

# THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprofit Organization

P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

512-371-2911

[www.atheist-community.org](http://www.atheist-community.org)

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## Should Atheists Proselytize?

On January 2nd, ACA had a panel discussion on the subject of atheistic evangelism. The question, as originally posed, was whether or not ACA should be more evangelistic; should we try to persuade others. I could not stay to hear all of it, but what I did hear was very thought provoking. Some of the comments made were worth repeating in the newsletter. The following has been reconstructed from the notes given to me by panel participants and from the audio tape made by Rodney Florence. Rather than try to put this in an essay form, I will just list the points each participant made.

~John Koonz editor

First to speak was Susan Loehner:

Organized religion is bad, granted. Wars, intolerance, guilt, fear, loss of freedom, etc. all result from religion. However, most Christians and other Theists, as well as Atheists, are good people and only a few use their religious beliefs as excuses to hurt others.

- Why people believe in god - Does theism serve some useful purpose? (Shermer asked them- it's not accurate because these reflect why they think they believe, not actual motivation)
  - Defense Mechanisms--A coping mechanism which people use when reality is just too uncomfortable. Inconsistency in belief is one good indication that a religious belief is really a defense mechanism. The reasons:
    - Need for Authority - Someone must be in Control
    - End of life fears - survival instinct
    - Development of Morality - A minority of people may be unable to be "good" without belief in a god.
- Why we should not proselytize:
  - It's annoying and reduces us to "their" level.

- Maybe some people really do need religion, and it would be wrong to deprive them of it:
- It doesn't work: It's impossible to alter a "fixed delusion". They aren't interested in the "truth".
- What We Can Do Instead:
  - Be tolerant--Religious freedom means religious wackos as well as atheists. If we become intolerant of the beliefs of others, then we'll be a threat to individual freedom. I don't want that.
  - Rather than attack them, we should try to understand them, and limit the harm they do, by arguing against immoral religious beliefs such as intolerance, censorship, and child abuse that go under the guise of authoritarian parenting, etc.
  - Work to maintain separation of church and state; discourage minority control of the government. NOTE: -you can and should convince Christians of the importance of this In that they have as much to lose as we do. Trying to limit our right to be atheist is not legal or moral in that that's what we should be fighting, not their belief in god.
  - Vote to support campaign finance reform, an end to special interest groups, and soft money, etc.
  - write to congressmen, editors, etc.
  - Join a group like Americans United for Church and State Separation.
  - Support secular education and *critical thinking*. If they learn critical thinking, they will convince themselves!
  - Plant seeds--Most of us started out Christian and the transition to Atheism was a slow, gradual process; let's give others the same time and patience we had. -- Might be interesting to explore how we gave up our beliefs, ie sequence, what was the turning point, etc.
  - Be there for them when they make the

- transition, ie support founding atheists.
- Come out of the closet.
- If You Must Convert Someone:
  - Focus on someone open-minded and reasonably intelligent, not militantly religious (ie a waste of time) who doesn't "need" it to cope (ie not an elderly terminal cancer patient) whose reasons for believing are particularly "negative" (eg fear of hell)
  - Be gentle. Nudge, don't push, let them down slowly, guide don't force.
  - Enlighten, don't hurt.
  - Don't lose your cool.

~Susan Loehner

Next to speak was 'Manda Dee:

The question posed to me to answer was not whether all atheists should proselytize, but whether ACA, the people who watch the show, get the newsletter and are on the roster and show up to the bagel shop. Proselytizing, comes from the word proselyte, a proselyte is somebody who you convert, and I am against this because I find the concept morally abhorrent. I think that I am more in favor of letting people go out and hurt themselves. This idea of protecting people from themselves is what leads to the thinking that we are our brothers keeper, and it opens the doors to the worst possibility of doing things to other people for their own good. When they are adults, they're responsible for themselves.

- We have such limited resources in this group, that it is too soon to be communicating a message of change from what you are doing and do things our way.
- I think our first message needs to be, if you are already somebody in agreement, stand up and recognize that you are already one of us, and we haven't done that.
- We haven't gone through a stage of serious recruitment
- We need to 'out' like the gay movement. The analogies have some parallels
- If you are gay, are you going to go out and recruit them heteros and show them the error of their ways?
- Us spending our precious time going to people trying to convert them is, of necessity, start with deconstructing their entire existence to find out why they believe.
- I think the most effective use of our time and resources is in education
- present the way the world really is - Such as teaching about evolution. If we don't do it, no one else is.

- We have to go out and speak up for a more accurate world-view.
- We don't have time to pros, there's so much more we have to do - at least at first.

Last to speak was Jeff Dee:

Justifications for promoting (preferred word than proselyte) Atheism - I'm not talking about theism illegal, or violating the civil rights of theists. I realized that simply explaining myself to someone who disagrees, to someone who is a theist, by trying to make a good case, whether I like it or not, I am making a case for why they should stop believing the way they believe and start believing the way i believe. I don't see anyway a round it. Unless we want to simply be silent, then we are promoting atheism.

- Free Speech
  - We have a right to express our views.
  - Like many other rights, if we don't exercise it, we may lose it.
  - When we *do* express our views, we want to make sense.
  - Publicly expressing atheist views in a sensible way may convert people to atheism. We can't help that, and we shouldn't have to make any apologies for it because we have a right to say what we think, and try to make a good case when we do.
- Civic Duty
  - We think atheism is a more accurate world view than theism.
  - We think we're better off having this more accurate world-view.
  - If we care at all about the welfare of our fellow citizens, it follows that we should attempt to give them the benefit of the more accurate world view we enjoy.
  - Some of us are resistant to this argument, because it implies that theists have a civic duty to promote their world-view, too. My only response to that is to say yes, of course they do. Society never benefited from good ideas that nobody ever promoted. The problem with theism is not that they try to convince others to agree with them. The problem with theism is that it is wrong. Again, that obligates us to speak up if we care at all about our fellow man. 

~Jeff Dee

## And The Survey Says:

Q. Are you 'out' as an atheist? Why or why not?

A. Absolutely. To remain quiet in the face of the tyranny of religion and ignorance that surrounds us is cowardice.

## Let Children Keep their Math and Science Books

"The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is the largest, most comprehensive, and most rigorous international study of schools and student achievement ever conducted."<sup>1</sup> according to the twelfth-grade TIMSS report, the US placed dead last out of the 16 nations listed under Average Physics Performance of Advanced Science Students in all Countries<sup>2</sup> and placed 15th out of the 16 nations listed under Average Advanced Mathematics Performance of Advanced Mathematics Students in All Countries<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the twelfth grade TIMSS report did not include Singapore, Korea, or Japan, the three highest achieving nations out of the 40 nations listed in the eighth-grade TIMSS report<sup>4</sup> and the three highest achieving nations out of the 26 nations listed in the fourth-grade TIMSS report.<sup>5</sup>

One reason why American children perform poorly is that Americans fail to adopt textbooks that are inexpensive enough for children to keep permanently. This failure denies children their familiar books from previous years-to read in their bedrooms whenever they need or wish. It also denies authors and teachers reason to assume children have ready home access to a full range of review material. In costly efforts to provide missing material, "...American texts covered many more topics than the foreign books and covered them over and over and over."<sup>6</sup> "American teachers are also more likely to repeat the same information from one grade to the next and to cover little or nothing in depth."<sup>7</sup>

In Singapore, Korea, Japan, and other high achieving nations, children get to keep their own textbooks and can read and write in their books whenever they need or wish. Authors and teachers expect children to have their books from previous years. Books limit review material and focus on new material. Teachers limit review time and cover new material in greater depth. Books do not get beat-up or marked-in by other children and do not fall out-of-date due to years of being reissued. Books are smaller,<sup>8</sup> soft covered, much easier for children to carry, and much less expensive. For example, Singaporeans adopt math and science books (written in English) that are roughly one-fourth the price of those adopted in Austin, Texas.<sup>9</sup>

The framers of the Constitution recognized "the Progress of Science and useful Arts" to be supreme national importance.<sup>10</sup> A fundamental way to promote both individual achievement and the progress of science and technology is to let children keep their math and science textbooks. State laws and district and school policies that obstruct the adoption of books for children to keep are easy to change. Parents, teachers, educrats, and

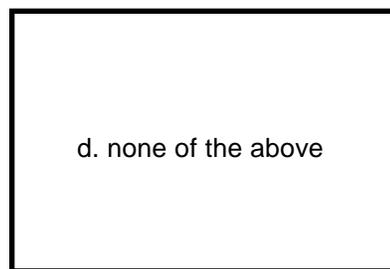
legislators can all play important roles in adopting math and science books for children to keep. 

~Mark Loewe, Ph. D. (Physics)

Due to limited space in this newsletter I did not include Marks footnotes. If you would like to see them, contact me. [jknz@hotmail.com](mailto:jknz@hotmail.com) John Koonz editor.

## Atheist Symbol Contest Results

Last fall the Atheist Alliance held a contest to find a universal symbol for atheists everywhere to use. The choice was narrowed down to the three symbols presented to member societies through their newsletters. See the November '99 issue for pictures of the symbols. ACA, decided to include 'none of the above' as one of the choices. And the winner is . . .



## ACA Raises \$100 to fight Boy Scout Discrimination.

On Sunday January 9th, in a spur-of-the-moment collection, ACA raised \$100 to send to Margaret Downey to help in her legal fight against the boy scouts. For more details, see the September/October '99 issue of Secular Nation. Downey is a long time activist in state/church separation issues. 

## HSH Workshop Needs Speakers

Bob Finch is organizing a convention tentatively to take place between late January to February. We are considering "Artificial Intelligence" as a workshop topic and would be interested to hear if you or anyone you know of is knowledgeable and/or qualified to speak on the topic. Any assistance you can offer would be appreciated.

Daniel Strain  
([dts2000@flash.net](mailto:dts2000@flash.net))

Chair, Houstonians for Secular Humanism

## Notes From the Board

### Old Business:

- Earle reports that we have a little over \$2800 in our general account. The board discussed moving some of this to our building account so as to earn some interest. We also discussed investing our savings in something more profitable than just a savings account. Earle and ray will investigate our options.
- John is finishing off the long awaited new member packets. They will be distributed at the bagelry on the 16th of January. Really.
- Ray Blevins has taken over as blood drive coordinator. When you donate blood, be sure to give him your coupon.
- New sign. Rodney has been working on a new sign to use as a backdrop for the show. He will have it made up this week.

### New Business:

- We collected \$100 to send to Margaret Downey to help her pay for her lawsuit against the Boy Scouts. Earle will send her an ACA check.
- The suggestion was made that we give an annual award to an individual promoting atheism. A modified version was also discussed in which we would give both a 'freethought award', and a 'thought free award'. Paul Wilson will be planning this. See him if you would like to help.
- John wanted to make sure that promoting political activism in our newsletter was legal. Howard Thompson, and others, assured him that it was legal and that we will not lose our tax exempt status as long as we don't endorse specific candidates or political parties.
- The donated t-shirt designs were discussed briefly. There was general agreement that we should expand our choice of ACA t-shirt. See Susan Brown for pictures of the possible designs.
- Can we host some kind of informal get together for Texas non theist groups? The board thinks so. John Koonz will look into this. If you are interested in helping, or even just have some suggestions, please see John.
- At the end of the January The TV show is not always coming out on the internet ([www.mindspring.net](http://www.mindspring.net)) as well as it should. We are paying for this, so if you notice problems, see Ray Blevins. At his own expense, Ray has been making copies of the show for the library. Please consider donating some tapes or money to him.
- The library has been passed on to Earle Beach.
- Michelle will hold off on ordering new t-shirts until we decide if we want to go with a new design.
- Mary Sue Osborne is moving away, and so resigned her seat on the board. If you are

interested in taking her place, please see one of the board members to be nominated.

- Howard Thompson and Rodney Florence spoke to us about their recent efforts to organize non-theists politically. There was some discussion of how we could help get atheist political activists in contact with each other. We wont allow other groups to use our mailing list, no matter how much we support their efforts. There was discussion of how we could reword our membership application so as to make it easier for our members to automatically get Howard's Texas Atheist e-mail newsletter.
- Discussion continued on the possibility of our getting our own place. Some board members feel strongly that we need to get a place, others think we cannot justify the expense. This is likely to become a hot issue. If you have strong feelings, please consider writing them up for the newsletter.

### Your ACA board of directors:

#### Co-chairs:

Susan Brown  
John Koonz

#### Treasurer:

Earle Beach

#### Secretary:

Don Rhoades

#### Board members:

Keith Berka  
Paul Wilson  
Michelle Gadush  
Jim Hallamek  
Arval Bohn  
Ray Blevins  
Vic Farrow  
Jeff Dee

## Godless Gamers

If you are interested in strategy and role playing games, see Jeff Dee or Vic Farrow. These figures represent characters in Jeff's game War Chest. (The game is available from local hobby stores)



Here, a goblin blowgunner, a dwarf berserker, and a dwarf scout battle to the death with a unseele champion and an underworld stonewalker. (Never let it be said that people who value reason cannot also have a good imagination and an appreciation of fantasy.) 

## All Dressed Up And No Place To Go

ACA held a 'Rapture Party' on December 18 to celebrate the non-ending of the world. As you know, especially if you have been following Jeff Dee's rapture reports on *The Atheist Experience*, there are a lot of crazies out there that actually think we are living in the 'end times.' (On a sad note, your editor actually knows kids who believe in, and worry about, this nonsense.) Obviously this stuff deserves a good laugh. . . and that is exactly what we gave it. We held a contest to see who come come up with the most outrageous costume to wear to the end of the 'end times.'. Here are some of the costumes worn to Lovejoys that night: (*The images are a little dark. Your editor is figuring out how to capture video and put it in Appleworks.*)



Jeff puts on a Dunce cap and goes off to where very bad co-hosts go.



The reverend Arlo saves the day as 'Bible Man'



Mea Culpe - - We have been very naughty. (Susan and Scott hit themselves in the head)



Michelle thinks she can escape notice in dark glasses and a camo jacket



Academia has prepared Mark to meet some really pompous asses.



John prefers not to be mistaken for a Christian as he prepares to swim through rivers of blood.



Charley our winner! When all else dies off, roaches will rule the world.



Not one to go down without a fight, Sue wears her "It's a girl!" (nativity scene) sweatshirt.

## A Quote to put on your refrigerator

"The liberation of the human mind has never been furthered by dunderheads; it has been furthered by gay fellows who heaved dead cats into sanctuaries and then went roistering down the highways of the world, proving to all men that doubt, after all, was safe--that the god in the sanctuary was finite in his power and hence a fraud. One horse-laugh is worth ten thousand syllogisms. It is not only more effective; it is also vastly more intelligent."

## **NONTHEISTS FORM "RESPECT OUR CONSTITUTION"**

By Howard Thompson

Texas nontheists are developing a new organization, Respect Our Constitution. Respect Our Constitution will publicize atheist issues and develop nontheistic experience with political party processes. This initiative is non-partisan towards political parties and candidates.

The strongest argument for freedom of conscience and religion free government is our founders' godless Constitution. Respect Our Constitution urges nontheists to promote and defend the freethinking ideals of our founders' Constitution.

ROC was begun by ACA member Rodney Florence and The Texas Atheist editor Howard Thompson. The effort builds upon 1998's success.

Rodney, Mary Sue Osborne, John Koonz and others attended 1998 Democratic precinct conventions and became delegates to the County convention. Mary Sue and Rodney went to the Democratic state convention. They organized a Freethought-Atheist caucus with more than 70 attendees, including members of the Freethinker Association of Central Texas. This effort exposed hundreds of political activists to nontheists in the political process and the issues of nontheists rights and state-church separation.

This year we hope to involve more Texas nontheists. We need everyone's help. A Steering Committee is being formed to help plan the effort and coordinate local information dissemination and activities. Activities include:

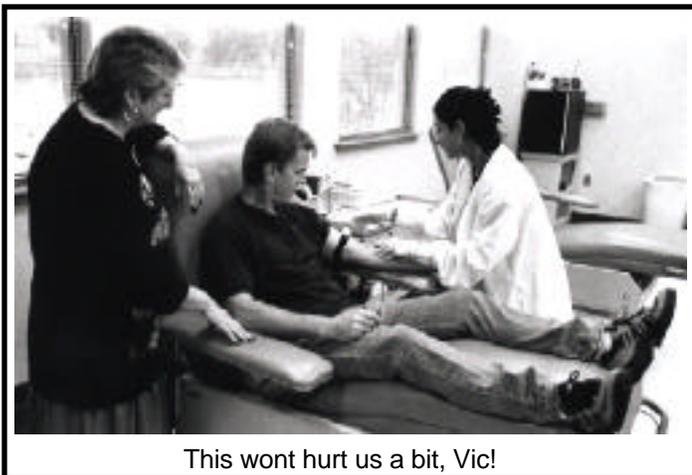
- Telling nontheists know about ROC via e-mail, US Mail and phone.
- Encouraging nontheists to vote. February 14th is the last day for primary election registration.
- Attending Republican, Democratic and other party precinct conventions. Democratic and Republican precinct meetings are at the primary voting location the evening of March 14th primaries.
- Presenting ROC resolutions to precinct conventions. These resolutions are ROC's primary issue education tool. They address equal rights for nontheists, state-church separation, and quality science education for all youths.
- Asking nontheists to become precinct delegates to county and state party conventions.
- Asking nontheists to get interested friends, neighbors and co-workers to attend precinct conventions with ROC resolutions (which will have no identifying name on them).

We gripe about religious right political abuses. Their power ultimately comes from individuals getting involved in party politics. ROC offers nontheists an opportunity to convert griping into something that can effectively oppose the religious right.

We hope you decide to participate. Contact Howard Thompson <gofreemind@aol.com> or Rodney Florence at 512-447-4970 to get on the information mailing list.

## Announcements

- **Weekly Meetings** Sunday Mornings at Hot Jumbo Bagelry, 307 West 5th Street at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings when lectures are not scheduled at Furr's Cafeteria.
- **ACA Board meetings** are on the second Sunday of the month at 12:00. Board meetings are open to all members.
- **Guest Speakers** We will have a panel discussion in February with the topic, "Chaplains in the Military." Lectures are held at Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall, 11:00 am on the first Sunday of the month. Susan Brown (Liatris@mail.utexas.edu) is in charge of scheduling our lectures.
- The **TV committee** is always looking for volunteers on Sunday mornings. They also need donations to pay for tapes and training. ACA TV Tapes are now available for \$20.00 each and will be offered over the web soon.
- **Products** There are still t-shirts left. Our ACA t-shirts list a number of famous atheists. Godless dollars are available now for \$1.50. See Michelle Gadush (gadush@mail.utexas.edu) for more information on these and other exciting atheist products.
- **Library** The library has a new keeper! If you want to check out a book, contact Earle Beach (earleb@jumpnet.com) so he can be sure to bring it to the bagelry. If you would like to donate a book, please be sure to put your name in it so we know who to thank.
- The next **blood drive** will be Jan 29th, and will be called the "Blood Bowl." Meet at the blood bank at 10:00AM. Ray Blevins has taken over the role of blood drive coordinator. After you donate, be sure to give him your coupon so that our account can be credited.



This wont hurt us a bit, Vic!

- **Randalls Donations** Randalls will donate a percentage of the money you spend there to the Atheist Community of Austin. To take advantage of this offer, contact the customer service department of your nearest Randalls. The ACA number is 5158.

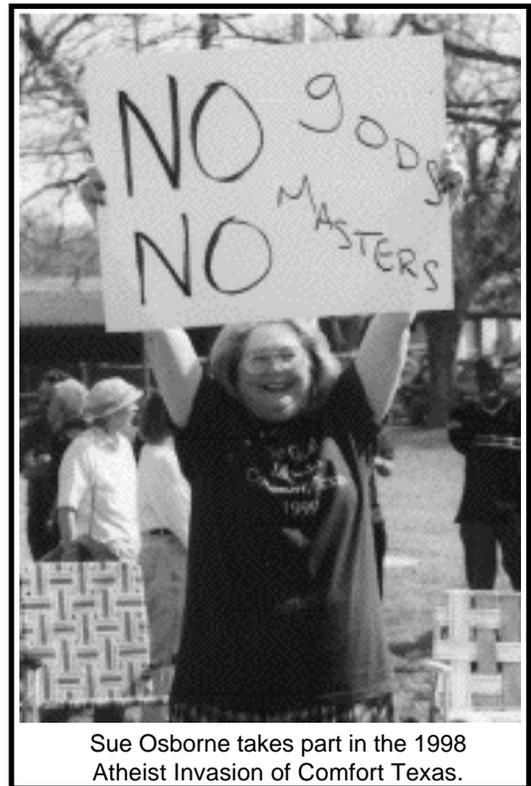
For more information about any of these coming events, call (512) 371-2911 or e-mail liatris@mail.utexas.edu

The Atheist is printed on somewhat recycled paper!

## From The Editor

During the last month, there have been a number of changes. On *The Atheist Experience*, Ray has stepped down as host. Jeff is moving into the host spot with Vic Farrow getting in front of the camera in the co-host spot. Regular viewers will surely miss Ray, but he isn't going far. As a producer, he will still be very much involved with the show.

Ray did an outstanding job as host. He put a good face on atheism. Thank you, Ray!



Sue Osborne takes part in the 1998 Atheist Invasion of Comfort Texas.

Longtime ACA member Mary Sue Osborne is moving away. She will still be around from time to time, but has resigned her position on the board. In addition to serving on the board, Sue has coordinated our blood drives, as well as help organize the 1999 Atheist Alliance Convention. Thank you for all your hard work!

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FOR THE ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, INC.**

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Companion's name (if family or couple membership)

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone : (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

This is to certify that I am a non-theist, that I have read the "Purpose" of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. as stated in the Constitution (below), and that I am in agreement with the principles stated herein. I understand that membership is open only to non-theists.

**Purpose**

The Atheist Community of Austin is organized as a nonprofit educational corporation to develop and support atheist community; to provide opportunities for socializing and friendship, to promote atheist viewpoints, to encourage positive atheist culture, to defend the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, to oppose discrimination against atheists, and to work with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

This organization shall operate in an open, democratic manner, without discrimination as to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, nationality, or disability.

The Bylaws to this Constitution are intended to further define and explain the operating procedure of this organization. Changes may be made to the Bylaws when necessary to improve the operation of this organization. Changes to the Bylaws shall not alter the purpose of this organization as set forth in its Constitution.

Check all that apply

I wish to become a member of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. Membership fees are \$24.00 per year, but our membership year does not begin until the 1st of March. My prorated membership fee, at \$2.00 per month u n t i l next March, is enclosed.

- I wish to make a tax exempt donation to ACA .
- I only wish to participate in the e-mail group. My e-mail address is above. No fee is required.
- I wish to help ACA save money by receiving The Atheist by e-mail. No fee is required.
- I wish to receive a hard copy of The Atheist in the mail. \$10 is enclosed.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to: Atheist Community of Austin, Inc., P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

