

atheists

UNITED A RATIONAL ALTERNATIVE

Co-President's Message

Nelson Not a Pope-ulist



Karol Wojtyla, the medievalist better known to the world as Pope John Paul II, seems intent, now that he recognizes his papacy is drawing to a close, to leave a reactionary legacy behind. No doubt he expects history to judge him as a man of principle, who stood by his church's traditions. In fact, he has become an embarrassment to Catholics and a laughingstock to all thinking people.

It started last year when he announced plans to beatify (the first step to sainthood) Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac, the Croatian Catholic leader who worked with the fascist Ustashe regime to exterminate up to 600,000 Orthodox Serbs during the Second World War. Wojtyla rationalized this insult to decency by extolling Stepinac's role as an anti-Communist.

Next, Wojtyla (let's not dignify the man by referring to him as "Pope") announced his intention to beatify Stepinac's superior, Pope Pius XII, despite the voluminous evidence of this pope's role in bringing Hitler to power, his support of fascism, and his silence during the Holocaust. This time, however, such a stink was raised that Wojtyla backed off.

However, in his effort to find someone worthy of beatifica-

tion, Wojtyla is now championing Pope Pius IX, who reigned from 1846-1878, the longest pontificate in history. Pius IX was a real monster. Like his medieval predecessors, Pius believed that any dissent from church teachings must be crushed,

and he proclaimed himself the universal authority over

“ Pius ... proclaimed himself the universal authority over all the world's governments. ”

all the world's governments. His actions against his own countrymen demonstrated his fundamental inhumanity. He had his own dungeons and torture chambers (remember, this was happening only

150 years ago). Hundreds of Italian patriots, fighting only for their freedom from papal tyranny, were executed, without trial, at Pius' command. Many of his prisoners were chained to walls and not let loose, even to relieve themselves. They wore only rags and were covered with vermin.

This is the man Karol Wojtyla beatified on September 1.

Not content with this, Wojtyla, on September 5, declared that Catholicism is the only true religion, and the sole path to salvation. This proclamation occurs at a time when he has been actively seeking to improve relationships with other

Continued on page 2

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To our first-class members:

This newsletter is coming to you by first-class mail, so that you will get your information about AU in a timely manner. Your board of directors has decided that the additional cost is small compared to the benefits of knowing that all of our members get their information in the first week of the month. Let us know what you think.

BK

November General Meeting

Sunday, November 26, 2000

The November 26 general meeting will be a change of pace, as AU members celebrate their emotional side in a metaphorical group hug with poetry, music and sentimental recitations on this holiday (Sunday after Thank-the-Living Day) weekend. Don Latimer will set the tone with a short talk about the importance of emotional appeal, and various members will contribute.

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 an item on the agenda.

The social period will begin at 12:30.

The meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. with 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.

On-line writers disapprove of Christians and Jews

(Editor's note: Atheists United members may join our e-group, the electronic version of sound-off, where members speak their minds on any issue

As with sound-off, opinions are personal and do not represent the organization. E-group manager Rachel Sene chooses one "best post" (this month it's two) each month for the newsletter, to share with our members who are not on line.)

"At least 12 Palestinians were killed and more than 500 injured in the third day of violence sparked by the visit of Ariel Sharon, a right-wing Jewish politician, to one of the holiest and most sensitive religious sites in Jerusalem. It was the worst fighting between Israelis and Palestinians in years."

Rachel Sene

"There is very much a sexual aspect to torture in Christianity and that feeds into the pleasure=bad, suffering=good mindset that has resulted in the puritanical laws we have today. What other reason could there be that it is OK to execute a condemned criminal by exploding his body with a few kV, but it's wrong to anesthetize him and harvest the organs for transplant?"

Steve Trunk

September Meeting, "One Mother's Story"

Nationally-known atheist Margaret Downey chronicled her nine-year struggle with the Boy Scouts of America in her talk to AU's September General meeting. "Fighting Discrimination—One Mother's Story," featured cartoons and humor in the very serious subject matter.

In 1993, Downey founded the Anti-Discrimination Support Network (ADSN) which works to counter negative stereotyping of Atheists and to assist with legal battles such as bigotry in the Boy Scouts of America and religious testing for public office. It is a committee of the Atheist Alliance International.

The ADSN is involved with "Freedom of Religion and Belief" through the United Nations

Co-President's Message

Continued from page 1

religions. Suffice it to say, other religious leaders were not enamored with the proclamation.

Karol Wojtyla is a medieval man living out of his time in a modern age. He wants nothing better than to drag the entire world by the scruff of the neck back to the "halcyon" days of Catholic supremacy when the Pope's word was law and to question it was to place one's life and limb in serious jeopardy. As atheists, we may safely say what the rest of the world is afraid to say: This is an evil man.

Jon Nelson

Apology: The excellent photos of the Awards Banquet in last month's newsletter were the work of Ken Bonnell. We omitted his name in that issue and regret the oversight.

Atheists United, Inc.

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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

The Autobiography of Charles Darwin and Selected Letters, edited by Francis Darwin (1892)
Reviewed by Harvey Tippit

Charles Darwin wrote his brief autobiography in 1876, when he was 67 years old. He intended it for the benefit of his family and not for publication. Nevertheless, ten years after the elder scientist's death, his son Francis did edit the work and publish it, adding chapters of his own to fill the gaps in the narrative of his father's life. Those letters, excerpts from scientific works and explanations by the son constitute the most of this volume. Anyone who takes much interest in Darwin the father is indebted to his industrious scion for the preservation of many intimate details. The picture of Charles Darwin which is afforded to the reader, is that of a humble, highly ambitious man in thrall with his observations and experiments, his readings in science and his own ideas.

After his circumnavigation as naturalist on the *Beagle* in his early twenties Darwin *pere* lived sedately and traveled only once out of England. He sought this persistent retirement as a necessity for the relief of his fatigue and his supposition that he was afflicted with some undefined, serious disease. Beyond his early years of travel and the raising of his children it seemed he was seldom contented, except when he was experimenting in his own home or yard.

Darwin introduced for the first time new scientific theories concerning coral reefs and atolls; the geologic impact of volcanoes; the beginning and evolution of life, including that of man; the expressions of emotions in people and animals; movements in plants; behavior of insectivorous plants; and other topics.

Along the way he engaged in skirmishes with religionists who would not challenge their own beliefs in the existence of a supernatural creator. In fact, he found some spice in such encounters on paper. Latterly Darwin called himself an agnostic. Is it possible that in his role as the discreet, Victorian gentleman he did not quite possess the candor to throw down the gauntlet before his foes (the latter word is used in this book)?

This brings up another aspect of Darwin, to which, quite naturally, his son was blind. Charles Darwin was highly favored financially throughout his life. He was favored to have a highly respected physician as his father and to benefit from the close acquaintance with eminent scientists, even in his youth. When his son, the author-editor of this book, spoke of his father as "working hard", he was referring to the elder Darwin's experiments with stems and roots in his own yard. He never had to do a scrap of work unrelated to his voyage, his experiments and his writings. Some of us may sense the tremendous advantages that separated Darwin from most men, or speculate what others might have accomplished with such advantages. But then we must add to the equation Darwin's devotion to his science, his private joy in the activity and his perseverance.

Thus, circumstances make the man, as much as the man makes circumstances, and not only the great and famous.

Finally, to humanize this icon further, there was the virtually simultaneous description, with Alfred Russell Wallace--working in Malaysia--of the new theory of evolution (a word which neither of them used then). The interesting tale of their learning of each other's work, and their subsequent, friendly correspondence, adds to the personal drama that this volume affords.

In the manuscript, which he sent to Darwin in June 1885--not knowing of Darwin's yet unpublished ideas, Wallace was first by a month. That manuscript prompted Darwin to write an abstract of his theory and present it jointly with Wallace's paper to the Linnean Society on July 1 of the same year. Darwin seems to have been somewhat disingenuous in disavowing priority over Wallace, but shortly afterwards eagerly accepting the renown bestowed on him by his scientist friends, of first to introduce the theory of evolution. But Darwin deserves credit for writing the book on the subject, his *Origin of Species*, and he popularized the theory. Evolution is clearly more associated with the name of Charles Darwin now, and the Wallace's name is mentioned as a footnote or afterthought.

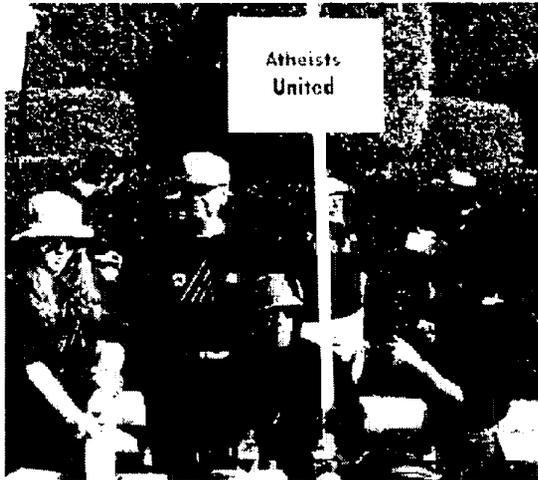
Increasingly, as he grew older, he would become depressed when he bent himself to the task of writing up his ideas and experiments for publication. He was attended by doctors throughout his life, but in this volume we are unable to find any diagnosis to which they ascribed his complaints until near the end.

Terminally he was found to have arrhythmia of the heart, which seemingly caused his collapse at that time and may have contributed to his death. In his era 73 years was a respectable age at which to die, particularly in the notion of Darwin himself, who had written some time before that he was ready to die. He is buried in Westminster Abbey near the burial place of Isaac Newton.

The volume which I read is a paperback version I found in the Atheists United Library and was published in 1958 by Dover Publications, New York.

Join members of the six organizations
of the LA Freethought Federation
in celebrating the Winter Solstice
with a dinner at the community room of
Burton Chace Park on December 17.
See next month's newsletter for details.

AIDS Walk LA Sees Red



At the AU table preparing to embark on AIDS Walk LA are, left to right (foreground) team leader Mary Cancilla, Mark Deaver, Warren Cancilla and Liliana Dishman. In the background are Jon Nelson and Ken Bonnell. (Photo by Steve Gage.) All are wearing bright red T-shirts boldly proclaiming "Atheists Against Aids."

Movie Review: *The Contender*

by Milt Timmons

"The Contender" is a political melodrama with plot twists that push the limits of credibility, but excellent acting and brisk pacing drive the picture on to a sentimental ending that would have gladdened the hearts of Frank Capra and D.W. Griffith.

The story involves a Democratic president, played by Jeff Bridges, whose vice president has suddenly died. His most urgent business, therefore, is to appoint a new V.P. His first choice is a woman senator, played by the elegant Joan Allen. But any appointment must be ratified by a congressional committee, chaired by a right wing Republican, played by Gary Oldman. Oldman's character is determined to block her appointment for several reasons: First of all, she is a woman; she is pro-choice; she supports separation of church and state; she had originally been a Republican but changed parties, which Oldman regards as traitorous; and finally, she

Member Comments on Public Education

Editor:

I just finished reading the newsletter a few minutes ago and saw your article about private schools. I have been extremely reluctant about broaching the subject, for two reasons. One, in a pluralistic society a standard education is very important for keeping friction between religions to a minimum. In a technical society every child needs to be educated to his or her maximum ability. Two, I know that many of our members are public teachers and have a need to support their jobs.

Don Latimer

Waiting for Jesus... Still Waiting... Still Waiting

Mark Smith, Orange County atheist activist, presented his slide show, "Jesus, the False Prophet," to the October 22 General Meeting. His central theme is that there is extensive documentation that the New Testament quotes Jesus as being very specific that his return and the end times would happen within the lifetimes of his contemporaries. In a humorous and thorough study of the issue, he pointed out that the mistake has been repeated by numerous modern "prophets" who have prepared their flocks for Judgment Days that never came.

is non-religious. In order to sabotage her confirmation, Oldman dredges up some salacious photographs allegedly taken of Allen when she was a college freshman at a fraternity party.

The main point of interest to us, however, is that in her closing statement to the congressional committee the senator proudly announces that she is indeed an atheist, and the only document she regards as holy is the US Constitution.

In real life, Gary Oldman the actor has publicly complained that the liberal owners of Dreamworks Studios re-edited the picture to turn the original script into an infomercial for the Democratic party - just in time for the election.

Be that as it may, the movie raises a number of points that most of us would applaud, and I think any film which dares to elevate an atheist to heroic status deserves our support.

Emotions and Reason

By Harvey Tippit

We see the evidence of emotions and affections in all advanced animal species in the caring of a mother for her child, the affection of one mate for the other, in the devotion of a pet to its master and of the master to its pet, and so on. Animals and humans behave in such ways—even to self-sacrifice, and we humans reveal our feelings in what we say or write. Yes, to the cynics, many words are sincere.

Love, hatred, fear, envy, and so on, show themselves every day in the animal kingdom and in the species *Homo sapiens*, though there is some difference of opinion whether they should be called “emotions”.

We may assume that the emotions, feelings and affections confer some survival advantage in the animal kingdom, and that they do in man, or did when we were a threatened species competing for survival. So general are these traits now, it is probable that they still do.

The faculty which we call reason is, in some respects, opposed to the emotions, or so we believe when we call

ourselves more rational animals, as opposed to changeable, emotional animals. Our ideas of truth or of what we should do in various situations are, we hope, based on reason. Yet, always behind this reasoning ability, the emotions affect our behavior, at least to some degree.

Over the period of recorded history mankind continued to evolve into the species which we are now, more social and interdependent, but less individually adept. Our adaptations and cooperative behaviors have been learned and perhaps generically transmitted. Some individuals afflicted with defects that would have limited their survival and ability to propagate in past ages can now live to propagate genetic defects: myopia, diabetes mellitus, hemophilia and so on.

If we can be perfectly frank with ourselves, we may see that our acts in some situations, perhaps most, are determined more by our feelings than by reason. But as Wittgenstein said, nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself. We behave emotionally, under the influence of habits or contrary to our reason, more than we think. We do not do the best thing to achieve our goals but what suits our biases and predilections. That is how we are constituted, and we cannot easily change. We think we do the reasonable thing, but it is not so easy to have the most effective emotions. Further, “ethical propositions lack sense”—that is, ultimate logic.

As atheists, we are concerned with developing and using our reason. Reason requires for its perceptions of reality that the latter be demonstrated, not only in the mind of a person, but in the physical, actual world outside the mind. What exists only in the mind, or in several minds, but is not demonstrable in the outside, physical world is a delusion, hallucination or dream. Real ideas, actions and objects impact the real world—not merely the human species, and they are evident to the senses of all sane, intelligent people in the appropriate circumstances. They are subject to being proven, or being disproved if they are false.

Objects and actions, which conform to repeated relations of cause and effect, and are demonstrable to the senses, are sometimes called “laws”: the laws of physics, of psychology, or any other discipline. Things that do not conform to well-recognized laws are unreal or imaginary; exist only in imagination, and can be called delusions or the products of trickery and persuasion.

Atheists, while recognizing that we do not always behave rationally, believe in the primacy of well observed realities as the best guides to our understanding and behavior. We believe what is demonstrable to ourselves and others and what follows natural, not mythical, magical or paranormal modes of action. In some circumstances we abide by our emotions, as other animals do, but we try to educate our emotions.

Weapons of Defense

By Barbara Soldier

A friend of mine decided to quit his
addiction

So he built a retreat from life,
High up in the air,

Senses secluded from stimulation,
Mind insulated from all things
controversial.

But one day,

He ran out of staples

And assayed a trip to the outside
Where he saw others doing what he
had tried to escape from.

He realized then that

These were the actors

Who constituted part of his reality.

And that, in not dealing with them

He had proved isolation to be irrelevant
As a weapon of defense.



Needs your help!

Yes! I'm prepared to help AU meet our goals with a monthly pledge!

Please charge the following pledge amount to my Visa or MasterCard on the 3rd 18th of each month.

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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: Henry (818) 988-2806.

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: (310) 456-6642.

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!

- aa.atheism.org
- AU's Website
- www.atheistalliance.org
- Atheist Alliance
- www.sloner.org/~ipauslo
- AU San Luis Obispo
- www.egroups.com
- Join the atheistsunitedonline 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
- Ken Bonnell: Ktbonnell@aol.com
- Monica Davis: ironica@iname.com
- Steve Gage: steven.s.gage@boeing.com
- Mark Rockoff: mark1377@juno.com
- Rachel Sene: nontheist@email.com
- Newsletter contribution: Bkirkhart@aol.com

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- Sustaining Member @ \$100 per year
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- Other _____

(requires two signatures)

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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.3 ⁺	Sunday	1:30 P.M.
Media One, Verdugo Hills	Ch.19	Monday	8:30 P.M.
Adelphia, Beverly Hills	Ch.3 ⁺	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.7 ⁺	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.

Out of State- Greater Seattle Area

Washington	Ch.29	1st Monday	1 P.M.
(Through March 2001)			

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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

General Meeting November 26: Thank-the-Living Day Celebration.....	Pg 1
Movie Review: <i>The Contender</i>	Pg 4
AU shows its emotional side.....	Pg 5

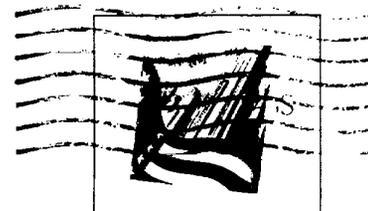
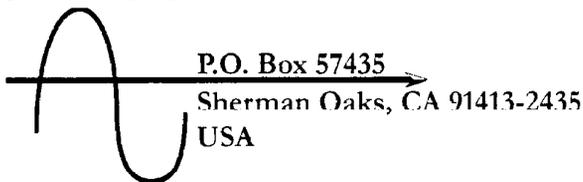
Things to do:

LAFF Winter Potluck December 17 – See page 3

Stuck for a Solstice gift? Make a contribution to AU the easy way! – page 6

Book now for HumCon 2001 February 16-18 – Page 6

NOVEMBER 2000



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