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THE ATHEIST

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groups

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JOHN KOONZ STEPS DOWN

John Koonz has resigned as ACA Chair and editor of The Atheist. His resignation letter mentions time constraints and taking a break from group activities. We can only guess that John's transition from public school science teacher to business entrepreneur requires all of his time and energy. We hope John visits us from time-to-time after he gets things organized so we know what is happening in his life.

John Koonz is an ACA founding member and long time stalwart for ACA growth and activities. He served as Co-Chair for 17 months with Susan Brown, who continues in office as Co-Chair.

John wrote the science text for his Middle School classes. It covers life from the big-bang to through human evolution. He participated in public actions, such as addressing the Texas Education Agency in favor of accurate descriptions of evolution in science textbooks, the Respect Our Constitution rally in Austin and other events.

John's energy and presence will be greatly missed. He helped the ACA through its first leadership transition of Co-Chairs and established The Atheist newsletter with excellent content and appearance. We wish him well in his business and personal activities.

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NEW CO-CHAIR IS KEITH BERKA

Keith (Not one of you bastards prayed for me ... and I'm doing just fine") Berka has been resurrected from his quadruple bypass heart operation and has ascended to the lofty realms of ACA Co-Chair. The ACA Board has elected Keith Berka to complete John Koonz's term of office. Martin Wagner was elected to fill the vacant ACA Board membership. Both choices need to be approved by vote of the membership. Martin and Keith are both active members with good ideas and energy. We can look forward to their positive contribution.

Howard Thompson will act as interim editor of The Atheist. Those interested in being the editor, or helping with the writing, layout, printing, or mailing contact Howard .

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PARTY PLANNING - NEW SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The ACA Board has revived the ACA Social Committee. Janet Swisher, Elze Surgailyte and Suzette Krubbe will head up the Committee. Susan Brown will check on a location for our Newcomers Welcome and Winter Solstice party. Everyone who wants to help make this revival a big success can contact Janet at swisher@cs.utexas.edu or 512-451-9594, Elze at vilya57@hotmail.com or Suzette at matthewjkruebbe@hotmail.com.

The ACA had a Social Committee for a long time with founder Mary Sue Osborne playing a key role. The old committee's party's and events played a big role in everyone getting to know each other in a club that could have a good time. Our trip to Esther's Follies during the Atheist Alliance convention was one of the more notable events.

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NEWSLETTER NEEDS YOUR NEWS

The Atheist needs news of member activities and happenings so we can keep up with our growing membership. Birth, death, illness, marriage, divorce, graduation, special events, awards, nifty vacations, atheist activities, etc. Send news to H. Thompson at gofreemind@aol.com or PO Box 1782, Georgetown, TX 78627.

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KEITH BERKA RETURNS

Keith Berka returned to ACA meetings a mere three weeks after his quadruple bypass heart operation. Keith was hospitalized after severe angina pains while attending a youth soccer game with his girl friend.

Keith did not inform his religious family members of his illness until he knew he was going to be O.K. after his operation. He didn't want any of them, or anyone else, claiming that their prayers were what helped him get better. Keith is recuperating rapidly, taking it easy and eating lots of fish. And no, near death experience has not changed our irrepressible Keith one bit (though some of us were hoping!).

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TRISH BENNETT HAS NEW BABY

Trish Bennett, one of our newer members, has not visited meetings, and for a darn good reason - she has a new baby! We hope Trish may be able to visit us at least briefly at one of our Sunday meetings so we can all see her baby.

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SUSAN & CARL MOVE TO PORTLAND

Susan Loehner and Carl Gocial are leaving the Austin area after completing some medical education for the U.S. Army. They are moving to Portland, Oregon, their first reassignment choice. We'll miss having them at meetings.

Oregon is the state with the highest proportion of non-religious people (17%). Portland does have an active atheist group that had a building a few years back, so Susan and Carl won't have to join the ranks of isolated atheism. A half dozen Portland atheists have been advised of Susan and Carl's move, including Jerry Billings, who is in his 8th year of a public access TV show, and Cliff Walker, who publishes a national newsletter.

Susan and Carl's new address will be PO Box 5693, Portland OR 97228, with their current e-mail address cgdoboy@hotmail.com. Isn't it great to have atheists moving across the country from one group to an area with another group?

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RUSSELL & GINNY GOT HITCHED

ACA Board Member and website manager Russell Glasser and ACA member Virginia (Ginny) Griffin got married, and some of us didn't know so we could have an excuse for a party!

Ginny says, "Well we got married on July 5th of this year. We met each other over the internet and lived together for about 2 years, then got married. As atheists we were very fortunate to have found each other. We didn't meet through an atheist organization or anything of the sort, we just lucked out that we both happened to be atheists!"

Congratulations to Ginny and Russell. We wish you the best of good luck and happiness. We're also glad the two of you found the ACA after you found each other.

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DON LAWRENCE SETTLES IN

Don Lawrence may be new in ACA, but he's been active with the Freethinkers Association of Central Texas in San Antonio for a few years, the last year as their president. He now has an apartment near Riverside Drive with easy access to his new Texas Parks & Wildlife job and is settling in to the Austin environment.

Don is active in public access TV. We can only hope he'll bring his show Sex, Drugs, & Rock & Roll to Austin cable access so we get the latest on topless dancers and other hot topics. Don's fondest hope is to establish an atheist commune of laid-back people who enjoy communal physical activities. And yes, sexual freedom also used to be part of the 1800s freethought movement.

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EDITOR TOTALS CAR

Your interim newsletter editor, Howard Thompson, had an auto accident Saturday night (11/11) while driving back to Granite Shoals. His aging Ford Escort got whacked by a huge Silverado truck pulling a trailer at the bad intersection between US 183 and Texas 29. Only Howard was hurt, lucking out with some rapidly healing bruised ribs and a soon to be bruised bank account.

One of the libertarian firemen who showed up did want to know where I got my "Just doing my part to piss-off the religious reich" bumper-sticker. Anyone wanting to sell a decent vehicle for \$6,000-8,000 cash can contact carless Howard at 830-596-1454 or gofreemind@aol.com.

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ATHEIST ENTREPRENEURS ORGANIZING

A few weeks back about seven ACA members interested in how to start a small business held a meeting near the end of a Sunday bagelry meeting. It seems that atheists are creative, self-starting and independent minded, which makes many of them interested in the satisfaction and potential pay-offs of having their own business.

The group is exploring how to proceed, so if you're interested, contact Jeff Dee at or 512-346-0366. Wouldn't it be great if our group experience played a part in helping atheists start successful businesses?

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FREIDENKERS HONORED IN COMFORT

Threatening clouds and rain greeted over 38 stalwart freethinkers, atheists and humanists who braved flash-flood warnings to gather in Comfort Texas Saturday, October 21st. They gathered for the fourth time to honor the German Freidenkers (freethinkers) who settled in the hill country in the

1840s and 1850s. The Freidenkers were mostly refugees from the failed 1848 European revolts with over 30,000 of them eventually settling in Texas.

Early arrivals at Comfort included some ACA members, including Don Rhoades and his daughter, Elze Surgailyte, Ron Gurr, Vic Farrow, Laura Sargent, Rick Williamson and his friend. We began at the Treue der Union (True to the Union) monument, under which are the remains of 36 German members of the Union Loyale League. The Union Loyale League was formed July 4, 1862 by hundreds of hill country Germans who were loyal to the Union and opposed slavery. Key leaders of the Union Loyale League were Freidenkers from Comfort, nearby Sisterdale and other hill country counties. The 36 were killed at the Nueces river August 10, 1862 by a force of Confederate Rangers who were pursuing about 65 Germans who were trying to get into Mexico. Nine of the dead were executed after capture by the Confederates. In keeping with Freidenker culture, the monument displays no religious words or signs, and there is no record that prayers or other religious observances at the monument's 1866 dedication.

We then gathered under a sporadic drizzle at the Freethinker Cenotaph rock in the Comfort town park. Freethinker's Association of Central Texas (FACT) President Don Lawrence was master of ceremonies.

FACT member Harvey Kendall spoke on Freidenker history. Harvey described the Battle of the Nueces and the Treue der Union monument's status as the only Union monument in the South, and only one of six national monuments authorized to fly their flag at half mast all the time. Harvey ended with, "It is our duty to resist unreasonableness, superstition, and attacks on progress in knowledge. There is power in truth and eventually truth will overcome the oppressions of political, social and economic tyranny."

Other activities included a reading of the politically liberal Freidenker resolutions passed at the 1854 Sangerfest in San Antonio, a reading of the October Freethought Month proclamation approved by the San Antonio City Council, and the singing of Die Gedanken Sind Frei (Our Thoughts Are Free) - a 1500s German peasant song. About half way through the activities we had to adjourn to the nearby BBQ place for an excellent lunch, after which we finished our presentations.

Comfort, the cradle of Texas freethought, is about 50 miles northwest of San Antonio just off of Interstate Highway 10. The park with Freethinker Rock is on state hwy 27 along a short commercial stretch. The pinkish rock stands about 12 feet tall right near the highway and still has no plaque. The Treue der Union Monument is about one and a half blocks off of Hwy 27 not far from the city park with the Freethinker Rock. We have heritage in Texas that you can see with a short day trip, aside from the old German school in Austin that banned religious education.

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GODLESS GAMERS STILL MEETING

(From Jeff Dee) The Godless Gamers meet every Monday night at the home of Vic Farrow. We play a wide variety of card games, board games, and role-playing games - it all pretty much depends on who shows up, and what games they bring along. On the 13th, we played a card game called Mausoleum (about bumping off your relatives for their money) and a board game called Save Doctor Lucky, where all the players run around the deck of the Titanic as it's sinking, trying to rescue this character who just doesn't seem to have much in the way of a survival instinct.

Other games we've played a lot recently are Guillotine (a card game about the French Revolution), Wiz War (a board game of combat between wizards in a

maze), and the Buffy the Vampire Slayer board game, based on that TV show. We haven't done much role-playing lately, but ongoing games include Jeff Jones' Call of Cthulhu game (where the players are trying to save the world for a demonic invasion), and Jeff Dee's near future/post holocaust science fiction game where the players are modern people who awaken in the future after having been frozen for 100 years. Jeff is also trying to start up a fantasy RPG that will be more of a "pick up game". Contact Jeff Dee or 512-346-0366.

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TV SHOW IS COMING BACK

(From Producer Russell Glasser) The Atheist Experience is a live, viewer call-in show on Austin public Access Cable TV Sunday mornings. The host is Jeff Dee, the co-host is Martin Wagner, and the producer is Russell Glasser.

Jeff makes general announcements and Martin reads news relevant to atheists. There is a guest on each show who frequently comes in with a specific topic to talk about. There are also open phone lines for people who want to come on and talk about any issues that interest them.

At the present time, the show is off the air. It is scheduled to return soon at 10:00 AM on Sundays, Austin Access Channel 16. I received a letter in the mail giving me a time and channel, but no start date. We are still looking into this.

TV Committee members include, Jeff Dee, Martin Wagner, Vic Farrow, Steven Elliot, and Keith Berka. If you have helped with the show in the past and/or would like to be on the TV Committee, they would be happy to have the extra help that makes the show run smoother and more professionally. Contact Russell Glasser at , , or 512-335-5862.

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ACA ENCOURAGES INTEREST GROUPS

The ACA Board wants to encourage members with similar interests to get together in interest groups such as the Godless Gamers and Entrepreneurs. These groups can be anything that interests members, hobbies, outings, music, books, arts, politics, philosophy, etc.

If you want to find others who share your interests, you can use the new newsletter Notices (see later ad box) and announce your interest during the business session of each meeting where any member can make an announcement. Send newsletter announcements to or PO Box 1782, Georgetown, TX 78627.

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MEMBERSHIP JUMPS TO 74

The membership committee now counts 74 ACA members. That is an increase of 36 members since the May officer elections when we had 38 members.

The membership drive is still going on while we deal with the TV show problems and the transition to a new Co-Chair and newsletter editor. One of the simplest things we can do to help is ask visitors and new comers to if they would like to join the ACA. Nothing seems to work as well as a simple personal invitation to join. You can get membership applications from the Secretary, Howard Thompson, or from the membership invitation packets in our cabinet at the bagelry.

New members in recent months include the following list (not complete). If you joined in the last few months, please contact Howard at or 830-596-1454 so we can let everyone know you are a member.

New or Renewing members: John Iacolleti (renewal), Robert Melsha, Elze Surgailyte, Tim Burnett (renewal), Ron Gurr, Enricka Dillman, Steven Elliott, Trish Bennett, Darwin Mann (renewal), Rod Higdon, Mike Ragusa, Robbie Lindsey, Laura Devine, Rick Williamson, Gene Davis, Jill Ford, Jeff Jones, Ethan Getz (renewal), Rock Howard, Matthew & Suzette Krubbe, Don Lawrence, Mark Loewe, Stephanie Nelson, Laura Sargent, Shawn Burks, Earle Beach (renewal).

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REORGANIZING MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

The ACA Board will begin discussing different kinds and levels of memberships, such as family, student, life, Patron, etc. Expanding the types of memberships could better serve the varied situations of members, and, could help the ACA meet some of its long range growth and building fund goals.

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BIBLE BLOOPERS
By Howard Thompson

Finding bible bloopers is fun, even when believers shut their ears to the facts. Contradictions run from the trivial to big ol' huge whoppers that undermine key Christian assumptions. One whopper every atheist should have in their arsenal of rebuttals concerns the crucifixion blood sacrifice of Jesus for humanity's sins.

The bloody death of Jesus/god supposedly took the place of animal sacrifices in the Jewish Temple. God required these blood sacrifices to redeem sinful violations of god's laws. Animal blood was traded for human sin. The blood sacrifice of Jesus/god made the animal sacrifices no longer necessary. Thereafter, only the blood sacrifice of Jesus/god redeemed the price of sins demanded by god.

The book of Acts, however, portrays Jesus/god's chosen disciples as ignorant of key salvation facts of Christianity. For example, this is how Peter describes Jesus. "...Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God ... this man ..." [Acts 2:22 NRSV] What's this? Peter, whom Jesus/god infallibly chose to lead his new religion, says Jesus is a "man" with no reference to divinity? Peter says this just after Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven?

Acts offers more confusion when Peter says, "This Jesus God raised up..." [Acts 2:32 NRSV] and talks about Jesus and god as separate beings. Peter is not preaching that Jesus is god or the son of god. It is as if Peter hasn't seen or understood resurrection events that proved Jesus was god. More reasonably, these words were probably written before Christianity had invented the resurrection and ascension stories with the claim that Jesus was god. Right there in Acts we have evidence of an early "Christianity" that thought Jesus was a man, not god. With this good evidence that Jesus' chosen disciples did not think he was god, there is no good reason for anyone else to think it.

Things get even more confusing. "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers," [Acts 2:42 NRSV]. Jesus/god had supposedly established the substitute of a meal of blessed bread and wine as a symbolic substitute for the ritual of eating the

animals sacrificed in the Temple to cleanse sins. Yet here is a description of disciple fellowship prayers and breaking bread without mention of wine or the symbolic substitute of bread and wine for Jesus' blood and flesh. It is as if the symbolic blood and flesh ritual Jesus told his disciples to perform at the last supper never happened. Again, we have good evidence that an early Christianity did not recognize nor perform the blood and wine communion, that it must have been created later.

Yeh, there's more. "Day by day as they spent much time together in the temple ..." [Acts 2:46 NRSV] And, "One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer" [Acts 3:1 NRSV] These passages describe Jesus/god's disciples as still going to the temple of blood sacrifices as if they were good Temple Jews. How can this be after they saw Jesus/god create a ritual substitute meal for temple animal sacrifice and after they saw Jesus/god crucified as the once and forever last blood sacrifice for humanity's sins? After the crucifixion and resurrection, temple worship should have been meaningless for Jesus/god's followers. Yet, Acts shows the chosen disciples of Jesus still going to temple like good Jews for prayers during the day long process of blood sacrifices on the altar.

Typical Christian response to this kind of evidence is to cite New Testament passages that describe communion, Jesus' replacement of temple animal sacrifice, and the disciples talking of Jesus as god. They do this without even realizing that such contradictory examples only make the New Testament look less reliable. They seem to think that even one New Testament passage that supports traditional Christian theology means the contradictory passages are merely incomplete statements that take the traditional theology for granted. Christian theology thus rests on selected bible passages that agree with tradition while ignoring conflicting passages in a pick and choose kind religion.

The difficulty for Christians is that such logic is not only flawed, but often defies the clarity of the contradictory statements. In our examples, Peter is explicitly calling Jesus a man, not a god nor son of god. Peter's statement is not vague and not incomplete, it is a blunt statement that Jesus is a man without reference to divinity. Acts also shows no embarrassment or qualifications in the disciples going to the temple for prayers, which would be during the nearly day long blood sacrifices.

It also doesn't help the Christian position for them to say that Jesus was both man and god, implying that Peter was only talking about one aspect of Jesus which should not then be taken to mean that he did not know of or accept the divine aspect of Jesus. This argument fails because the divinity of Jesus is arguably the single most important statement of any Christian evangelical because the rest of the "good news" makes no sense without the god claim. Peter could not properly spread the "good news" without saying Jesus was god.

This example bible blooper comes from the first three chapters of Acts, only a few pages of reading for those who want to see the full context. It's good ammunition to counter Christian traditions that early disciples thought Jesus was the god of a blood sacrifice cult.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

[Send Announcement notices to Susan Brown .]

* Weekly Meetings: First Sunday of the month Speaker's meeting, 11:15AM, Furr's Cafeteria Longhorn Room, North Cross Mall at N. Burnet Rd. and W. Anderson Ln. All other Sundays 10:30AM, at Hot Jumbo Bagels, 307 W. 5th St.

* Dec. 3rd Meeting: December's first Sunday program at Furr's is a panel discussion of The Advantages & Hopes of Atheism with Paul Wilson, Ginny Glasser, Suzette Krubbe, and Howard Thompson; followed by general group discussion.

* ACA Board Meetings: Second Sunday of the month at 12:00. Meetings are open. Send proposed agenda items to Susan Brown or 512-443-0689.

* Newsletter: The Atheist newsletter schedule is to be out by the third Sunday meeting each month. Send news items to Howard Thompson

* Products: Michelle Gadush runs the ACA products table at meetings where you can buy your atheist and freethought paraphernalia. If you want to buy something or help Michelle with this effort contact her at

* Library: The ACA library is in our cabinet at the bagelry. You may donate or check out books from this growing repository of valuable information.

* Randalls Donations: Randalls grocery store will donate a percentage of what you spend in their stores to the ACA. You'll need your receipts and their code number for the ACA, 5158. So, contact the customer service dept. at your Randalls to increase donations to ACA.

* United Way Donations: The United Way fund drive at your employer is another way you can donate to ACA. You need to designate the ACA as the organization you are giving to, which should qualify for any matching funds your employer adds in.

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NEW SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

Reader Notices: The Atheist will begin a new section for member notices for buying, selling, trading, offering services, looking for others to share interests etc. This will begin as soon as we get some.

Reader Letters: The Atheist does print letters, but we haven't had any recently. So, keep it brief and get the thing off your chest you've been wanting to mention to ACA members.

Send Notices to: or PO Box 2782, Georgetown, TX 78627.