthly for members and is also available by subscription. Deadline for submissions is the first day of the month prior to publication, otherwise at the discretion of the editor. Submissions should be no more than 500 words long and are subject to editorial revisions, at the discretion of the editor, for reasons of clarity or space. Send all material to Editor's attention by mail to AU, P.O. Box 57435, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413-2435, or by email to bkirkhart@aol.com, or by fax to 818-785-1743. Opinions and statements made by authors may not reflect the positions of Atheists United and are therefore not the responsibility of Atheists United, its officers, directors, nor editor. All material © 2000 by Atheists United. All rights reserved. Permission to use articles is explicitly granted to the editorial staffs of member organizations of the Atheist Alliance and of the Alliance of Freethought Organizations of Southern California. Credit should be given, and a copy is requested for our files. U.S. Postal Bulk Rate Permit No. 888, Van Nuys, California.

Atheists United

P. O. Box 57435 • Sherman Oaks, CA 91413-2435

Atheist Information Line: (818) 785 - 1743

Calls are machine-answered with a short message about our next open meeting. Messages may be left and will be relayed to the appropriate officer.

After Years of Wishing, the Lending Library is Here

By *Harvey Tippit*

On April 30, while the of directors were meeting at Center for Inquiry-West as per usual, librarian Jerry Brown was in the other end of the room sorting our books for the new Atheists United library. Jerry was helped by Jay Johnson and Jon Nelson, the latter taking time out from the board meeting to lend his book knowledge.

The books initially in our library came from the AU storage bins, where some 100 books and as many periodicals of various names and vintages have been kept for several years.

The first job was to scan all the books and decide which ones were appropriate for lending to AU members. Some of the books were selected for safekeeping and can only be borrowed under special circumstances, to be decided by the librarians. Finally, there were many volumes (books of religions, Bible studies, that kind of thing) which will be offered by the library as gifts or sold.

By the time you read this, we hope to be books from the library in the CFI-W meeting room will be available for borrowing by AU members. The librarians--Jerry, Harvey Tippit and Fran Troy--will be loaning books for one month, and the books can be taken and returned on the second and fourth Sundays after 10:30 AM, while the directors are meeting.

At least peer in the bookcase and see what we have. If you can lend a hand in cataloging, tell one of the librarians. If you want to contribute books or money for new books or supplies, the librarians will be happy and see that you get due recognition.

What Is Morality?

By *Don Latimer*

If we look in the dictionary we find that morality pertains to doing the right thing. If we keep going we will either go in a circle or wander off to nowhere, or we will end up with religion. Christianity says that morality comes from their god and is exemplified in the Ten Commandments. If we look at the Ten Commandments we find two of them deal with murder and theft and are very immoral. Sure enough they have high penalties in our legal system too. So it is easy to say that morality comes from religion. However, when we look at our driving laws, such as how soon we need to use our turn signals before a turn or under what conditions we may make a U-turn, we find religion is of no help.

When we look at our legal system, again we find that the acts that are most damaging to society are given the highest penalties. Therefore, immorality can be ordered, if not measured, and morality can also be measured by what is most helpful to society.

Measurable quantities are properly a subject for science. So, how can people possibly cede morality to religion?

AyoUth Reaches Out

By *Matt Waggoner*

Last Saturday (May 20), Monica Davis, Srinilakshmanan and I spent the afternoon at AU's outreach table, only this time it was at Santa Monica's 3rd Street Promenade, instead of its usual location at the Venice Boardwalk. We arrived at 2 p.m. and set up the table, pamphlets, chairs, and a sound system that Srinil had brought.

Like Venice, the Promenade is a popular tourist area, but it is also very popular with locals, who tend to spend a good deal of recreational time there. We set up the table in front of the AMC Theaters at 3rd and Arizona, and almost immediately were besieged by several interested people who took pamphlets and asked questions. This continued on and off until we packed up and left at 5:30.

Our first hurdle -- though not much of one -- came when we went to the police-run information booth just south of Santa Monica Blvd. When we asked the officer on duty whether we could set up our table, she said that since we weren't a religious organization, the First Amendment didn't apply to us (which was news to me; I thought it applied to EVERYONE!). We set her straight and she seemed happy for it, and informed us that as long as we didn't get any louder than the crowds, we were fine.

After that, it was smooth sailing. We (not too loudly) used the microphones attached to Srinil's sound system to alert people to our presence, and to invite them to take some of the free pamphlets we had set up. Many people did come over as a result of our exhortations, and several stopped to talk with us for a while, asking questions about atheism, AU, etc.

I'd be inclined to say that we had more people stop and talk to us or take pamphlets in the three and a half hours we were there, than had done so in the five hours I had once spent at the outreach table on Venice Beach. It might have been because we were new to the Promenade, or maybe there was just more traffic, or maybe it was just a different mix of people. In any case, it was a definite success.

*Don't forget... AyoUth Coffee Night, every Monday!
See the Calendar listing for details!*

Father's Day Brunch



Summer
Solstice

*Family Fun
in the Sun*

on Sunday, June 18th, at 12:30 p.m.

All Dads of all descriptions (fathers, step-fathers, fathers-in-law, surrogate fathers...) FREE when accompanied by their son or daughter, and get gifts!

Kids, bring your dads! Dads, bring your kids!

Children under 16 free • Adults \$5

Kite Making Contest • Raffle

Burton Chace Park Community Room, Marina del Rey
at the end of Mindanao Way

Vegetarian food available

*Volunteer opportunities for this
event include:*

- Raffle donations (new items only, please)
- Rideshare drivers
- Servers
- Greeters

A joint effort of the
Humanist Association of
Los Angeles
(HALA)
and Atheists
United



Atheists Speak Out!

Atheists United's Annual Speech Contest July 23rd, 2000 • 1:00 p.m.

Who: All members of Atheists United may participate, as well as those who may not be members but are in accord with Atheists United's aims and purposes. AU members will be given priority over non-members if the number of speakers has to be limited due to time considerations.

What: The contest will be in two parts:
Part 1: Short, 1 to 2 minute "sound off" type speeches;
Part 2: Longer, 5 to 7 minute speeches for those who want to speak in greater depth on a subject.
Your speech (or speeches if you enter both contests) should be on a topic related to atheism or the separation between government and religion.
The contest will be judged by the rules of Toastmasters International. Winners will receive a variety of trophies and prizes.

When: At the July 23rd, 2000 general meeting of Atheists United.

Where: Center for Inquiry West, 5519 Grosvenor Blvd., Los Angeles near the Marina.

Why: To give atheists and other freethinkers a chance to speak out on issues important to them. We hope to videotape your speech (only with your permission) and broadcast them to a wider audience thru our cable TV outreach program.

DEADLINE FOR ENTRY: JULY 5TH, 2000

How: To enter, fill out the entry form and send it to our address:
Atheists United • P.O. Box 57435 • Sherman Oaks CA 91413-2435
or by e-mail to: Mark1377@juno.com

All entrants will be sent additional information about contest rules and suggestions about speech preparation.

Some Thoughts on the Contest

If you are not an experienced public speaker don't be afraid to participate. Winning or losing is not as important as saying what you have to say. The contest will be videotaped for our public access cable television project. You can choose to be videotaped or not.

Our monthly meetings and cable TV shows are some of the few places where atheistic views can be heard. That is why we hope the speeches will have plenty of atheism related content. Here are some suggestions:

How you became an atheist • The bible vs women • Church and State issues • Humorous looks at religious texts or paranormal beliefs • Historical horrors committed in the name of religion • Personal experiences with intolerant religious persons • Great Freethought books

----- ENTRY FORM -----

Name: _____ Phone#: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____ E-mail address: _____

I wish to speak in : 1-2 minute contest 5-7 minute contest Both contests

(Optional) Title(s) of your speech/speeches:

Report from Venice

By Henry Farber

We get the silliest questions and remarks at our outreach table in Venice. Here are a sample of these:

- Q. So if you don't believe in a god, who made you?
- A. My mother and my father.
- Q. Yes, but who made them?
- A. My grandparents.
- Q. Yes, but who made Adam and Eve?
- A. Probably an ape!
- Q. You atheists believe in evolution?
- A. Yes, we certainly do.
- Q. You don't believe in creationism?
- A. The only ones that did not evolve are the fundamentalists.
- Q. What about the missing link?
- A. Those are the creationists.
- Q. Why are you here?
- A. To show some reason and rationality among all the cults on the ocean walk.

- Q. Haven't you found Jesus?
- A. Why, is he lost?
- Comment: We will pray for you.
- Response: We will think for you.
- C. Jesus loves you.
- R. Good. We don't have to change
- C. (When an atheist sneezes) God bless you.
- R. Darwin bless you.
- C. I got Jesus in my heart.
- R. You are in danger, you have an obstruction, you need a triple bypass.
- C. Evolution is only a theory.
- R. It is a fact, the same as gravity. (Dropping keys on table)
- C. There is a god, look at the ocean. Cased closed.
- R. Case open, mind closed.

Latimer Still Challenging Us

Though the official three-month period of the Don Latimer Challenge drive is ended successfully, AU will happily accept and recognize donations to this fund. And Don is still challenging us. Along with a news item detailing the fact that conservative Christians give the most to nonprofits we give the least, he sends this poem:

notice

If you will not fight, you cannot win.
If you will not compete, your end is near.
Religion got to its current position by willingly paying the price.

People who will not fight get contempt heaped on them. Gays were in that position until they learned to fight.

If we don't change, I have this question: Can you spell suicidal behavior?

By Don Latimer

AU Moving up in Cyberspace

Webmaster Sue Huntzinger announces that the AU web site can now be accessed at www.atheistsunited.org. It's the same web site, with improvements in process, including a shopping cart, so that you will be able to renew your membership or buy items on line.

For those who resist change, au.atheism.org will carry a link to the new site for some months to come.

Gems, Antiques,
Small Collectibles

The **HASSLE** of caring for them?

The **HEADACHE** of selling them?

Or the *heartwarming* feeling from giving,
As well as the *thrill* of a tax deduction.

AU wants your gold,
your diamonds,
your art and artifacts.

Just call the office.



A Semantic Confusion

By Harvey Tippit

Magic means trickery and false science. But those words were used interchangeably by Paracelsus, a Sixth Century physician and free thinker. "...(S)cience, or magic, as he preferred to call it, is the belief that all natural phenomena, however strange, have a cause in nature herself and are determined by immutable laws, accessible to investigation by experiment and to understanding by the human reason." From this he distinguished superstition. Okay, I can live with this kind of "magic", so long as there is no deceit.

Meetings of Allied Freethought Organizations

Meeting Dates, Times, Phone Numbers

AUGen - Atheists United General Meeting: Fourth Sunday, except December. 11:00 AM, board meeting, 12:15PM, social hour; 1:00PM, meeting. Center for Inquiry West, 5519 Grosvenor. Info: (818) 785-1743.

AUOC - Atheists United Orange County: Brunch. Second Sunday, 10:30AM, Irvine Ranch House Restaurant (formerly Jolly Roger's), 1727 E. Dyer Rd., Irvine, one block east of 55 Freeway. Info: David (714) 220-1777 or e-mail: ocau@thinkdontpanic.com.

AUSFV - Atheists United San Fernando Valley: Discussion Group. Third Wednesday. 7PM IHOP Restaurant, 6429 Van Nuys Blvd., Van Nuys, one block N. of Victory Blvd. Info: Sam (818) 993-1353.

AUSLO - Atheists United San Luis Obispo: 3rd Saturday, 3PM. County/City Library. Info: Peggy (805) 544-1580.

AyoUth - Young Atheists Coffee Night, Mondays 8:00 p.m. Lulu's Alibi, 1640 Sawtelle (just south of Santa Monica Bl.) Info: Matt (310) 993-4876 or Monica (310) 383-8409.

ECLA - Ethical Culture Society of Los Angeles: First and Third Sundays, 11:00 AM, Children's Community School Auditorium, 14702 Sylvan Street, Van Nuys. Info: (310) 470-2873.

FTM - Freethinkers Toastmasters: Second and Fourth Saturdays, 2PM. CFIW, 5519 Grosvenor. Info: David: (310)479-6318.

GALAH - Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists: First Sunday, 1:00 p.m., The Village Gay and Lesbian Center; Room 135; N. Mc Cadden Place Los Angeles, Info: Ken: (818) 500-9858

HALA - Humanist Association of Los Angeles: Third Sunday, 2:30PM, MGM Center, Colorado & Cloverfield, Santa Monica. Info: (213) 876-9036.

SHJ-Society for Humanistic Judaism, Third Friday Info: (213) 891-4303.

SHOLA - Secular Humanists of Los Angeles: First Sundays, 11:00AM, Center for Inquiry West, 5519 Grosvenor. Info: (310) 371 8169.

Freethought "Links"

For those of you who are connected to the Internet, check out the following websites!

- au.atheism.org
- AU's Website
- www.atheistalliance.org
- Atheist Alliance
- www.slonet.org/~ipauslo
- AU San Luis Obispo
- www.egroups.com
- Join the atheistsunitedinc eGroup discussion

Board member email addresses:

- Bobbie Kirkhart: Bkirkhart@aol.com
- Jon Nelson: jonanelson@earthlink.net
- AU Office/Margie Farber: margief2@juno.com
- Henry Farber: margief2@juno.com
- Harvey Tippit: harvip@earthlink.net
- Ken Bonnell: Khbonnell@aol.com
- Monica Davis: ironica@iname.com
- Steve Gage: steven.s.gage@boeing.com
- Mark Rockoff: mark1377@juno.com
- Rachel Sene: nontheist@mail.com
- Newsletter contribution: Bkirkhart@aol.com

Membership Form

I support the aims and purposes of Atheists United which are to keep state and church separate, and to promote atheism. I apply for membership in Atheists United including a monthly Newsletter at the Level indicated:

First Name _____ Last Name _____ Telephone _____

Name(s) of other family members: _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date _____ Email _____

Signature X _____

Payment Method Cash or Check Visa/Mastercard number _____ expiration _____

- Life Member @ \$500
- Sustaining Member @ \$100 per year
- Regular Member @ \$30 per year
- Limited Income Membership – call or write for details
- Family Membership @ \$45 per year
- Other _____

(requires two signatures)

Newsletter Subscription Only @ \$12.50 per year/\$20.00 outside the U.S. (does not include membership, no signature required.)

Send Check or Money Order To: Atheists United, P.O. Box 57435, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413-2435

AU Cable TV Listings

AU is currently reorganizing our Public Access Outreach effort. During this time there may be some interruption in programming. Please bear with us.

Media One, Hollywood	Ch.37	Sunday	1:30 P.M.
Media One, Verdugo Hills	Ch.19	Monday	8:30 P.M.
Adelphia, Beverly Hills	Ch.37	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.
Adelphia, Marina	Ch.3	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.
Adelphia, West Hollywood	Ch.3	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.
Adelphia, All Others	Ch.77	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.

Out of State- Greater Seattle Area

Washington	Ch.29	1st Sunday	6 P.M.
------------	-------	------------	--------

STUN (Superstition, Talking Snakes, Unjust Taxes & Nonsense) Program

Charter Cable, Long Beach	Ch. 65	Tuesday	4:30 p.m.
		Friday	8:30 p.m.

Would you like to see our programming on your local cable public access? Call the office to help! We need local residents in areas in order to get our programming on the air!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Co-president's Message: The Nine Commandments?..... Pg 1

General Meeting June 25: Our own Stuart Bechman on California Politics Pg 1

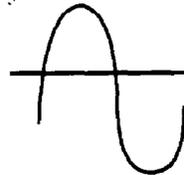
LA Works Team Now Forming..... Pg 2

New Website URL Pg 6

Things to do:

- Summer Father's Day Party with HALA June 18 – Details Page 4*
- Sign up for Speech Contest – Entry Form Page 5*
- Volunteer for Outreach in Venice or Santa Monica*

JUNE 2000

 P.O. Box 57435
 Sherman Oaks, CA 91413-2435
 USA

NON-PROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID Van Nuys, CA. Permit No. 888

Your Membership or Subscription Expires In the Year and Month Shown on Your Mailing Label



**POSTMASTER: TIME SENSITIVE MATERIAL
PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY**

U.S. Constitution, First Amendment:

“Congress Shall Make No Law Respecting Establishment of Religion...”