

# theists United

August 2000

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A RATIONAL ALTERNATIVE

## Let Us Pray to the Powers We See

Co-President's Message

By Bobbie Kirkhart

Justice David Souter may not be a man who inspires many dreams, but he inspired one I'd like to share. This June he was with the majority as the Supreme Court decisively outlawed school-sponsored student-led prayer at special events, such as high school football games. Last March, when the oral arguments were made, the attorney for the state of Texas school board said that the student message is intended to "solemnize" the event. Justice Souter asked, "What would it mean to solemnize a football game?"

It is a very good question. Recently, I've been wondering what John and Joy Gault's grandson, a good student in a local high school, would do if he were asked to lead a prayer. In my dream, the principal considered withdrawing the invitation when she learned that Max Lucas is an atheist, but it was too late.

When Max was announced, people stood, awkwardly shuffling their feet as they bowed their heads, not knowing what to expect. Nervous murmurs filled the stadium.

"A prayer," he began, a little nervously, "is an appeal to a source of power. Let us look each other in the eye, as

we pray for a better world," Max began. The crowd looked around in puzzled silence.

"Teachers," you could hear in his voice the strain of a person summoning courage, "when your job seems to demand too much of you, we pray that you always remember that your work is our future.

Let that knowledge inspire you to give the extra effort which we will appreciate for the rest of our lives.

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*"By making us all responsible for our own actions, my young friend Max had found a way to solemnize a football game."*

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proud of us."

Max's voice, still strong, grew more natural as he turned to his peers. "Fellow students, let us pray to each other for peace. When the passions of our youth push us toward violent protest of unfairness, I appeal to all of us to keep in mind that we have only one life, only one chance to make this world better.

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### August General Meeting

Sunday, August 27, 2000

#### Working and Living with Believers

Dr. John Suarez is known in the freethought community for his work on separation of church and state. He will apply his expertise as a psychiatrist and his life experience, including his service with Americans United for Separation of Church and State, where he serves on the national board, to the topic.

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 10:00 a.m., with members' concerns a major item on the agenda. (Note the earlier starting time. Your board has voted to eliminate the interim meeting on the second Sunday to see if this is sufficient to get all business done.)

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., LA.

# Is Atheism Negative?

By Barbara Soldier

A believer, after an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting where I declared myself to be a non-believer or atheist, confronted me with: "Being an atheist means you hate god." I retorted with: "How can you hate anything if you don't think it exists?" The negative "not" does not have to be either a destructive or constructive term; it depends on what is at issue and how people define it. If you "hate" war, that negative is considered "good", for instance. But, more to the point here is that

## Co-President's Message

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"Members of the local press, as you write about this game, I entreat you to bear in mind that you are writing about boys and girls who need to lead a full life, not about athletes who are put on the field for your entertainment.

"Players and coaches, I implore you to dedicate this game to enjoyment, camaraderie and healthy exercise. No contest is worth breaking a young bone or risking a mind-threatening concussion.

"Cheerleaders, I invoke you to be true leaders of good cheer and good sportsmanship, and never give into the temptation of yelling against the other team, rather than for your own.

"I ask that we all watch this contest, not for the thrill of competition or the excitement of violence, but to admire the beauty of individual dedication and the wonder of a human team working as one toward a common goal.

"I pray to all of us to recognize that any god or gods which might exist have no interest in this game, and have shown no inclination to protect us from our own mistakes.

"I invoke each of you to live your life as if it is your only one, to meet each problem as if you are the power most likely to solve it.

"I ask the school administrators, if you must continue to open these games with an invocation, lead the way as we demand of ourselves the best, rather than appealing to gods who do not show the same face to all of us.

"In that spirit, let us get on with the game."

There was a collective, thoughtful sigh. By making us all responsible for our own actions, my young friend Max had found a way to solemnize a football game.

But it was only a dream.

*Bobbie Kirkhart*

"a" plus "theist" means simply "without God" (as derived from the Greek).

What would life be like if one were never introduced to the idea of god? Wouldn't one live life just as it presented itself to one with the modifications produced by one's unique ego and one's experience? And if there were trouble, wouldn't one consult others of the same species with more experience on a particular issue? And, if something happened to one's own advantage, wouldn't one "charge that up" to a combination of efforts on one's own part and the help of others, and try to do the same thing again, allowing for change in oneself and other

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## Atheists United, Inc.

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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.

# Book Review

**For Your Own Good.** By Alice Miller. Published by Collins Publishers, Toronto, Canada, 1983. Review by Jerry Brown

The thesis of this book is that abusive behavior toward children in the name of discipline for their own good will in fact do them great harm. Since small children are more or less in awe of their parents, and cannot express the anger and resentment they feel, these emotions are suppressed, later to erupt against their own children or other members of society at large.

The childhoods of a drug addict, a political leader, and a murderer of young boys are detailed. The political leader is Adolph Hitler, and a sizeable part of the book is devoted to his upbringing. Since I've always wondered what could have driven this man and his henchmen to do what they did, I found this part especially insightful. All these people had grown up in an atmosphere of Christian virtues and duty. They had been raised to be obedient and to repress their hatreds and needs to "keep a stiff upper lip."

One significant quote from Hitler reads: "What good fortune for those in power that people do not think."

In her research on the childhood of criminals the author claims to have found no example of the beast or evil; child whom pedagogues say they must educate to be good. What she found were defenseless children mistreated in the name of child rearing, often for the sake of the highest ideals. The cruelty was directed not toward the child's welfare but toward satisfying the parents' need for power and revenge. (If true this would seem to shoot down the "bad seed" hypothesis.)

On page 263 there is a comment that while the commandment to honor one's parents is well-known, nowhere do we see one calling for respect for the child. This is said to possibly be because of fear that children's natural reactions toward their parents can be so violent that there would be a risk of their being beaten or even killed.

There is quoted a speech by Himmler, followed by a comment that repetition of these crimes is possible unless we understand the psychological mechanism behind them. "(Those) who carried out the 'final solution' did not let their feelings stand in the way (because) they had been raised from infancy not to have any feelings of their own as children (they) had been proud of being tough and not crying, of carrying out their duties 'gladly,' of not having an inner life at all."

As Ashley Montagu says on the cover, this book makes clear the root causes of violence as a consequence of our misguided child-rearing practices. It should be read by all who are troubled by what has happened to our world and to our children.

## RE: Evolution is only a theory

by Bob Morgan

Evolution IS a theory and that is the POWER of its worth, both as "knowledge" and as a weapon against religious "Truth." Given the nature of modern science, perhaps there ARE NO facts: A fact may simply be an observation that almost everyone agrees is valid and therefore "true!"

Consider gravity as fact. On a windy day, drop a feather on a table: Has gravity ceased to exist? Drop a launched rocket on a table: Has gravity reversed? Actually even our understanding of gravity has changed. Newton saw it as a "attractive force", but Einstein changed it to effects of "curvature in timespace."

The heliocentric theory might be a better case for "fact" as an obvious given. Even so, this begs two issues. What was "fact" before Copernicus (and for a long time thereafter) when everyone could obviously see and know that the earth was the center of the universe? Secondly, why do we even today obviously see and speak of the sun's rise and setting?!!

It is my hypothesis (and I choose that word deliberately) that atheists will continue to make negligible impact on human ideology until we come to grips with this nature of "fact." "Timespace" is only one of the new constructs of modern science. Consider quantum mechanics and string theory: can we criticize a belief in unseen things? What about "truth-as probability": Consider the Uncertainty Principle. It gets more bizarre: Read books like *The Elegant Universe* By physicist Brian Greene.

I've prepared a "think piece." I conclude that atheism can advance only by admitting the *uncertainty of fact* and the need to construct working explanations; namely, inclusive and predictive experiment-based scientific theories. In fact (haha), I say that religions are by by-products of consciousness, casting the unknown as unscientific "theories." They will fade like geocentrism when seen as such, and inferior in every way to scientific theories we can use with more (even if not absolute) certainty.

# Is Atheism Negative?

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factors? And wouldn't all these results lead one to conclude that everything which happened happened NATURALLY or, everything did what it did because that was the way that it was programmed to do? Wouldn't one heartily second Robert Ingersoll's *Thanksgiving Proclamation* which begins: "When I learned that everything was natural, then..."

How can you make an issue of what is natural – "natural" is neutral, takes no sides! Similarly, "not", the "negative" here is really not negative when you say "without god." With that in mind, I think "a-theist" is still best defined as "without God." Though it probably will take more time to explain "atheism" to newcomers than to use a fast slogan, it probably will be more faithful to the fact. For exercise, try the questioner out on some simple but easy-to-answer question, such as: "Do you think that an animal actually hates you if you disturb it and it retaliates?" Or, "Do you think it's evil that the natives of some countries go naked?" Perhaps questions like this will help persuade the believer that these reactions are only natural.

I like what M.J. Hardman's guest editorial in the November-December issue of *Free Mind* says in its title, "Why we Should Say Women and Men Until it Doesn't Matter Anymore." Similarly, as atheists, perhaps WE should say, "Atheism Means Without God until THAT doesn't matter anymore."

## Video Of The Month Temporarily Re-installed

**Henry and Margie Farber will be hosting a single video of the month on Friday evening, August 18, 2000 at their home in the North Hollywood area. The time will be at 7:00 PM. The video will be from Ray Romano's "Religiously Incorrect" cable show archives. The main feature will be "Hitler's Pope", detailing the crimes of Pius XII during the Second World War. Time permitting, other videos from Ray's series will also be shown.**

**To make reservations and get directions, call Henry or Marge at (818) 988-2806.**

## Don't Forget...

The long-awaited **Atheists United Awards Banquet** will be held on **September 9, 2000**, at Taix Restaurant in Echo Park. We will be honoring the Funniest Freethinker of the Year 2000, morning show DJ Bean Baxter of KROQ Los Angeles (and he might even show up to accept!) and rewarding our hard-working members as well.

Want to know if you're going to win something? Reserve your seat now and find out! Call the office for details.



The **LAFF** (formerly the Alliance of Atheists, Humanists and Ethical Culturalists) **Picnic** is **August 12th** in Roxbury Park, Beverly Hills. Free food, fun games, sunshine... who needs a god for that?

**Are you young and rational?  
Do you feel like everyone your age  
is out finding Christ?**

NO, we're not! Some of us are finding  
coffee and conversation at

**AyoUth Coffee Night**

8:00 p.m. Mondays at Lulu's Alibi  
1640 Sawtelle Bl., just south of Santa Monica Bl.

For more information call

Monica  
(310) 383-8409

or

Matt  
(310) 993-4876

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: ocou@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: Marr (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) 371-8469.

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 atheistsunitedin 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: hartip@earthlink.net
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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 \_\_\_\_\_

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- Life Member @ \$500
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 Sustaining Member @ \$100 per year
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(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.
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*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!*

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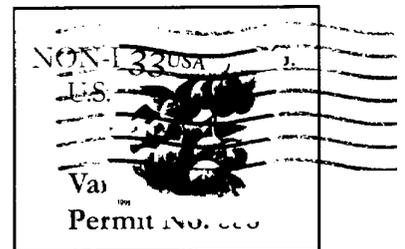
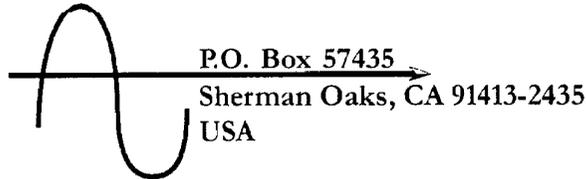
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Things to do:

*Awards Banquet September 9*

*LAFF Picnic August 12*

AUGUST 2000



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

U.S. Constitution, First Amendment:

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