

The Secular Gazette

Supporting Science, Reason and the Separation of Church and State

Issue #21

October 4, 2011

I see the signs around me. They're all over, Studies, polls, interviews with secular leaders...There are less and less people being drawn to religion, even in the bastions of the righteous – the southern Baptists. The faithful are waning, due in part to the information explosion from the internet and the social acceptance of a non-religious stance. Of course the child-abuse scandals which rocked the world in the 1990's didn't help much either. Is America going the way of Europe, with 80-85% atheistic countries? I sincerely hope so. The world would be much better without superstition beliefs.

Current politicians are claiming they know of God's power and then backpedaling and even switching sects. Some have dominionists links and will gladly make this a more theocratic nation. But doesn't this seem mute if we are becoming a more non-theistic nation? There's over 8% of atheists in America, and if we add the non-religious and agnostics the number approaches 20% - a larger number than most religions and most sects of Christianity. I'm just waiting for the day that politicians don't even mention their faith, and keep the separation of church and state 'sacred'

Bruce Gleason, Editor

Bible Tearing – Not Bible Burning



See video of this event [HERE](#)

On September 17, the grass-roots atheist groups Backyard Skeptics (BYS) visited the Huntington Beach pier in southern

California to demonstrate a point – that no one could live by certain Bible verses, both New and Old Testament, and not be thrown immediately in jail.

The BYS group which was formed in 2008 by Gleason to strengthen the secular movement in conservative Orange County, CA. "The secular numbers are rising" says Gleason, "Where will one find a community, much like the religious community, but with no God?"

Gleason says his group is reason-based vs. faith based and 15-20 BYS members attends the pier events two or

three times a year. Often, evangelistic open-air preachers are at the foot of the pier, spouting off their eternal damnation rhetoric. Greg Course, pictured above, is one of those who profess to give your soul to Jesus and gain eternal happiness in a mythical heaven.

Bruce Gleason, the founder and organizer of Backyard Skeptics says he didn't really tear actual Bible pages out – just photocopies of verses from the New and Old Testament. The demonstration lasted about 8 minutes, and to finish his presentation, Gleason tore one random page from the Bible, noting that many verses are immoral and no good Christian could ever take this bronzed-aged book literally.

Evan, also a BYS member and strong atheist shared the tearing responsibilities with Gleason as each tore

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photocopied verses and disposed of them in a trash container – not risking an arrest for littering.

an atheist but one who deplores the harm caused by religion. “The world would be a much better place without religion” he adds.

One woman hear a news report from a Christian radio station and had to come down to prevent these atheists from going to hell. You can see here in the attached video link near the end of the video.

Gleason says he’ll be doing this more often. He says there are many good passages in the Bible, but adds there are many good passages in any holy book. The Koran, The Analects, Bhagavad Gita, and even in secular books as in philosophy, psychology and science books if one examines reciprocal altruism in other life forms.

Gleason says this ‘outreach program’ was originally intended, and still is, to let other non-theists know there is a group in Orange County that shares the idea that we can be good without God, and the well-being of others is linked to exploring and discovering the world though naturalistic means, not faith based ones. Backyard Skeptics is the largest atheist based group in orange County with over 500 members.

[See HERE](#) for the New Testament photocopied verses which were torn

[See HERE](#) for Old Testament photocopied verses which were torn

Join backyard Skeptics for free at <http://www.meetup.com/Backyard-Skeptics/>

Surprisingly, the 50 or so people who were witnessing this well-organized publicity stunt did not seem phased by the demonstration, even as Gleason tore one page from the holy book, no one shouted “blasphemy!” - not a peep from anyone. Gleason admitted that Orange County Xtians are mostly moderate in their belief, but he wouldn’t try this exercise of his civil rights in Kansas. Nor would he try this with the Koran, even though he says he’s does not discriminate to one particular religion – he is against all of them. He mentioned “Voltaire said the ‘those who believe in absurdities can commit atrocities’ ”. He adds “all religious have their weird and crazy superstitions, but a religionist simply confirms their superstitions while calling all the others ridiculous. This is a perfect example of confirmation bias.” Gleason describes himself as an ‘anti-theist’, on who not only is

Video [HERE](#) More video [HERE](#)
From Skeptic Logic [HERE](#).

The most comments in the OC Register and photos [HERE](#).
Also from [BeliefNet](#)

The TEARifying Bible @ backyardskeptics.com

Do you agree that certain verses of the Bible are immoral? Join us by sending your picture of tearing your favorite immoral verse to info@backyardskeptics.com. We promise you won’t be damned!

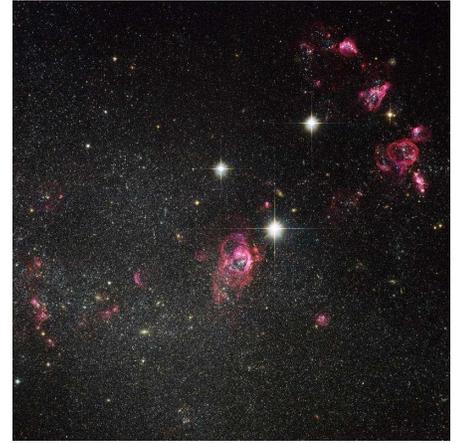




Science News

Galaxy Caught Blowing Bubbles

ScienceDaily (Oct. 1, 2011) — Hubble's famous images of galaxies typically show elegant spirals or soft-edged ellipses. But these neat forms are only representative of large galaxies. Smaller galaxies like the dwarf irregular galaxy Holmberg II come in many shapes and types that are harder to classify. This galaxy's indistinct shape is punctuated by huge glowing bubbles of gas, captured in a new image from the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope.



The intricate glowing shells of gas in Holmberg II were created by the energetic lifecycles of many generations of stars. High-mass stars form in dense regions of gas, and later in life expel strong stellar winds that blow away the surrounding material. At the very end of their lives, they explode in as a supernova. Shock waves rip through these less dense regions blowing out and heating the gas, forming the delicate shells we see today. Holmberg II is a patchwork of dense star-forming regions and extensive barren areas with less material, which can stretch across thousands of light-years. As a dwarf galaxy, it has neither the spiral arms typical of galaxies like the Milky Way nor the dense nucleus of an elliptical galaxy. This makes Holmberg II, gravitationally speaking, a gentle haven where fragile structures such as these bubbles can hold their shape.

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

The mind's eye revealed

Researchers have just wrapped production on a special movie of the mind that stars a brain scanner, a sophisticated computer program and millions of YouTube videos. By monitoring people's brains as they watched movies and then re-creating what they saw, the new release has tiptoed closer to technology that can read minds by decoding mental activities, researchers report in an upcoming *Current Biology* paper.

"It's very dramatic. It really is like *Minority Report*," says neuroscientist James Haxby of Dartmouth College, referring to the 2002 Tom Cruise vehicle in which decoded visions from psychic brains help identify criminals before any crime is committed.

In the study, researchers led by Jack Gallant of the University of California, Berkeley used a type of brain scan called fMRI to record brain activity in three people (who were all coauthors on the paper) as they watched hours of Hollywood movie trailers. Brain signals were fed into a computer program that learned how each person's visual system responded to scenes in the movies. Once the computer program had a good handle on the brains' responses, the researchers went backwards and attempted to re-create what people were watching solely on the basis of brain signals.

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#) (video included in article)

Dinosaur-era feathers sealed in amber

The 11 small, amber-bound specimens found in Canada span an evolutionary range of late Cretaceous fashion, from what appear to be unbranched filaments — which have been proposed as the first stage of dinosaur feather evolution — to bits of sophisticated, corkscrewy barbs like the wettable feathers on modern diving birds, a team from the University of Alberta reports in the Sept. 16 *Science*.

Such a range has shown up squashed in rock fossils, but “we’re seeing the same thing preserved in beautiful 3-D forms,” says coauthor Ryan McKellar. “It’s preserved down to the point of having pigment, which opens up the doorway for all sorts of weird and wonderful investigations.”

To find the 11 specimens, McKellar screened more than 4,000 pieces of amber, collected from the discards of a coal mining operation near the town of Grassy Lake in southern Alberta. McKellar speculates that back in the day, the area was some kind of salt marsh along the edge of the great seaway that ran through what is today western North America.



Church-State Legal News



Pulpit Perversion Sunday: The Religious Right’s Partisan Scheme To Politicize Churches

On Oct. 2, a few fundamentalist clergy around the country will observe “Pulpit Freedom Sunday.” They will take to their pulpits and endorse or oppose candidates in defiance of federal tax law, which prohibits nonprofits from intervention in elections.

This isn’t some occasion on the liturgical calendar or a spontaneous eruption of civic zeal. It’s part of a plot by the Alliance Defense Fund, a right-wing legal group founded by theocracy-minded TV and radio preachers. The ADF-sponsored observance has one goal: to pave the way for Religious Right leaders to forge fundamentalist churches into a disciplined voting bloc.

To hear ADF lawyers talk, you’d think American clergy are currently bound and gagged by an overweening Big Brother government. In [an essay last Saturday](#), ADF Senior Legal Counsel Erik Stanley said preachers are subject to “cruel and unusual punishment.”

“[I]t remains a fact,” said Stanley, “that every Sunday, when pastors in America ascend the pulpit, they face the cruel and unusual prospect of exchanging their natural, God-given right to free speech for a government-ordained lexicon (if they want to keep their tax-exempt status).”

What nonsense!

American clergy are perfectly free to address any religious, moral and political issues they wish. The only limitation is that they cannot use their tax-exempt resources to endorse or oppose political candidates.

That's not some sort of onerous government intrusion; it's just fair governmental application of the same rules that apply to all religious, educational and charitable organizations in the 501(c)(3) category.

If you want to be tax-exempt and you want donations to your church or other nonprofit to be tax deductible, you have to be devoted to religious, educational and charitable endeavors and not be some sort of political action committee.

The [vast majority of](#) American clergy and the [vast majority of](#) the American people see this distinction as reasonable and prudent. We don't want our churches and other nonprofits perverted into cogs in some scheming politician's political machine.

It would be particularly destructive to politicize our houses of worship. Congregations would be bitterly divided, communities would be beset with religious

tensions as congregations vied with each other for political power and the rights of minorities would be placed in grave jeopardy.

The ADF's allies in Congress tried for years to pass legislation allowing churches to endorse candidates while keeping their tax exemption, but the campaign failed.

Now, the ADF is trying to spark a lawsuit and test the federal tax law in court. Well, here's some news, ADF, the law has already been tested in court and upheld!

In May of 2000, a three-judge panel of the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals [ruled that the IRS](#) had acted within the scope of its authority when it revoked the exemption of a New York church that opposed presidential candidate Bill Clinton. (AU had reported the scofflaw congregation to the IRS and later filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the *Branch Ministries v. Rossotti* case, supporting the IRS's revocation.)

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

[Ban on judge's Ten Commandments poster in classroom stands as Supreme Court declines case](#)

The [US Supreme Court](#) declined Monday to take up a case examining whether an [Ohio](#) judge violated the separation of church and state when he displayed a poster in his courtroom that contrasted the Ten Commandments with humanist precepts.

By declining the case, the court let stand rulings that found that the judge had indeed violated the church-state principle.

Ohio [Common Pleas Court Judge James DeWeese](#) had labeled the poster "Philosophies of Law in Conflict" and included personal commentary.

He declared his preference for the moral absolutism of the Ten Commandments [forbidding murder, theft, adultery, etc.] rather than what he called the moral relativism of humanists.

"The cases passing through this courtroom demonstrate we are paying a high cost in increased crime and other social ills for moving from moral absolutism [like the Ten Commandments] to moral relativism [favored by humanists].... Our Founders saw the necessity of moral absolutes," Judge DeWeese is quoted on the poster.

He added: "I join the Founders in personally acknowledging the importance of Almighty God's fixed moral standards for restoring the moral fabric of this nation."

Concerned that the judge was attempting to use his public courtroom as a pulpit, the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) of Ohio filed suit asking a federal judge to declare the display a violation of the [First Amendment's](#) bar on government establishment and endorsement of religion.

Judge DeWeese defended the display as an attempt to express his views about the consequences of the country abandoning its religious heritage and moving toward a moral relativist philosophy and away from a moral absolutist legal philosophy. Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

5 Signs That America Is Moving Away from Religion

If you look closely there are promising signs that American attitudes are changing in a way that may blunt the impact of religion on politics and culture.



In between bragging about the number of people they've killed and vilifying gay soldiers, the GOP

presidential candidates have spent the primaries demonstrating how little they respect the separation of church and state. Michele Bachmann seems to think [God is personally invested](#) in her political career. Both she and Rick Perry have ties to [Christian Dominionism](#), a theocratic philosophy that publicly calls for Christian takeover of America's political and civil institutions. (Even Ron Paul, glorified by civil libertarians for his only two good policy stances -- opposition to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and drug prohibition -- sputtered about churches when asked during a debate where he'd send a gravely ill man [without health insurance](#).)

GOP pandering to the Religious Right is just one of those facts of American public life, like climate change denial and Creationism in schools, that leave secular Americans lamenting the decline of the country, and of reason and logic. Organized religion's grasp on the politics and culture of much of Europe has been [waning for decades](#) -- why can't we do that here?

But there are signs that American attitudes are changing in ways that may tame religion's power over political life in the future.

Annie Laurie Gaylor, founder of the [Freedom from Religion Foundation](#), tells AlterNet that she thinks what happened in Europe is (slowly) happening here. While questioning religion remains controversial -- Gaylor says the group's work on church and state issues often elicits hate-mail strongly suggesting they move to, you know, Europe -- atheism, skepticism, and agnosticism are becoming more widely accepted.

"The statistics show there are more of us ... If you're in a room of people you can count on more to agree with non-belief or to be accepting of non-belief," says Gaylor.

Here are five trends that give hope one day religion will reside in the realm of personal choice and private worship, far away from politics -- something like what the Founders intended *hundreds of years ago*.

The intrusion of religion into places where it doesn't belong, like government or public education, naturally requires high levels of organization and control -- it's not something that just happens. So it's a good sign that even many Americans who maintain a personal religious faith are distancing themselves from hierarchical, top-down religion. Polls have repeatedly shown that even among the devout, emphatic proclamations of faith do not translate into actual churchgoing. In fact, church attendance rates hovered at around 40 percent until pollsters realized there's a major gap between what Americans tell them about their religious habits and their actual religious habits. Tom Flynn [summarizes](#) the over-inflation of US churchgoing and offers more accurate stats:

Americans may believe in a god who sees everything, but they lie about how often they go to church. Since 1939, the Gallup organization has reported that 40% of adults attend church weekly. (The most recent figure is 42%.) Gallup's figure has long attracted skepticism. Were it true, some 73 million people would throng the nation's houses of worship each week. Even the conservative *Washington Times* found that "hard to imagine." New research suggests that there may be only half to two-thirds that many people in the pews. Americans are also actively shaping their religious beliefs to fit their own values. Profiled in [USA Today](#), religion statistics expert George Barna shares recent findings that show religion is becoming increasingly personal. Believers might drift from faith to faith until they find one that works for them, or cobble together a belief system drawn from many religious traditions. The US is becoming a place of "310 million people with 310 million religions" Barna is quoted as saying.

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

SAUDI WOMAN SENTENCED TO 10 SLASHES FOR DRIVING CAR

_Living in America we sometimes fail to appreciate the freedom of choice that we have and the freedom to be treated like a human.. Maybe because those are rights and not things one should have to fight for. However over in other parts of the world, brazen injustices still occur and most of those brazen acts occur against women.

CAIRO (AP) — A Saudi woman was sentenced Tuesday to be lashed 10 times with a whip for defying the kingdom's prohibition on female drivers, the first time a legal punishment has been handed down for a violation of the longtime ban in the ultraconservative Muslim nation.



Normally, police just stop female drivers, question them and let them go after they sign a pledge not to drive again. But dozens of women have continued to take to the roads since June in a campaign to break the taboo.

The driver, Shaima Jastaina, in her 30s, was found guilty of driving without permission, activist Samar Badawi said. The punishment is usually carried out within a month. It was not possible to reach Jastaina, but Badawi, in touch with Jastaina's family, said she appealed the verdict.

Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that bans women — both Saudi and foreign — from driving. The prohibition forces families to hire live-in drivers, and those who cannot afford the \$300 to \$400 a month for a driver must rely on male relatives to drive them to work, school, shopping or the doctor.

There are no written laws that restrict women from driving. Rather, the ban is rooted in conservative traditions and religious views that hold giving freedom of movement to women would make them vulnerable to sins.

Activists say the religious justification is irrelevant.

"How come women get flogged for driving while the maximum penalty for a traffic violation is a fine, not lashes?" Zein el-Abydeen said. "Even the Prophet (Muhammad's) wives were riding camels and horses because these were the only means of transportation."

Until Tuesday, none had been sentenced by the courts. But recently, several women have been summoned for questioning by the prosecutor general and referred to trial.

One of them, housewife Najalaa al-Harriri, drove only two times, not out of defiance, but out of need, she says.

"I don't have a driver. I needed to drop my son off at school and pick up my daughter from work," she said over the phone from the western port city of Jeddah.

Read more: <http://www.askkissy.com/2011/09/28/saudi-woman-sentenced-to-10-slashes-for-driving-car/#ixzz1ZU2zQ2rE>

Looking for a good tax write-off?

Freethought Alliance is a 501C3 organization and will gladly use your donation to promote secular values and the public education of non-belief. Use the DONATION button at freethoughtalliance.org to make your donation of any amount.

By Brian Dunning

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[Student Questions: A Few Good Myths](#)

(ed. This is a small portion of this Skeptoid podcast)

Hi Brian, my aunt's laptop has slowed down so much that she has decided to upgrade. Most of us have noticed that a Windows installation on a PC will operate more slowly over time. Some claim this is malicious, to coerce users into upgrading their hardware. My friends say this is due to the registry becoming cluttered, and that Windows should be re-installed periodically. Is there a simple, known cause for the slowdown? P.S. This is not a request for tech support. Jaime Allan, the United Kingdom.

The theory that Microsoft conspires with PC manufacturers to make performance degrade over time, thus requiring upgrades to new PCs, makes little sense. Microsoft would have to write this gradual decline into their operating system, presumably in exchange for some kickback from the PC makers. Is Microsoft really so desperate for cash that they'd risk losing customers to competing operating systems like Mac and Chrome and Linux? Giving your customers a deliberately crippled product is certainly an established way to get them to upgrade in the future; but these days, Microsoft also has to worry about keeping them from defecting today.

Gradual performance degradation is what we'd expect to see from any PC even without the existence of a conspiracy. Bloat is a real, non-spectral culprit. Software gets bigger and more demanding of system resources, random downloads and extensions install themselves and consume processor cycles, hard disks get fragmented, free space available for swap files shrinks. Computers twenty years ago were just as snappy as computers today, because their simpler software required much less of the hardware.

I have no doubt that some conspiracy theorist can point to some existing licensing deal that Microsoft has with PC manufacturers and describe it as consistent with the existence of the conspiracy. I say, prove the conspiracy. Show me the code written into Windows that executes the gradual performance decline. Until they do, tell your aunt that her computer is not the only one that needs to keep up.

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[Backyard Skeptics News:](#)

Backyard Skeptics is a grass-roots organization based in Villa Park, CA which sponsors monthly meetings with interesting secular speakers, dinner-and-a-movie nights, science-oriented field trips, outreach programs at the Huntington Beach Pier and atheist advocacy programs. If you are local to Orange County you are welcome to join our meetup group to receive announcements of upcoming events. <http://www.backyardskpetics.com>



We're now on Facebook – if you're a Facebook fan then join our group by going [HERE](#).

NEWS

[10/4/11 Greek Orthodox church appears to be exempt from austerity measures](#)

[10/3/11 Worshipper rips out both eyes in Mass with his BARE HANDS](#)

[10/1/11 Rising atheism in America puts 'religious right on the defensive'](#)

[9/28/11 Saudi Woman Sentenced To 10 Slashes For Driving Car](#)

9/24/11 Atheists 'Picket' San Diego Creation Museum Celebration - [Christian Post article](#) [LA Examiner article](#)

[9/24/11 Jail or Church for offenders – Is it Legal?](#)

9/23/11 Two atheists billboards are up in the OC. One in Garden Grove and one in Orange See the homepage for more. The Examiner article is [HERE](#)

More on the billboards [Calif. Atheist Billboards Lump Magic Underwear, Voodoo With Salvation](#)



[9/17/11 Atheist group to rip Bible pages in H.B.](#)



[9/16/11 COURT RULES TEACHER MUST REMOVE RELIGIOUS BANNERS](#)

[9/15/11 AMERICAN ATHEIST LEADER CALLS FOR THE 'ERADICATION' OF 'FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIANS](#)

[9/16/11 Religious Right want Homosexuality a Criminal Offence](#)

[9/10/11 OK legislator claims homosexuality is "more dangerous" than terrorist attacks](#) – wants an 'non-religious ' registry started.

Backyard Skeptics Events

If you are local to southern California, join some of the great events from BYS and many other secular groups in the area.

Carl Sagan's Cosmos Episode #5 in San Juan Capistrano, 6:30pm. The October 12 showing is called 'Blues for a Red Planet' and, as you might suspect, is about Mars. Scott Maxwell from JPL will be the presenter.

Oct 23 2pm Pasadena Cal Tech Lecture The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined: Lecture in Pasadena with Stephen Pinker. [See meetup.com.backyard-skeptics](#)

Our Next Monthly Meeting: Wednesday October 26, 2011 in Villa Park, CA. This month we will be having our Psychic and Magic night with mentalists and magicians both armature and professional.

October 27, – Free film – “There's No Dinos In Heaven” at Fullerton State campus. See the flyer [HERE](#) (also has a link to the trailer)

April 19th, 2012 – special private viewing at the 60: Mt Wilson Observatory

Other Local Events

Oct 6, 2pm The Orange County Secular Book Club. Meets on the second Saturday of the month in Westminster. Contact Nancy [HERE](#)

Atheists United is organizing a group for the October 16th AIDS walk in West Hollywood. You can register to walk going to <http://www.aidswalk.net/losangeles/>

American's United Showing

– Saturday October 15, 2011 at 2:00 pm Irvine Ranch Water District Headquarters 15600 Sand Canyon Avenue Irvine, CA 92618-3102

Oct 15 [Step Out 5K Walk to Fight Diabetes](#) IEAA Riverside

[Generation Atheist Monthly Meetup](#) Oct 16th, Pasadena

Oct 16 [Long Beach Atheists](#) 11:30am

Oct 16 2pm [EVOLUTION: THE FOSSIL EVIDENCE – A PowerPoint presentation by Robert Richert](#) Humanist Association of OC

Oct 16 Atheists United [AIDS walk Los Angeles](#)

Oct 16 7pm Mission Viejo BYS South [Monthly Meeting](#)

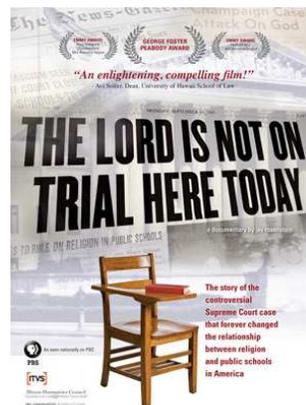
Oct 21 7pm [Philosophy as a World View](#) Santa Ana

National Events

The 2011 AAI U.S. [Texas Freethought Convention](#) has been scheduled for October 7-9, in Houston, Texas.

This event is being held in conjunction with the Texas Freethought Convention as the local host.

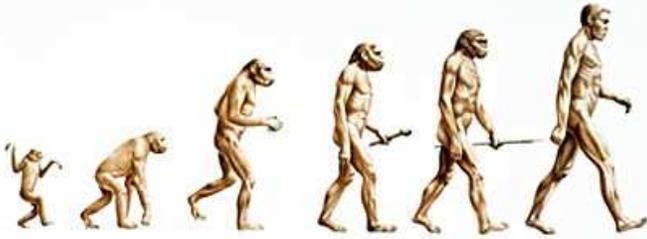
[Oct 7-9 2011 FFRF Conference, Hartford, Connecticut](#)



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Evolution Education



[A new poll on evolution and climate change](#)

A new poll asked respondents about their views on evolution and climate change, what they regard the scientific consensus on those topics to be, and whether it matters to them whether candidates for president share their views. The [poll](#) (PDF) was designed and conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute in partnership with the Religion News Service.

On the topic of evolution, 57% of respondents said that "Humans and other living things have evolved over time" came closest to their view, while 38% preferred "Humans and other living things have existed in their present form since creation," 1% volunteered different responses, and 4% said that they didn't know or refused to answer the question. (In a 2009 [poll](#) [PDF] from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 61% of respondents from the general public preferred "Humans and other living things have evolved over time." The discrepancy between the results may be due in part to a difference in the wording of the alternative: where the PRRI/RNS poll refers to "creation," the Pew Research Center poll refers to the less overtly religious "the beginning of time.")

The distribution of opinion among political positions and religious affiliations in the PRRI/RNS poll was broadly consistent with that reported in previous polls and surveys. PRRI [noted](#), "More than 6-in-10 political independents (61%) and Democrats (64%) affirm a belief in evolution, compared to 45% of Republicans and 43% of Americans who identify with the Tea Party," adding, "Nearly two-thirds (66%) of white mainline Protestants, 61% of Catholics, and 77% of the unaffiliated believe humans and other living things evolved over time, compared to only about one-third (32%) of white evangelicals. African American Protestants are evenly divided on the question, with 47% affirming a belief in evolution and 46% affirming a belief in creationism."

Among those who accepted evolution, 53% preferred "Humans and other things have evolved due to natural processes such as natural selection," 38% preferred "A supreme being guided the evolution of living things for the purpose of creating humans and other life in the form it exists today," 3% volunteered different responses, and 6% said that they didn't know or refused to answer the question. Of those who rejected evolution, 50% agreed with "humans and other living things were created within the last 10,000 years," 39% disagreed, and 12% said that they didn't know or refused to answer the question. PRRI noted, "White evangelical Protestants (33%) and Americans who identify with the Tea Party (31%) were significantly more likely" to agree with the 10,000-year option.

On climate change, 69% of respondents said that they believe that "there is solid evidence that the average temperature on earth has been getting warmer over the past few decades," with 26% saying that they did not believe it, 2% volunteering that there is some or mixed evidence, and 3% saying that they didn't know or refusing to answer the question. Among those who believed that there is evidence (whether solid or mixed), 64% said that "[c]limate change is caused mostly by human activity such as burning fossil fuels" came closest to their view, while 32% preferred "[c]limate change is caused mostly by natural patterns in the earth's environment" instead, and 4% said that they didn't know or refused to answer the question.

Asked "do scientists generally agree that humans evolved over time, are scientists divided, or do scientists generally disagree that humans evolved over time," 51% of respondents said that scientists agree, 26% said that scientists were divided, 15% said that scientists disagreed, and 9% said that they didn't know or refused to answer the question. Similarly, asked "do scientists generally agree that the earth is getting warmer because of human activity, are scientists divided, or do scientists generally disagree that the earth is getting warmer because of human activity," 40% of respondents said that scientists agree, 37% said that scientists were divided, 15% said that scientists disagreed, and 8% said that they didn't know or refused to answer the question.

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

Born Atheist

A portion of each chapter is included here. See <http://bornatheist.com/index.html> for other chapters

Chapter 16. Sexuality.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. The Bible

Religion has dug its claws into human sexuality and it will not let go. Perhaps at one time religious preoccupation with sexuality was functional. When a male priest wrote, "God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply" around 600 BCE, the world population was less than 100 million and the "tribes of Israel" were a minority that could gain strength by increasing their numbers. But times changed. By 1500 CE, the world population grew to 450 million; by 1800, 813 million; by 1900, 1.5 billion; by 1950, 2.4 billion; by 1980, 4.5 billion; by 1999, 6 billion, and today, there are 6.8 billion people living on earth. By 2050, the world population will be 9.4 billion (see Figure 14). Unbridled reproduction has gone from helping to preserve mankind to endangering mankind's existence by overburdening our natural resources. Even once plentiful resources like water are threatened. But religious scriptures, written by men and fixed in time, are unable to adapt to changing human conditions.

And even if religion's preoccupation with sexuality had a functional origin, it has morphed far beyond its original purpose. Perhaps religion has gained power by attempting to harness the human sex drive and yoke it to the church. Religionists go as far as claiming that all sexual activity is a sin, unless it is for procreation. Up until the 1965 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (extended to unmarried couples by the 1972 decision in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*), religionists succeeded in denying American couples access to birth control in many states. They had forced their ancient dogma that sex is for procreation not recreation on everyone, whether religious or not.

Religionists promote their procreation-only policy not only to the exclusion of pleasure, but even at the risk of death. In sub-Saharan Africa 22 million people are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. However,

the Pope, an allegedly celibate man, condemned the use of condoms, even though they have been demonstrated to limit the spread of the virus. The Vatican's head of the Pontifical Council for the Family went even further, saying condoms are not effective in blocking the AIDS virus because they are full of tiny holes, and that condoms help spread AIDS through a false sense of security. This application of Catholic doctrine against birth control subjects millions to the risk of death from disease—bizarrely claiming to protect life by causing death.

Religionists of the past made American children feel frightened and guilty about masturbation, and to this day some religious groups condemn this widespread and harmless act. Perhaps during ancient times when children married at 14, prohibiting masturbation encouraged marital reproduction, but in the modern world marriage is discouraged until after 18, and the median marriage age in the U.S. is 27 for men and 25 for women. Once again the scriptures have not kept pace with modern life.

Further, religion for some reason even attempts to make the way we were born, naked, a prohibited status. Although appalling acts of violence, both actual and dramatized, are regularly shown on television, a fraction of a second glance at Janet Jackson's nipple during the entertainment at a football game netted a \$550,000 fine, a penalty cheered by religionists.

In part influenced by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who tried to blow up a Detroit-bound airliner with explosives hidden in his underwear, aviation officials have begun using "body scanners," which electronically strip away a person's clothes to search for explosives. A group of Islamic officials has issued a religious ruling that says going through a body scanner violates Islamic rules prohibiting nudity. They say, "It is a violation of clear Islamic teachings that men or women be seen naked by other men and women . . . The Quran has commanded the believers, both men and women, to cover their private parts." Similarly, the Pope has warned that when using body scanners "the primary asset to be safeguarded and treasured is the person, in his or her integrity."

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

The Christian Right & the power of money

The Davids of science, rationality and humanistic compassion vs. the Goliaths of powerful Christian fundamentalist and evangelical organizations.

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Long Beach City College (ruloncl@yahoo.com)

pastors, plus 200+ Bible colleges across the United States.



Introduction

The total financial budget of all those organizations in the United States in 2010 that educationally and politically campaign for humanistic societies, gay equality, death with dignity, abortion choice, separation of church and state, plus sex education, evolution education, and climate change education runs in the low tens of millions of dollars. For example, the Center for Inquiry which publishes *Free Inquiry* and *Skeptical Inquirer* has a budget of around \$3 million. NARAL, a leading pro-choice organization has an annual budget of under \$5 million.

In stark contrast is America's Christian Right. Campus Crusade for Christ in 2010 raised around \$500 million!! Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network/Regent University raised over \$350 million! Jerry Falwell's ministries, Liberty Counsel and Liberty University raised over \$400 million! The Southern Baptist Convention raised over \$200 million! James Dobson's Focus on the Family – \$130 million!; Heritage Foundation - \$70 million!...and on and on.^[1] Don't even ask about the financial resources of the Vatican or of huge sums of money pouring into Christian Right political candidates from giant corporations.

The explosive growth of the Christian Right

Money, of course, buys power. Throughout the 1980s there were reported to be some 4000 evangelical and fundamentalist television and radio broadcasters in the U.S. reaching an estimated 40,000,000 Americans. There were also some 80,000 evangelical

By the early 1990s, fundamentalist and evangelical Christians were swinging major elections. In addition they claimed control of over 2000 school boards nationwide, elected nine state governors, took control of numerous legislatures and dominated 20 state parties.^[2]

By 2001 the Christian Right had taken control of the White House and much of Congress. By 2005 100 million Americans were claiming to be evangelical Christians, Christian radio and TV broadcasters were reaching over 140 million listeners and a number of religiously conservative law schools were training students for legal assaults on church-state separation.

In 2010, more than 600 measures were introduced in state legislatures in an attempt to force women with unwanted pregnancies to stay pregnant against their will—in essence, to be reproductively enslaved. Also, 29 Christian conservative governors were elected, all solidly anti-choice.

Consider just three of the many Christian Right organizations and leaders: Campus Crusade for Christ, Focus on the Family and Televangelist John Hagee.

Campus Crusade for Christ

Campus Crusade for Christ (now known as Cru), with its \$500 million budget, has operations in 190 countries, is on over 1000 college campuses in the United States and has extended its operation into high schools. The problem is that its beliefs (and the beliefs of over 10,000 other Christian clubs on campuses) can create serious obstacles to learning. After all, why learn about our

biological evolution, or the critical importance of keeping abortions legal, or of insuring basic human rights for gays when Scripture is said to be against all of these? And why be too concerned about overpopulation, or equality for women, or global warming, or nuclear and biological weapons when all the truth one needs to know is in Scripture — particularly since the destruction of our world is inevitable as foretold in Revelation and the Second Coming of Christ is only around the corner.

Focus on the Family

A major player is James Dobson of Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs. By 2010, James Dobson's colossal fundamentalist Christian media empire was taking in over \$130 million/year. It was presenting news programs daily on 3,000 radio stations in North America, heard on radio broadcasts in 99 countries, mailing out four million pieces of mail each month, buying television time on 80 stations daily and maintaining an activist network of over 100,000 people. Dobson has backed political candidates who called for the execution of abortion providers and defined embryonic stem-cell research as "state-funded cannibalism." He issued warnings to the Bush administration that his agenda must begin to be implemented in Washington and by the federal courts if the Republican Party wanted his continued support.^[3]

John Hagee

Reverend John Hagee is an extremely influential American televangelist. He is the founder and senior [pastor](#) of [Cornerstone Church](#) in [San Antonio, Texas](#), a [non-enominational evangelical](#) church with about 20,000 members. Hagee has received millions of dollars in compensation for his position as [CEO](#) of his [non-profit](#) corporation, [Global Evangelism Television](#) (GETV), which telecasts his national radio and television ministry carried in America on 160 TV stations and 50 radio stations to 100 million homes. His ministries can also be seen in [Canada](#), [Africa](#), [Europe](#), [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#) and in most [third world](#) nations.

Hagee has asserted that [Hurricane Katrina](#) was an act of God, punishing New Orleans for "a level of sin that was offensive to God". He specifically referred to a homosexual parade that, he said, was held on the date the hurricane struck as proof "of the judgment of God against the city of [New Orleans](#)." (Actually the gay parade was scheduled for the next week and those areas spared the destruction included most of the gay neighborhoods.)

Another reason for God sending Katrina, Hagee claimed, was the Bush administration's pressure on Israel to abandon the land God gave them 2000 years ago (the Left Bank). Therefore, claimed Hagee, God took American land in a tit-for-tat exchange during Hurricane Katrina.

In 2008 Hagee came out in strong support for presidential candidate John McCain who initially sought and welcomed his endorsement. Later, McCain changed his mind when he learned that Hagee said that God had used Hitler and the Holocaust to send the Jews to Israel, the Promised Land.

Closing Thoughts

There is little doubt that the Christian Right has become a financially extremely powerful force in American politics.^[4] Today, there is no comparable force in either our state or national governments that is willing to defend secularism, or to vigorously support women's reproductive rights, or gay equality, or death with dignity, or evolution education, or ecological sanity. The Republican Party is currently dominated by conservative Christians who appear wedded to archaic biblical morality. The Democratic Party has also failed, as its politicians increasingly affirm their devotion to religious piety in public pronouncements. Indeed, to amplify Will Rogers quote, we have the best Congress and media that religious/corporate money can buy.

"Any person or group who holds beliefs contrary to those of the Religious Right is certain to be the target of hostility, recrimination and ridicule...I do not object to them expressing their views. That is their right. But I will not remain silent while these political operatives manipulate religion to condemn those who oppose their narrow agenda."

—Walter Cronkite^[5]

^[1]Major organizations in the Christian Right include The Christian Broadcasting Network ([www.cbn.org](#)), Focus on the Family ([www.focusonthefamily.com](#)), the American Center for Law and Justice ([www.acjl.org](#)) working with the Christian Advocates Serving Evangelism, The Alliance Defense Fund ([www.alliancedefensefund.org](#)), the American Family Association ([www.afa.net](#)), the Family Research Council ([www.frc.org](#)), Concerned Women for America ([www.cwfa.org](#)), Jerry Falwell Ministries ([www.falwell.com](#)). Also included are the Christian Coalition, National Right to Life Committee, National Conservative Political Action Committee, Liberty Foundation, Coalition for America, Institute on Religion and Public Life, Heritage Foundation, Ava Maria Foundation, Christian Voice, Christian Action Council, American Coalition for Traditional Values, the Eagle Forum, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, Citizens for

Excellence in Education, Coral Ridge Ministries, National Legal Foundation, Traditional Values Coalition and many more.

[2]"Onward Christian Soldiers," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 6, 1994, p. 43. Also see *Creation/Evolution*, Vol. 15, #1, p.47. (Published by the National Center for Science Education; www.natcensci.ed.org)

[3]"Dobson's Choice: Religious Right Leader Becomes Political Power Broker" at www.pfaw.org.

[4]An excellent newsletter which monitors Christian Right activities is "Church & State" published by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a nonprofit educational corporation www.au.org.

For everything you might want to know about the Theo-political Right: Their personalities, ideologies, agendas, goals, and methods of operation read *Democracy under Assault: Theopolitics, Incivility and Violence on the Right*, by Michele Swenson (Sol Ventures Press, 2005).

For a fascinating history of the Christian Right, along with an analysis of their arguments, see Robert Boston's 1993 book, *Why the Religious Right is Wrong*, published by Prometheus Press at www.prometheusbooks.com. Also check out Boston's book, *Close Encounters with the Religious Right* at www.robertboston.com.

See also Kimberly Blaker's *The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America* and John Shelby Spong's *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*.

[5] Walter Cronkite, The Interfaith Alliance www.interfaithalliance.org



One Nation, Indivisible

(ed.) Concerning the 'edited' version of the pledge which aired in a NBC program last June:

To: Chris McCloskey
Vice President, Communications
National Broadcasting Company, Inc.
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112

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Dear Mr. McCloskey,

I am writing regarding the controversy over your network airing a version of the Pledge of Allegiance that did not include the wording "under God." Based on news accounts, it appears that certain religious conservatives are overreacting to your network's actions, bombarding your network with telephone and email complaints even though your network has already apologized for the incident. I would like to convey the sentiments of millions of other Americans who, while less vocal about the issue, should be heard.

Your network did nothing wrong by airing the "God-free" version of the Pledge. In fact, a strong argument can be made that this version is the most patriotic. As you no doubt know, the "under God" wording was added to the Pledge only in 1954, at the height of the McCarthy era, after much lobbying by religious organizations. In many ways this was a dark period in American history, with good people being blacklisted and unfairly scrutinized for so-called "un-American" activities. It is not surprising that divisive religious language would have been added during this period (ironically, making a mockery of the "indivisible" language).

Since the religious language was not added until 1954, please be mindful that any soldiers who landed at Normandy would have said the God-free Pledge before taking to the beach in defense of democracy and freedom. So would any soldiers fighting in the Pacific, in Korea, or in the First World War. There is nothing unpatriotic about the beautiful wording "one nation indivisible."

Please rest assured that many Secular Americans long for a return to the truly unifying Pledge that was aired by your network. We thank you for airing it, and we only regret that you apologized for doing so. We hope that you won't be intimidated by the Religious Right bullies who are trying to give the appearance that the entire nation is offended by your actions. They are a small but vocal group, and they do not speak for America. This is a teachable moment, and we hope that your actions will initiate a serious discussion of this issue.

Very truly yours,

David Niose
President
American Humanist Association

Secular DVDs

From FreethoughtAlliance.org and

BackyardSkeptics.com

Both of these sites have one of the largest selections of secular DVDs available anywhere. Most DVDs are only \$10. Make a contribution to your secular organizations by ordering one of our entertaining and educational DVDs

[The 2011 Orange County Freethought Alliance Conference 3-DVD set. 13 wonderful speakers. Enlightening, Educational and inspiring. \\$34](#)

[Thomas Quinn "God Needs Therapy" \(a comedy\) \\$12](#) Videotaped at a Backyard Skeptics meeting in July of 2011, Mr. Quinn presents a hilarious tragedy by telling the story of the Christian God's Bible from the beginning and how, if God were human, he would be at a shrinks office twice a week!

[Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Survey of the Supernatural World with Adrian Novotny, Ph.D. \\$10 special](#)

[Dr. Richard Carrier: How Christianity Began Is Proof Enough It's Bunk](#)

[San Diego Secular Humanist Conference 2011 - Entertaining speakers, engaging insights and thought-provoking lectures. 2 DVDs \\$45](#)

[Ali Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a spokesperson for human rights and a proponent against female mutilation in Muslim countries. Her riveting personal story is told with the help a local journalist, Jill Stewart. \\$10](#)

[Sean McDowell vs. BYS - Commonalities of Christians and Atheists Sean visits Backyard Skeptics, then Bruce Gleason and Mark Smith visit Sean's church in San Juan Capistrano A 2-DVD set. \\$15](#)

[Sarah Dunn - Atheists in Prison: How the law, culture, psychology shape prison pPopulations \\$10](#)

[Dave Richards - Exploring logical fallacies and how to identify them \\$10](#)



[Eugenie Scott - Creationism, evolution, education, and politics, Taped at Chapman University, Orange CA \\$10](#)

[Orange County 2010 Freethought Alliance Conference 2- DVD set Enjoy 12 full-length seminars and an evening discussion panel for only \\$30](#)

[Does God of the Bible Exist? A 6-Person Panel Debate, December 2009 \\$20](#)

["The God Question" - Debate between Shermer & DeSouza \\$10](#)

[Bruce Gleason - "Why Am I Am Atheist" speech at Calvary Church, Costa Mesa, CA \\$10](#)

[Dan Barker 2 DVD set - Jesus Myth or Fiction? and Why I Became An Atheist \\$20](#)

[Chris Mooney - The War on Science: What Have We Learned? CFI lecture \\$10](#)

[John Shook - The God Theory is Dead CFI lecture \\$10](#)

[Edward Tabash - America at the Crossroads \\$10](#)

[Sean Carroll - The Origin of the Universe and the Arrow of Time CFI lecture \\$10](#)

[Ross Blocher - Swaddling Cloth out of Whole Cloth: Problems with the Nativity Story CFI lecture \\$10](#)

More information can be seen on the sites where the links from each selection will take you.

National Secular Links

Here are several secular links to other organizations supporting secularism, science and skepticism around the world:

Americans United for Church and State Separation, National au.org
American Humanist Assoc.
americanhumanist.org
Atheist Alliance International atheistalliance.org
American Atheists atheists.org/
Military Assoc. of Atheists and Freethinkers
atheists.org

ACLU.org

BERTRAND RUSSELL SOCIETY
www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/brs.html

CFI centerforinquiry.net

camp-quest.org

Freedom From Religion Foundation ffrf.org

jennymccarthybodycount.com

Meetup.com (search for humanist, agnostic, atheists or church and state in your area)

National Center for Science Education ncse.com

People for the American Way pfaw.org

Richarddawkinsfoundation.org

James Randi Educational Foundation
randi.org/site

Southern California Secular Humanist Conference.org (in San Diego)

Whatstheharm.net

Local Southern California secular groups

Ateos Unidos: The group for Spanish speakers!
3rd Saturdays at 11 a.m. at the Center for Inquiry West, 4773 Hollywood Blvd.
Contact Liliana at 323-466-4223.

Americans United Meets the third Sunday of the month at 1:30pm at the Irvine Ranch Water District 15600 Sand Canyon Ave. Irvine, CA 92618
<http://www.au-oc.org/>

AU General Meeting: 4th Sundays, 11:00 a.m. at Center for Inquiry West,

4773 Hollywood Blvd. Presentation followed by lunch and afternoon activity.

Board meets briefly at 10:30 a.m. for members' concerns. Childcare is available.

<http://atheists.meetup.com/705/>

Adopt-a-Highway: Help us keep our roads clean in the name of atheism!

AU hosts the southbound strip of the Glendale Freeway, Hwy 2, south of the 210.

Keeping the road clean allows us to keep our signage there. Good exercise, and fun company! Two Saturdays a month. Dates vary. Contact Steve 310-670-7131

BackyardSkeptics.com – meets once a month in Villa Park (Orange County) also see meetup.com/backyard-skeptics

Center for Inquiry -Lectures 1st and 3rd Sundays, 11a.m. 4773 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles.
Free for members of CFI, \$6 for non-members
<http://centerforinquiry.net/la>

FreethoughtAllaince.org – sponsors debates and events in southern California

Free Thinkers for Liberty.org Freethinkers for Liberty is an organization of humanists and others who reject all superstition, in favor of rationality and critical thinking, who also respect the freedoms our forefathers described in the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Freethinkers Toastmasters: Want to improve your speaking abilities in a fun and supportive group? Join FTTM on 2nd & 4th Saturdays at 2 p.m. at the Center for Inquiry West.
More information: David: 310-479-6318.
<http://www.freethinkersclub.org>

GALAH: Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists- 2nd Sundays, 1 p.m.,
Center for Inquiry West, 4773 Hollywood Blvd.
Contact Ken Wolverton 818-554-9858 or galahla@aol.com

Generation Atheist: A meeting group for atheists in their 20s and 30s, 3rd Sundays, location changes monthly.
<http://atheists.meetup.com/724/Hollywood/East LA: 2nd Tuesdays, 7 p.m. at Atwater Village in Glendale>

.Contact Steven Gibson 562-900-2834.

<http://atheists.meetup.com/212/>

Humanist Association of Orange County Meets the third Sunday of the month at 1:30pm at the Irvine Ranch Water District 15600 Sand Canyon Ave. Irvine, CA 92618

<http://www.meetup.com/OCHumanists>

Humanist Association of Los Angeles: 2nd Sunday, 11:00 a.m., Colorado Center Community Room (same as Yahoo Center), 2500 Broadway, Santa Monica (near corner of 26th Avenue and Broadway); Contact: Larry Taylor 310-479-2236, larry-a-taylor@att.net

Inland Empire: 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m., Riverside Unitarian Church 3657 Lemon St., Riverside Contact JanGoings@aol.com

<http://www.meetup.com/InlandEmpireAtheists/>

Lancaster "Antelope Valley Freethinkers" 4th Thurs., 7pm, Camille's Garden Cafe, Lancaster
<http://atheists.meetup.com/615/>

Long Beach: 3rd Fridays, 7 p.m., at Hometown Buffet, 290 E. 4th St. Meal cost is \$16. Contact Rodney 562-437-4370 or Hank Schultz, whschultz@mac.com.
<http://atheists.meetup.com/487/>

Orange County Atheists, meets one a month at the IHOP across from OC Airport
<http://www.ocatheists.com/>

Orange County Atheist United Chapter: 2nd Sundays, 10:30 a.m., Tee Room, 3100 Irvine Ave Newport Beach Contact Norman 310-408-8653 (cell).

San Fernando Valley: 3rd Thursday, 6:30 p.m., Kountry Folks Restaurant, on Sepulveda Blvd. and Chase St. Contact Henry at 818-988-2806, after 5:00 p.m. <http://atheists.meetup.com/614/>

Santa Clarita: 2nd Sundays, 11 a.m., at Greenhouse Café, 26586 Bouquet Cyn. Rd., Santa Clarita <http://atheists.meetup.com/670/>

South Bay/Torrance: 3rd Sundays, 7p.m., At Marie Callender's, 2979 Artesia Blvd, Redondo Beach <http://atheists.meetup.com/729/>

Ventura: 4th Mondays, 7pm, E.P. Foster Library, 651 E Main Street, Ventura. Contact Brian Parra for info: 805-794-4714, venturaatheists@yahoo.com.
<http://atheists.meetup.com/494/>

Ventura "Freethought Parents Network": Kids playgroup meets every Tuesday at 11am, Locations subject to change
<http://www.meetup.com/freethoughtparents/>

WestValley : Last Sundays, 2 p.m., Daphne's Greek Café, 5780 Canoga Ave. Unit B, Woodland Hills, CA
<http://secularhumanism.meetup.com/17/>