

# ☞ The Secular Gazette ☞

Supporting Science, Reason and the Separation of Church and State

Issue #28 January 17, 2012

## From the Editor

Since we will have another 9 months of political speech-making, I've started a topic in the Secular Gazette simply entitled 'Politics'. The recent political campaigns in Iowa and New Hampshire have spawned campaigns based on the onesupmanship of how religious each candidate can champion. This new pious rhetoric shows how religious our future leaders might have to become to cradle the needed conservative voters to their side. Set aside Article XI of the Constitution – there shall be no religious test for a government office. It is as if they need to evangelize their devoutness of faith to show how good of leader they will be. Do we need more pious politicians - or leaders who know how to lead? Do we need leaders to promote their own religious-based decisions on 'hot-topic' issues such as same-sex marriage or a women's reproductive rights? I hope not. Most non-believers I know feel the same – that the Republicans generally support the reduction of individual rights and the reduction of taxes.

I recently googled "Republican Party Platform". I had an idea of how conservative the platform would be, but I had no idea how much constitutional liberty and individual rights would be sacrificed if the issues from the Republican platform web pages I read would become law. It's much worse than I thought it would be. Even a bit scary. Be informed. Search the platform of both parties and decide for yourself. Or is this too early to get political?

Bruce Gleason, Editor

## Billboard Fever



Backyard Skeptics, a 501C3 organization, has added another billboard off Beach Blvd, a major north-south thoroughfare in Orange County on January 12, 2012 in association with American Atheists based in New York, NY. This is the sixth billboard campaign Backyard Skeptics has implemented.

The goal of the billboard is to open the door for closeted atheists, and to offer a place where their voice will be heard. A secondary goal is to educate believers on the humanistic values atheists have and to promote understanding between a normally divisive issue. Over 18% of Americans choose to select the "not affiliated with any religion" box and are sometimes considered the 'nones'.

Blair Scott, communication director of American Atheists says the billboards are not intended to offend people, but that the group knows people are going to be offended. "When you question someone's long-held beliefs and doctrine they are going to be immediately offended and be on the defensive: it's a known psychological phenomenon," Regardless of one's theological views, we should all support Freedom of Speech. The truly offensive view comes from those who say we do not have a right to put up our billboards."

Bruce Gleason, founder of Backyard Skeptics, the largest non-theistic Meetup group in Orange County says "The billboard is meant to have others who believe to compare other myths to their own beliefs and to reflect on how myths can, thought a drawn-out legend-building process, come to be thought of as real."

The billboard which is in the American Legion parking lot at 14582 Beach Boulevard, has been reserved for the next six months and will have different artwork each month.

Gleason can be reached at [bruce@backyardskeptics.com](mailto:bruce@backyardskeptics.com).

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## **Skeptic's Corner**

### **Holy Princess Diana's Ghost! Meh.**

Is this image Princess Diana's ghost or an optical illusion?

A video has emerged which appears to show a ghostly-looking figure resembling Princess Diana in a stained glass window.

The video was shot by Chinese tourists in Scotland and has been described by paranormal writer Michael Cohen – who was sent the video – as one of the “clearest” paranormal images he has come across.

Michael Cohen said: “The footage is currently being examined by myself and other researchers to ascertain if it is a genuine ghost capture. It might be a bizarre optical illusion, but then again, it could be a ghost – possibly Princess Diana’s. <http://doubtfulnews.com/2012/01/holy-princess-dianas-ghost-meh/>



### **Sounds from the sky: Reflections on historical observations and recent events**

The recent wave of sky noise videos and reports from across the globe have sown concern and copycat hoaxes. Historical observations disclosed here reveal that mystery noises in the sky are not new and have many and various potential explanations. Our urban and industrial society may be contributing to the recent events, if they are indeed genuine. <http://doubtfulnews.com/2012/01/sounds-from-the-sky-reflections-on-historical-observations-and-recent-events/>



### **Russian harping over HAARP as cause of Phobos Grunt fail (More added)**

Off the Beam: Did a U.S. Radar Research Station Disable Russia's Phobos Probe?

Soon after the ill-fated Phobos Grunt spacecraft stalled in Earth orbit, a former Russian official implicated “powerful American radars” in Alaska. Is there a basis to the claim, or is it just scapegoating?

Russia has yet to chalk up a fully successful mission to Mars. That includes its ambitious Phobos–Grunt probe, launched November 8 from Kazakhstan and now stranded in low Earth orbit. Unable to regain control of the spacecraft, the Russians now expect it to fall back to Earth around January 9.

Responding to shame over the nation's Mars program, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has threatened to criminally prosecute those responsible if possible. Soon after Medvedev's comments, a former high-ranking Russian officer found a more convenient scapegoat in a remote Alaskan radar facility. But an analysis of the timing and physics involved shows that there is little basis for the claim. <http://doubtfulnews.com/2011/12/russian-harping-over-haarp-as-cause-of-phobos-grunt-fail/>



## Science News

# Planets as common as stars in Milky Way



When you turn an eye to the evening sky, there's a good chance that many of the stars above have at least one planet. Using six years of data from planet-finding surveys, an international team of researchers concludes that, on average, every star in the Milky Way is accompanied by 1.6 planets. That's at least 100 billion planets, the scientists report January 12 in *Nature*.

The figure might seem enormous, but it doesn't shock planet hunters. "I'm not surprised by this result," says astrophysicist Wesley Traub of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif., who was not involved in the study. "This sounds reasonable. This sounds good."

To make their estimate, the scientists used data that had been gathered from 2002 to 2007 by surveys looking for the temporary brightening in a distant star's light caused by the gravity of a body passing in front of it. If that passing body is a star with planets, the system causes a predictable boost in the distant star's light, revealing the presence of the closer planet. [http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/337517/title/Planets\\_as\\_common\\_as\\_stars\\_in\\_Milky\\_Way](http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/337517/title/Planets_as_common_as_stars_in_Milky_Way)

## "Scientific": It's just a catchphrase!

Science.

It is a bit hard to define what that is. Meanings change through time. If you are one who values science as the most reliable way to understand the world, you likely have a much stronger definition of the term than someone who values it less. Science is all these things: a process, a way of looking at a topic, a community, an infrastructure, a career, a set of results, an authority, and more. We can use the word in many ways. That means it can be abused in many ways as well.

Daniel Patrick Thurs's aptly named book *Science Talk* is an interesting walk through how we have historically talked about science. He takes us through the terms and rhetoric that the public and purveyors of sciences used through the development of the scientific age and demonstrates how meanings are constructed based on the needs we have at any time.

[http://www.csicop.org/specialarticles/show/scientific\\_its\\_just\\_a\\_catchphrase](http://www.csicop.org/specialarticles/show/scientific_its_just_a_catchphrase)

## Babies lip-read before talking

When adults mouth off, babies learn by watching. As infants start babbling at around age 6 months in preparation for talking, they shift from focusing on adults' eyes to paying special attention to speakers' mouths, a new study finds.

As tots become able to blurt out words and simple statements at age 1, they go back to concentrating on adults' eyes, say psychologist David Lewkowicz and psychology graduate student Amy Hansen-Tift, both of Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

Whereas babbling babies match up what adults say with how they say it, budding talkers can afford to look for communication signals in a speakers' eyes, the scientists propose in a paper published online January 17 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.



“Babies start to lip-read when they learn to babble,” Lewkowicz says. “At that time, infants respond to what they see and hear as a unified stimulus.” [http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/337718/title/Babies\\_lip-read\\_before\\_talking](http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/337718/title/Babies_lip-read_before_talking)

## Church-State News



Americans United for the Separation of Church and State

### [Church-State Watchdog Group Says Government Should Never Show Favoritism Toward One Religion](#)



January 17, 2012

The U.S. Supreme Court today announced that it will not intervene in a controversy over sectarian prayer before meetings of the Forsyth County, N.C., Board of Commissioners.

The justices' action leaves in place an appellate court decision barring the county from regularly opening its meetings with Christian invocations.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State, one of the groups sponsoring the lawsuit, said the high court was right not to intervene.

Said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, “When government meetings are opened regularly with Christian prayer, it sends the unmistakable message that non-Christians are second-class citizens in their own community. That’s unconstitutional, and it’s just plain wrong.” <http://au.org/media/press-releases/americans-united-hails-supreme-court-refusal-to-intervene-in-north-carolina>

### [Court: “Jesus” Prayers Can Be Banned](#)

January 17, 2012

The Supreme Court will not intervene in a controversy over Christian prayers delivered before commission meetings in Forsyth County, North Carolina. The North Carolina chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State praised the decision as a victory for the First Amendment.

The high court’s decision leaves in place a federal appeals court ruling that held that the predominantly Christian prayers at the start of commission meetings violated the First Amendment’s alleged ban on government endorsement of a particular religion.

The court found that more than three-quarters of the 33 invocations given before meetings between May 2007 and December 2008 referred to “Jesus,” “Jesus Christ,” “Christ,” or “Savior.”

That, according to the court was a problem.

“Faith is as deeply important as it is deeply personal,” Judge J. Harvey Wilkinson wrote in the July 29th appellate court ruling. “and the government should not appear to suggest that some faiths have it wrong and others got it right.”

Americans United Executive Director Barry Lynn hailed the Supreme Court’s decision not to consider the case. His organization was one of the groups sponsoring the lawsuit.

<http://radio.foxnews.com/toddstarnes/top-stories/court-jesus-prayers-can-be-banned.html>

Looking for a good tax write-off?

Freethought Alliance is a 501C3 organization and will gladly use your tax-deductible donation to promote secular values and the public education of non-belief. Use the DONATION button at [freethoughtalliance.org](http://freethoughtalliance.org) to make your donation of any amount.

<http://freethoughtalliance.org/donate.html>

## Politics



### [Rick Sanatorium's Christian Sharia Fantasy](#)

Rick Santorum has a fantasy — one of Christian 'Sharia' law. He shares this vision with Rick Perry, Newt Gingrich, and Ron Paul — though Paul adds a lemony twist of 'state's rights' to the mix. Michelle Bachmann, failed GOP candidate, also espoused this goal; in Sanatorium's words, "We have civil laws, but our civil laws have to comport with the higher law." Sanatorium means, of course, that civil law must be in alignment with Biblical law. What does that mean? All of it? This statement of his seems to indicate yes, all of it: We have Judeo-Christian values that are based on biblical truth. ... And those truths don't change just because people's attitudes may change. In other words, contrary to what most American Christians believe, Santorum thinks that all Biblical law is immutable. Nobody has asked Sanatorium if he thinks this means that rapists should be forced to marry their victims (Deuteronomy 22:29), or that adulterers (like Newt Gingrich) should be put to death (Leviticus 20:10), or if a woman should have her hand cut off if she intervenes in a fight between her husband and another man by grabbing the assailant's 'junk' (Deuteronomy 25:11-12). I don't know about you, but I'd sure like to know the answer to those questions. All of it? Or just the parts certain voters like? More.... <http://www.secularnewsdaily.com/2012/01/17/rick-santorum-sanatoriums-christian-sharia-fantasy/>

### [The Rise of the Religious Right in the Republican Party](#)

The [Texas Republican Party Platform](#) can be read as a blueprint for Bush administration policies, and reflects the values of [Dominion Theology](#).

Dominionists believe the federal government should recede into the background. This would be achieved through massive tax cuts. Then the Church would assume responsibility for welfare and education. Tax cuts, Faith-based initiatives and school vouchers are the cornerstone of Bush administration domestic policies and recommended in the Texas GOP Platform. These policies are putting the U.S. on the path toward becoming what the Platform calls a "Christian" nation.

**Tax Cuts**, p. 17 - "The Party urges the IRS be abolished," and the following taxes eliminated: "income tax, inheritance tax, gift tax, capital gains, corporate income tax, payroll tax and property tax."

**Tax cuts are accompanied by Downsizing the Federal Government** on p. 19 -

We support the abolition of ... the Bureau of Tobacco and Firearms, the position of Surgeon General, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Departments of Energy, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Education, Commerce and Labor. We also call for the de-funding or abolition of the National Endowment for the Arts, and Public Broadcasting System.

**Deregulation** - Adherents of Dominion Theology support deregulation of industry. They use terms such as "unfettered" or "unhampered" by regulation. The first three agencies listed in the above paragraph are all regulatory agencies. The Texas GOP Platform calls for business to be "unencumbered by excessive government regulation." (p.1, preamble)

**Biblical Law** - Dominion theology calls for a government based on [Biblical Law](#), relying on the Ten Commandments as its guiding source. Therefore, posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings has great symbolic value.

On p.7 of the Platform: [Ten Commandments](#) - "We ... oppose any governmental action to restrict prohibit, or remove public display of the [Ten Commandments]..."

More here: [http://www.theocracywatch.org/texas\\_gop.htm](http://www.theocracywatch.org/texas_gop.htm)

## Get religion out of politics

The norm for judging modernity in a society -- in human rights and in political and economic terms -- has moved steadily toward greater secularity.

This evolution has included growing tolerance of different religious beliefs. Some practitioners of some religions have taken advantage of this trend to insist on practicing their beliefs even if they are at variance with the views of the society within which they live and to seek to punch above their numerical weight in political affairs.

At one point in my life I was a member of a British Army officers' mess in which a hard-and-fast rule was no discussion of religion or politics. This rule was enforced because discussion of these two issues could be divisive to the unit, and, thus, destructive of its ability to fight as a unified body in the event of combat.

Nothing of this rule prevented some members of the mess to worship together in the unit chapel, nor to gather together after the service to "thirst after righteousness." It worked, to the degree that to this day I couldn't tell you what the personal religious beliefs of virtually any of the group's members were, even though I knew some of them quite well.

Now, in 2012, when it seems that more and more of the world's population is indifferent to or only formally practicing religions, religious differences are playing a disproportionate role in politics. And as I've said, certain sects are taking advantage of the secular, liberal -- I know, anything but that! -- practice of tolerance by modern governments to organize themselves and use their religious beliefs as a basis for political action. <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/12018/1204108-374-0.stm>

## **Religious Right Watch**

### Trouble in Riverdale: Religious Right Groups Blast Gay-Friendly 'Archie' Comic Books

by: [Rob Boston](#)

I was never a big fan of comic books when I was a kid, but on those occasions when I did spend some spare change on them, I treated "Archie" comics like they were radioactive. Who cared about the tame antics of the gang in Riverdale when there were superheroes to follow?

Times have changed. "Archie" is really hot now, and it's all thanks to a character named Kevin Keller. In the "Life with Archie" series (which gets the gang out of high school and follows their adventures in their 20s), Keller is an Iraq War veteran who comes home after being wounded. During his hospital recovery, he meets a physical therapist and falls in love. In an issue that came out Jan. 10, they get married.

Have I mentioned that the physical therapist is also a man? Yep, "Archie" comics [hosted a same-sex wedding](#). (And the mayor of Riverdale officiated!)

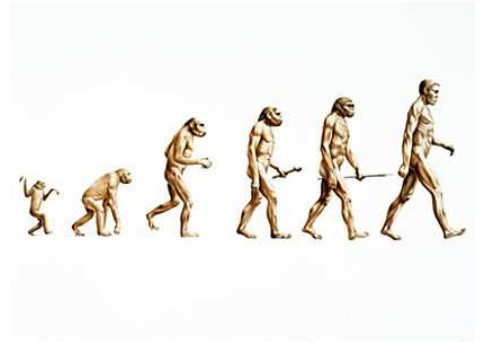
This is not going over well in some quarters of the Religious Right. The group Christian Response issued [an alert](#) blasting Archie for promoting "the gay agenda" and failing to "discuss honestly...the serious physical and mental dangers of gay sex." More: <http://www.secularnewsdaily.com/2012/01/17/trouble-in-riverdale-religious-right-groups-blast-gay-friendly-archie-comic-books-2/>

### **Christian Group Slammed For 'Dangerous' and 'Misleading' Campaign Against Sex Education**

Discussions of the Education Bill in the House of Lords became heated last night as prominent children's rights advocates slammed the Christian Institute for spreading 'misinformation' and 'wicked insinuations' about amendments relating to inspecting well-being in schools insinuating that proposed changes 'would force schools to teach five years-old about sex'. Leading health and education campaigner, and secretary of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group, Baroness Massey, and the former shadow Children, Schools and Families Minister for the Liberal Democrats Baroness Walmsley, both spoke out against the campaign organised by the Christian Institute against their proposed amendment to the Bill. Baroness Massey said 'Never in the time that it has been my honour to serve in your Lordships' House have I known such a sinister and vicious campaign, which has sought to misinform others.' <http://www.360diversity.com/christian-group-slammed-for-%E2%80%98dangerous%E2%80%99-and-%E2%80%98misleading%E2%80%99-campaign-against-sex-education/>

## Evo Education

### Who drives the science/religion conflict?



Results of a recent poll of 1,000 American Protestant pastors are perhaps not surprising, given the well known opposition to evolutionary science amongst the US public. (see **Poll: Pastors oppose evolution, split on earth's age**). As the figure below shows, over 80% of these pastors believe Adam and Eve were literal people, and over 70% oppose evolutionary science. And about half believe the Earth is about 6,000 years old!

<http://www.secularnewsdaily.com/2012/01/12/who-drives-the-sciencereligion-conflict-2/>

### Cuckoo for Creationism: Legislators in Ind. and N.H. Seek to Undermine Instruction about Evolution

It looks like opponents of creationism are going to have their hands full in 2012. The new year is just a few days old, and already we've seen several anti-evolution bills popping up in the states.

In Indiana, state Sen. Dennis Kruse **has introduced** S.B. 89, a bill that would allow public schools in the state to "require the teaching of various theories concerning the origin of life, including creation science, within the school corporation."

Kruse has been on this crusade for a number of years and has introduced versions of this bill before. They always died. But Republicans now control the state Senate, and Kruse is chairman of the Senate Education Committee. From this powerful perch, he can agitate for this misguided legislation.

There remains one huge problem with the bill: It is patently unconstitutional. Our good friend Genie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education, told the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette that Kruse's bill would run afoul of *Edwards v. Aguillard*, a 1987 Supreme Court ruling that struck down a Louisiana law requiring "balanced treatment" between creation science and evolution.

"The law is very, very clear on this," Scott said. "If this bill is passed, it is going to be challenged, and they will lose. The case law is so strong against them." Meanwhile, some New Hampshire legislators have introduced a pair of truly kooky bills. State Rep. Jerry Bergevin's bill, H.B. 1148, would order the state board of education to "[r]equire evolution to be taught in the public schools of this state as a theory, including the theorists' political and ideological viewpoints and their position on the concept of atheism."

Bergevin believes that teaching evolution leads to Nazism and school shootings.

<http://www.secularnewsdaily.com/2012/01/05/cuckoo-for-creationism-legislators-in-ind-and-n-h-seek-to-undermine-instruction-about-evolution/>

## God is Imaginary

### Understanding religious delusion

Let's imagine that I tell you the following story:

- There is a man who lives at the North Pole.
- He lives there with his wife and a bunch of elves.
- During the year, he and the elves build toys.
- Then, on Christmas Eve, he loads up a sack with all the toys.
- He puts the sack in his sleigh.
- He hitches up eight (or possibly nine) flying reindeer.
- He then flies from house to house, landing on the rooftops of each one.
- He gets out with his sack and climbs down the chimney.
- He leaves toys for the children of the household.
- He climbs back up the chimney, gets back in his sleigh, and flies to the next house.
- He does this all around the world in one night.
- Then he flies back to the North Pole to repeat the cycle next year.



This, of course, is the story of Santa Claus.

But let's say that I am an adult, and I am your friend, and I reveal to you that I believe that this story is true. I believe it with all my heart. And I try to talk about it with you and convert you to believe it as I do.

What would you think of me? You would think that I am delusional, and rightly so.

Why do you think that I am delusional? It is because you know that Santa is imaginary. The story is a total fairy tale. No matter how much I talk to you about Santa, you are not going to believe that Santa is real. Flying reindeer, for example, are make-believe. The dictionary defines delusion as, "A false belief strongly held in spite of invalidating evidence." That definition fits perfectly.

Since you are my friend, you might try to help me realize that my belief in Santa is a delusion. The way that you would try to do that is by asking me some questions. For example, you might say to me:

- "But how can the sleigh carry enough toys for everyone in the world?" I say to you that the sleigh is magical. It has the ability to do this intrinsically.
- "How does Santa get into houses and apartments that don't have chimneys?" I say that Santa can make chimneys appear, as shown to all of us in the movie [The Santa Clause](#).
- "How does Santa get down the chimney if there's a fire in the fireplace?" I say that Santa has a special flame-resistant suit, and it cleans itself too.
- "Why doesn't the security system detect Santa?" Santa is invisible to security systems.
- "How can Santa travel fast enough to visit every child in one night?" Santa is timeless.
- "How can Santa know whether every child has been bad or good?" Santa is omniscient.
- "Why are the toys distributed so unevenly? Why does Santa deliver more toys to rich kids, even if they are bad, than he ever gives to poor kids?" There is no way for us to understand the mysteries of Santa because we are mere mortals, but Santa has his reasons. For example, perhaps poor children would be unable to handle a flood of expensive electronic toys. How would they afford the batteries? So Santa spares them this burden.
- <http://godisimaginary.com/i7.htm>

# Skeptoid

By Brian Dunning

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## Wunderwaffen: Nazi Wonder Weapons



*Did the Nazis really have super-advanced technology, even anti-gravity flying saucers?*

Few subjects provoke as much emotion as Nazi Germany, or attract as much attention and speculation. Since the war, we've even attached an occult mythology to Naziism, in an attempt to rationalize it away as having come from outside of our own society. This combination of true military might and mysticism has spawned a whole subculture of study of Nazi *Wunderwaffen*, the alleged wonder weapons with capabilities that far exceeded those of the Allied forces not only of the 1940s, but even of today. The range of these weapons goes from simple gunsights to ramjet fighter planes, and even all the way to antigravity flying saucers. How much of this mythology is true, and how much is driven more by our fascination with

occultifying Naziism?

Like all military industrial complexes, Nazi Germany had military research programs, as did a huge number of civilian contractors. Within all of these scores of programs, serious plans for just about any advanced weapon you can imagine did in fact exist. As Germany's resources and manpower dwindled over the course of the war, fewer and fewer of these projects saw the light of day, but some of those that did were astonishingly advanced for their time.

We know about virtually everything that was under development in Nazi Germany because at the war's end, the Allied forces overran Germany and captured not only all of their technology in the form of operational and prototype designs, but also all of the documentation pertaining to their experiments and plans. In many cases, documentation was destroyed by the Nazis as capture became imminent; but this primarily regarded activities that were likely to be prosecuted as war crimes, such as the human experimentation programs at places like Auschwitz. All of the significant factories and design bureaus were captured relatively intact, and we have a very complete picture of what the Nazis did and did not develop. Real weapons that the Nazis did actually build and deploy included jet powered fighters such as the Messerschmitt Me-262 and Heinkel He-162, and even a rocket powered fighter, the Me-163. There were also a number of variants and derivatives of these and similar aircraft. Toward the end of the war, some troops were armed with the Zielgerät ZG-1229 *Vampir* infrared gun sight, giving them night vision years before most Americans had ever dreamed of such a thing. Perhaps the pinnacle of Nazi military might was the pulsejet powered V-1 guided cruise missile, and the suborbital V-2 long-range ballistic missile, three thousand of which entered space fifteen years before Sputnik 1.

Other designs, while seemingly even more fanciful, did in fact exist, in either prototype form or completed (and perfectly sound) blueprints. Aircraft included the Horten Ho-229 jet powered flying wing, the Mach 2.2 Lippisch P13a delta winged ramjet-powered fighter, a high altitude spyplane similar to the later American U-2 called the DFS-228, even a variable geometry swing-wing jet, the Messerschmitt P.1101, which became the precursor to the later American Bell X-5. They also had designs for a number of vertical takeoff and landing jets.

More... <http://skeptoid.com/episodes/4293>

# Freethought Alliance

**The Third Annual**

## **Orange County Freethought Alliance Conference**

Promoting Science, Reason and Critical Thinking

**“Comparing the World Contributions: Science and Religion”**

**UCI May 19 & 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**With a special public debate Saturday night**

This will be Orange County’s third secular conference, where all freethinkers, humanists, atheists, agnostics, and church and state separatists can mingle with some of the most famous secular leaders of our time. Our speakers will inspire, educate and entertain you.



Mr Deity



Michael Shermer



Brian Dunning



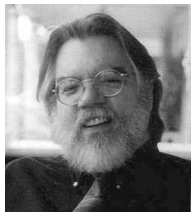
Barbara Forest



Jim Underdown



Aron Ra



Robert Price



Phil Zuckerman



Richard Carrier



Dan Barker



Dave Richards

**Jan 1 – May 10 Pre-Registration:**

Saturday afternoon: \$60, Saturday night debate: \$10, Sunday:\$90, All-weekend pass:\$130

**At-The-Door pricing,**

Saturday afternoon: \$70, Saturday night debate:\$10, Sunday:\$110, All-weekend pass:\$150

**Child-Car services:** \$20 per day. \$15 catered dinner Saturday \$10 lox lunch on Sunday

Students \$35 Saturday, \$45 Sunday

**[www.Freethoughtalliance.org](http://www.Freethoughtalliance.org)**

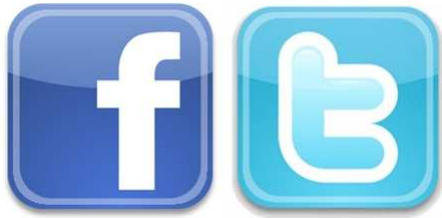
## Backyard Skeptics

is part of Freethought Alliance, a 501C3 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 for letting others know about our secular community 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.backyardskeptics.com>

**Keep this nation a secular one.**

Make your tax-deductable donation [HERE](#)

<http://freethoughtalliance.org/fta/donate/>



[Backyard Skeptics is now on Facebook and twitter – if you're a Facebook fan then join our group page by searching for Backyard Skeptics.](#) Follow us on Twitter at Backyardskeptic (no 's' at the end)

[Also see the "Newsworthy Articles section on the Backyard Skeptics website for interesting and insightful articles.](#)



**[NEWS](#)** (more at [backyardskeptics.com](http://www.backyardskeptics.com))

[1/18/12 2011 Congressional Report Card](#)

[11/15/12 Kansas Speaker O'Neal asks House GOP to pray for Obama's death](#)

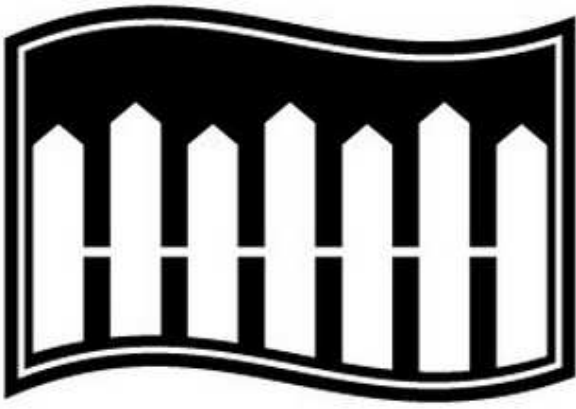
[11/12/12 Jessica Wins He Court Case in High Schools!](#)

[BYS places huge "What Do You See" billboard in Westminster](#)

[Secular Signs Vandalized At Santa Monica Park](#)

[1/5/12 Pastors, Lawmakers Protest Ban on Worship in School Building](#)

[Major Ron Paul Supporter Favors Death Penalty for Gays](#)



## **Backyard Skeptics Events**

<http://backyardskeptics.com/wordpress/events2/>

(like our new logo?)

Jan 25 - Monthly Meeting - Does God Exist?  
Gleason/Pamlin debate at

Feb 8 - cosmos episode in San Juan  
Capistrano

Feb 9 BYS South at Denny's in Mission Viejo

February 18, Goldstone Deep Space Satellite  
Complex north of Barstow. all-day field trip

April 28 - 11am Pasadena DooDah Parade -  
Join us!

More:

Blackstar Canyon visit with the OC  
Astronomers Club

Habitat for Humanity volunteer day

Music Appreciation night – rock, classical and  
jazz

Mt Wilson Observatory night (we are renting  
the 60" telescope for the evening!)

Orange County Freethought Alliance  
Conference May 19 & 20, 2012

Borego Springs overnighter with the OC  
Astronomy Club

Joshua tree camping overnighter in June.

## **Other Local Events**

*(Also on the [Backyardskeptics.com](http://backyardskeptics.com) page)*

Jan 19 Wizard of Oz Reading town square 14  
San Diego Atheists

Jan 18 OC Critical Philosophy Meetup 7pm  
Huntington beach

Jan 20th Billiards and Karaoke Party –  
Generation Atheist, Pasadena 8pm

Jan 20 Scientific Study of Religion OC Critical  
Philosophy Meetup

Jan 21 Beach Cleanup, Seal Beach, Mindful  
Mending Meetup 9am

Jan 21 IIG Independent Investigations Goup  
CFI West 11am

Jan 21 The Practicalities of Death and Dying  
– San Diego New Atheists

Jan 22 Atheists united Monthly Meeting, CFI  
Hollywood

Jan 22 Seal Beach Atheists Meetup

Jan 23 South Pasadena Atheists

Jan 22 Sunday Morning Breakfast Inland  
Empire Atheists

<http://backyardskeptics.com/wordpress/other-local-events/>

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science and church-state separation.

## Born Atheist

# Chapter 22. The end times.



*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting. While he watches, the heifer is to be burned--its hide, flesh, blood and offal. The Bible*

The combustible mixture of religion and politics, especially in the volatile Middle East, is frightening. That Christians and Jews see building a new temple on land now occupied by a Muslim Mosque as essential to bringing out their messiah is more frightening still.

Jews, Christians and Muslims have similar end times myths. Each predicts that soon world

conditions will worsen, international leaders will rise, major battles will be fought and a messiah will appear, rewarding believers with everlasting heavenly life.

For Jewish people, a necessary step to bringing about the end times is a purification ritual using a red heifer born in Israel and conducted at a special new temple to be built on the Temple Mount, in an area now occupied by the Al-Asqa mosque—the same mosque Osama bin Laden mentioned in his letter in the previous chapter. As weird as it sounds, breeding and sacrificing a red heifer is considered essential. The Temple Institute says:

Perhaps it would be difficult for some to believe that a cow could be so important. But in truth, the fate of the entire world depends on the red heifer. For G-d has ordained that its ashes alone are the single missing ingredient for the reinstatement of Biblical purity--and thereafter, the rebuilding of the Holy Temple. . . . [T]he ashes of the red heifer rectif[y] humanity's most basic flaw: despair. The despair brought about by the loss of the Temple and the Divine Presence amongst us.

Around the time of building the temple, the story says, there will be a great battle involving Gog and Magog, a messiah will be recognized, and 40 years later, all the dead in Israel will be resurrected. All Jews will return "home" to Israel. Everyone will recognize the Jewish god and as the only god and Jewish religion as the correct religion. The world will live in peace.

More: <http://bornatheist.com/22.html>

# Religion's Attractions, Humanism's Challenge

## The Power of Religion's Message

Ronald A. Lindsay

**God rewards the faithful**, either in this life or the next. The faithful do not know when these rewards will come, but they can be confident that they *will* come—eventually. Moreover, God does not ask for much in exchange. God requires only that the faithful be faithful, that is, that they trust in him and manifest their trust by praying, joining in worship services, supporting their church (or mosque, temple, whatever), and following his commands—as interpreted by self-appointed spokespersons, naturally. Distilled to its essential core, this is and has been the message of most religions from ancient times to the present. Sure, there are variations. Typically each religion now has a deity instead of deities, and today's deity seems more concerned about what we characterize as moral rules than some past deities whose concerns focused more on ritual observance. But these differences are nuances in the core message.

And it's a powerful message. Its power is exhibited by the fact that it remains attractive to most inhabitants of this planet, even when belief in supernatural agents has lost all intellectual respectability. In the infancy of humanity, belief in supernatural agents had *some* empirical justification. The existence of the gods seemed to explain things that otherwise escaped our understanding. If our ancestors did not understand the natural causes of wind, rain, drought, flooding, fertility, disease, and so forth, it's not surprising that they attributed such phenomena to an agent or agents, and obviously such agents had to possess powers far exceeding our own. But for modern humans—except for those who are ignorant, willfully or otherwise—the gods explain nothing.

Belief in gods has lost any evidence-based foundation it may have once possessed—hence the reliance on “faith.” The appeal to faith would have no effect, however, if there were not a strong motivation for belief. Few are going to accept the reality of an invisible, undetectable used car based on faith, but many still accept the reality of an invisible, undetectable deity. While our epistemic capabilities have matured, humanity's basic emotions and desires remain little changed from prehistoric times. Freud called religion “an infantile delusion,” and if one interprets that assertion to refer to a stage in humanity's development, Freud has hit the mark. It's not that the individual believer has the mind of a child; rather, the believer seeks emotional reassurance in ways similar to early humans.

It's a commonplace that humans turn to the gods because of anxiety over death. There's some truth in this observation, but it is both too broad and too narrow. It's too broad because not all humans, not even all early humans, have associated belief in gods with personal immortality. Certainly, many millions today neither believe in the gods nor appear terribly concerned about their inevitable deaths. The statement is also too narrow because it's not just existential anxiety over death that the gods relieve but also anxiety over the uncertainties of life. How will I support my family? Will my child be hurt and suffer? Will I find love? Which opportunities should I pursue? Will I have *any* opportunities?

In ancient times, people would seek specific answers to these questions by consulting oracles or other messengers from the gods. God is more distant now, and most believers accept that God expects us to draw up preliminary plans on our own and make some effort to implement them. Believers proceed, however, with the assurance that, ultimately, they cannot fail. What may seem like failures to others are just transient setbacks and challenges, because, in the end, *God will reward the faithful*.

As indicated, there is some reciprocity involved. God's offer of absolute love comes with a couple of conditions. Rewards are guaranteed only if God is shown proper respect and his rules are obeyed. Theists unashamedly point to this reciprocal relationship in arguing that religion provides more secure grounding for morality than any secular worldview. The faithful can be relied on to do the right thing—usually—because they know God's favor is conditioned on their doing so.

More here: [http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=fi&page=lindsay\\_32\\_1](http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=fi&page=lindsay_32_1)

# Secular DVDS from FreethoughtAlliance.org [BackyardSkeptics.com](http://BackyardSkeptics.com)



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

Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Survey of the Supernatural World with Adrian Novotny, Ph.D. \$10 special  
Thomas Quinn - "God Needs Therapy" (a comedy) \$12

[Dr. Richard Carrier: How Christianity Began Is Proof Enough It's Bunk \\$12](#)

[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 Populations \\$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](#)

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## Funny Stuff



## 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](http://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 groups and links

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](http://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>

San Diego Coalition of Reason

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](mailto: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](mailto:larry-a-taylor@att.net)

Inland Empire: 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m., Riverside  
Unitarian Church 3657 Lemon St., Riverside Contact  
[JanGoings@aol.com](mailto:JanGoings@aol.com)  
<http://atheists.meetup.com/499/>

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](mailto: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).

Atheists United 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/>

[San Diego New Atheists and Agnostics](#)  
<http://www.meetup.com/atheists-518/>

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

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

[Atheists United Ventura](#): 4th Mondays, 7pm,  
E.P. Foster Library, 651 E Main Street, Ventura.  
Contact Brian Parra for info: 805-794-4714,  
[venturaatheists@yahoo.com](mailto: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 Secular Humanists](#): Last Sundays, 2 p.m.,  
Daphne's Greek Café, 5780 Canoga Ave. Unit B,  
Woodland Hills  
<http://secularhumanism.meetup.com/17/>