



San Francisco Atheists | January 2009 Newsletter

January Program Meeting: Tommi Avicolti Mecca



This month our guest speaker is writer, artist and activist [Tommi Avicolti Mecca](#) with his presentation *Smash the Church / Smash the H8: A Queer Atheist Speaks*.

Tommi entertained us at our Summer Solstice Picnic last year, and he and John Radogno will bring guitars for more thought-provoking musical glee. Join us!

6:00 pm Saturday, January 31, 2008

[Schroeder's Restaurant](#), rear dining room, 240 Front Street. SF Financial District, 2 blocks north of Market, between California and Sacramento Streets. Use California Street cable car, or BART/MUNI Embarcadero stop. Parking on street or at nearby garage. Restaurant and bar remain open after meeting.

San Francisco Atheists is an affiliate of American Atheists. You can help American Atheists fight for your rights by joining for \$35 per year. As a subscriber of this newsletter, you can also request a free 6 month trial membership. Join at www.atheists.org or call 908-276-7300.

East Bay Atheists Meeting



This month [East Bay Atheists](#) will view and discuss Part Two of The Four Horsemen, the discussion between Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens on Atheist issues. (We watched Part One last year.) With their recent best selling books promoting Atheism, they have become acknowledged spokesmen for the struggle against religion. We think you will find the depth of their ideas inspiring.

First the Horsemen examine the ways that they have actually been able to effectively challenge the faith of some believers, although the ability of otherwise intelligent people to compartmentalize their thinking — being a scientist during the workweek, and then believing in superstition on Sunday — is truly amazing. At one point Dawkins brings up how wonderful it feels to stop believing things just because you want to, and build up a model of the world that accurately reflects its complexities. The way the universe actually is inspires awe; primitive superstitious explanations of the universe cheapen it.

Next comes a long discussion of whether one would prefer the churches to be empty.

At one point Dawkins points out how much he cherishes much of the art associated with religion, even though he dislikes the religious messages it contains. He compares this to losing oneself in a work of fiction, without actually believing it to be real.

Join us for the thoughtful event.

Meeting is **Sunday, January 18**, 1:30 - 3:30 PM in the Berkeley Main Library, 3rd Floor Meeting Room. 2090 Kittredge Street, One Block From Downtown Berkeley BART.

BART Access: From the downtown Berkeley BART Station, walk 1.5 blocks south on Shattuck Avenue, then turn right on Kittredge. The library is a half block down the street on the left.

Parking: The city parking lot at Allston & Harold Way, a short block from the library, is \$5 for the entire day on Sunday. If you don't mind walking, take University to MLK, turn right and then instead of proceeding left on Allston to the parking lot, turn right. In several blocks you will see parking on the side streets.

Information:

Larry Hicok, Coordinator: 510-222-7580

Ski Grabowski, Treasurer: 510-652-8350

Evolutionpalooza!



It's a bird! It's a plane! No, it's **Evolutionpalooza**, our 8th annual Darwin Day celebration and the party is bigger than ever! 2009 is an especially significant year:

It's **Charles Darwin's 200th birthday** and the **150th anniversary** of the publication of **Origin of Species**. Mark your calendar for Sunday, February 8th* from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. at the San Francisco Public Library Main Branch 's Latino/Hispanic conference room and join your fellow primates for a great afternoon of fun and evolution!

*Note that it's Feb. 8th this year, not Feb. 12th!

Wanna volunteer? E-mail Dave Fitzgerald at fitz@sfatheists.com.

Seeking Counselors for Freethinkers Summer Camp



Camp Quest West is an overnight camp located in the Sierra foothills of California for children ages 8 to 17. Camp runs from Sunday, July 12, 2009, through Saturday, July 18. There will be a staff party the night of July 18, so plan to stay on until July 19.

Camp Quest West's goals are 1) to promote a sense of belonging in the freethought community, 2) to encourage critical thinking, 3) to promote respect for others with differing viewpoints, and 4) to provide a safe and fun environment for personal development.

Camp Quest West is seeking applicants to become counselors. Although there is no pay, you will have the opportunity to work with and learn from other freethinkers, to have a unique camping experience in one of the most beautiful areas of the country, and to help develop critical thinking in young people, all while having fun.

California law requires that we have an RN or LVN on site, so we are especially seeking a nurse. Although we can't pay a salary, in addition to all the wonderful opportunities this camp offers volunteers, the nurse's child can attend camp for free. Now there's an offer you can't refuse.

If you are interested in becoming a counselor or camp nurse for Camp Quest West, visit www.campquestwest.org. You can learn more about your duties by emailing west@campquestwest.org or by downloading the application. Positions will be filled by qualified people according to when the application is received, so we urge you to apply as soon as possible.

Ed Buckner



New AA President **Ed Buckner** will speak at a special meeting at Schroeder's on Saturday, February 21.

Ed will also be speaking at ...

Feb. 22 (Sun.) – EBA, Berkeley Public Library, Berkeley Main Library, 3rd Floor Meeting Room, 2090 Kittredge St., Berkeley, One Block From Downtown Berkeley BART, 1:30 - 3:30 PM.

Feb. 24 (Tue.) – Rossmoor, Walnut Creek.

Feb. 27 (Fri.) – HSSB, Santa Barbara

Feb. 28 (Sat.) – OCA

Rally & March Against the Annual Walk for Life in San Francisco



This year the Religious Right will again bus thousands of Right Wing Christians from all over the West Coast to march against women's rights in San Francisco. And the Bay Area Coalition for Our Reproductive Rights (BACORR) will again sponsor a counter rally and march. East Bay Atheists and San Francisco Atheists are both sponsors of this event, and we urge everyone to help us show our determination to stop the religious oppression of women. This Walk is a major event for the Religious Right, and they should not be allowed to push their agenda in San Francisco without a major response from the secular community. We are rather insulated from the theocrats in the Bay Area, and it has made us complacent. But we must not allow them to parade through our City without major opposition. If we can't get together to fight this, we really have a problem.

The event will begin on Saturday, January 24, at 10:30 AM at the Music Concourse at the Embarcadero at the end of Market Street. (Embarcadero BART Station) There will be a rally, followed by us marching beside the walk on the city streets. The walk goes on for several miles at a slow pace. Please avoid any incidents that could lead to physical confrontations. This is a peaceful protest march.

American Atheists' New California State Director



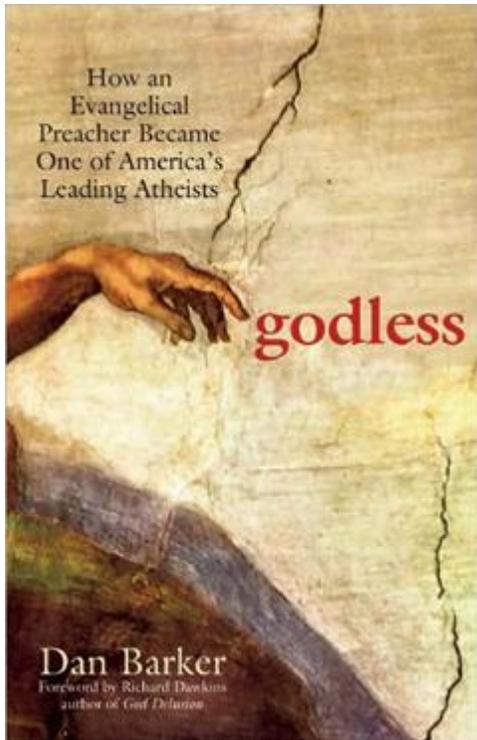
American Atheists has appointed **Michael Doss** as its new California Director.

American Atheists is very pleased to announce the appointment of Michael Doss as the new director for California. Michael is based in Santa Ana, in the heart of Orange County. Working with local affiliate Orange County Atheists over the past several years, Michael has spearheaded some important projects, including monitoring city council invocations throughout the county for sectarian bias and opposing almost a dozen proposals to place "In God We Trust" in public places. Michael has excellent leadership skills and a background in journalism. We are delighted to have him on board.

Michael takes over the California position from Dave Kong. Dave has acted as state director for over 13 years. He is stepping down as California director so he can focus on his new position as the Director of State and Regional Operations for American Atheists. Dave says "I wanted a very strong person for California. After an extensive search throughout the state, Michael was clearly the most qualified candidate for the job. I am confident that the California members of American Atheists will be represented well, and I am excited about the new possibilities for our state."

With an informed, vibrant, and active Atheist community throughout California, Michael is taking over an important role for the organization. Please feel free to contact Michael at mdoss@atheists.org and welcome him in his new position.

Book Review: godless



godless

By Dan Barker

Reviewed by **David Fitzgerald**

Dan Barker needs no introduction to most atheists. As co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation along with his wife Annie Laurie Gaylor, he is a well-traveled ambassador for freethought. His first book, *Losing Faith in Faith*, is a classic collection of essays that should be required reading for every freethinker. For those who may question the need to buy this new title if they already own Dan's first book, I'm pleased to say that his new book *godless* is every bit as indispensable and is a great addition to your library. Don't be put off by the sections from LFIF which have been reprinted here; even with them *godless* is chock full of new material which readers will be glad to have (and conversely, those new readers who have it won't regret going back to pick up a copy of LFIF, either).

Part One, "Rejecting God," recounts Dan's 19-year career as the kind of preacher "you would not want to sit next to on a bus." He was a supremely confident bible-believing minister, missionary and Christian songwriter, and it's fascinating to hear him reveal the secrets of how he and his fellow evangelists proselytize their victims so easily. But then in the next chapter he goes on to talk candidly about the questions of Christianity which arose, blossomed into doubts and slowly began to edge him by fits and starts beyond the comfortable simplicities of fundamentalism.

In a moving and very personal story he describes the "slow, sometimes wrenching, halting, circuitous process" of his journey towards thinking for himself. Dan also describes the reaction of his friends and family when he announces his new atheism. The painful bombshell costs him many friends, but had surprising and positive results as well. He ends the first part of the book by

talking about his new calling as an atheist activist, and some of the debates he has engaged in – a perfect segue to the major portion of the book.

Parts Two and Three are essentially a handbook for countering the claims of theists. "Why I am an Atheist" responds to common accusations from Christians, and gives logical refutations of Christian arguments like the Kalam Cosmological Argument. This section repeats two of the best chapters from LFIF, "Omni-Aqueous" and "Dear Theologian." Part Three, "What's Wrong with Christianity?" tackles the problematic morality and internal contradictions of the Bible, and questions the historicity of Jesus and the resurrection.

The final section of the book ends on a high note with "Life is Good!" It details FFRF's lawsuits against Church-State violations, a moving personal account from Dan and Annie Laurie's life, and hopeful signs for the positive future of atheism worldwide. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, and think all atheists will find it both an uplifting story and a highly useful resource manual. Not a bad present to buy your Christian friends and relatives, either!

Jerry Alvarado: Looking at Death with Eyes Wide Open

Jerry Alvarado has been a frequent sight at SFA picnics and events over the years, a cheerful and easy-going guy. We were all shocked to hear he has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. At the Laguna Honda Hospice, he is a model patient who charms the doctors and staff, and amazes them with his great attitude and fearless acceptance of his mortality. A dancer and a volunteer Obama activist, he is a genuine joy to visit, he'd love to see more people, and I strongly encourage you to go see him soon while he is still with us.

-- Dave Fitzgerald

I asked him to share with us some of his thoughts and experiences:



My father was a Peruvian Indian who became a cabin boy at age 12 and sailed to the Orient. When he landed in San Francisco in 1916, he jumped ship and never came back. He met my mother here; she was a native of northern Mexico. I was his "anchor baby."

I was born on a hot Saturday afternoon. I was born at home; I arrived before the doctor did. I was my mom's fifth child and I'm sure she suffered a lot of pain, but she knew the drill. Ten pounds of baby is a big load! Back then (1940) San Francisco was a different world. Our street wasn't paved. Our sidewalk was a wooden boardwalk. There were still horse-drawn carts.

To think that a month and two weeks ago, I was a happy-go-lucky guy doing aerobics at San Francisco City College. Then a minor pain in my right groin became major. I had it examined and it was a high grade “shark-oma” (a sarcoma) that was growing rapidly. Now I have this 200 pound leg that reminds me that gravity is actually a powerful force. I am anchored into my bed. This shark is eating me up!

How did this happen to a healthy 69 year old who ate his veggies from Rainbow Market? Ate mostly organic. Had a daily glass of wine. Had an extensive background in sports and dance.

Save your gray matter. It just happens and I’m not in denial. I’m well aware and okay with my situation. I’m metastatic; many little “sons of sarcoma” have gotten into my lungs and ribs and all this is pretty terminal. We’re all dying; our difference is that I have some idea of how and when I’ll die.

I’m lying here looking at death with eyes wide open and I need no succor to lessen its impact. No angels. No Mary. No Jesus. No God. I’m gonna die, period. It’s a foot race between the cancer and me. Right now I’ve got outdistanced, but it’s a footrace I can’t win.

So visit me while I’m lucid. I can’t predict how I’ll act later as exhaustion sets in. I hope to be me until that final moment, then they’ll have to tape my mouth shut! =)

The doc gives me months. You can reach me at Laguna Honda Hospital at (415) 759-2300, ask for Ward C2, bed 21 (the telephone system here is rather antiquated).

I often listen to commentary on KPFA and Mumia Abdul-Jamal is a favorite. I especially like his sign-off. So, from Death Row at Laguna Honda Hospice, this is Jerry Alvarado. Peace & Love.

Letter to the Editor



Don Havis got this Letter to the Editor published in the San Mateo Daily Post, and we think you'd like to read it here:

Dear Editor,

Achieving peace in the Israel/Palestine situation is very simple...in theory. But it is quite impossible to actually do. This is because of only one factor -- a factor held in common by both

parties to the dispute, a factor that they will not abandon. I'll tell you what that is at the end of this communication. All each party has to do is as follows:

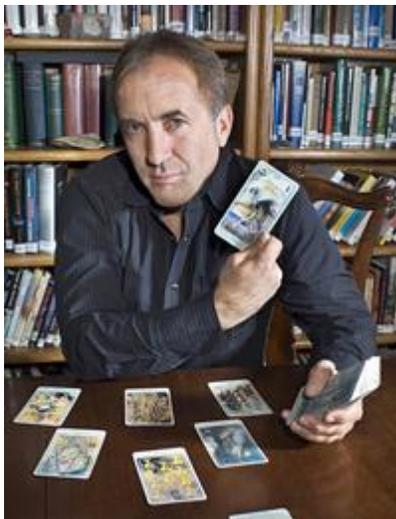
1. Hamas and all Palestinians must immediately cease firing any and all rockets into Israel and cease any sort of aggressive, violent action such as suicide bombers.
2. As clearly stated in previous U.N. Resolutions, Israel must withdrawing from all illegal settlements in the West Bank, return to approximately its 1967 borders, cease the bulldozing of Palestinian homes, cease targeted assassinations of Palestinian political leaders, honor the Palestinians right to return, etcetera.

This, of course, will never happen “in real life.” This is because the conflict is ultimately based on deeply irrational beliefs. Just as one of many examples on each side, the Jewish people believe that God has somehow ordained that they are the “chosen people” and have a sacred right to live in that area. Hamas leaders, largely fundamentalist Muslims, believe that much of the same ground is rightfully theirs both on the grounds that they have lived there for centuries, and that the Dome of the Rock is the holy site from which Mohammed is alleged to have risen into heaven. As long as people are so afflicted with these disordered beliefs, they will continue to kill each other in god’s name. This defective mental condition—the loss of the ability to think straight—is commonly known as religion.

Sincerely,

Don Havis

An Evening with Michael Shermer



Michael Shermer is a genuine ghost buster, a relentless crusader against superstition, and pseudoscience. In a lecture presented by the Ohlone College Psychology Club, he will discuss his investigation of paranormal claims and other unexplained phenomena and what makes us believe in them.

- Is ESP real?
- Does “alternative” medicine really work?
- What causes mass delusion?
- What’s up with UFOs sightings?
- Why are people so gullible?
- What’s the evidence for Near-Death Experiences, Alien Abductions, Recovered Memories, Creationism, Holocaust Denial, Race, or God?

Based on his bestselling book [Why People Believe Weird Things](#), psychologist Michael Shermer applies scientific reason to these and many other questions in a witty talk that has been described as a no-holds barred attack on the pseudoscience and nonsense of our day.

This event will take place Friday, March 6, 2009 at 7:00 PM at Ohlone College in Fremont. General admission is \$10. Tickets, details, and directions are here: <http://www.ohlone.edu/instr/psychology/#michaelshermer>

Joke Of The Month

I was walking across a bridge one day, and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So I ran over and said 'Stop! don't do it!'



'Why shouldn't I?' he said.

I said, 'Well, there's so much to live for!'

He said, 'Like what?'

I said, 'Well...are you religious or atheist?'

He said, 'Religious.'

I said, 'Me too!'

Are you Christian or Buddhist?'

He said, 'Christian.'

I said, 'Me too!'

Are you Catholic or Protestant?'

He said, 'Protestant.'

I said, 'Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?'

He said, 'Baptist!'

I said, 'Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?'

He said, 'Baptist Church of God!'

I said, 'Me too! Are you original Baptist Church of God, or are you reformed Baptist Church of God?'

He said, 'Reformed Baptist Church of God!'

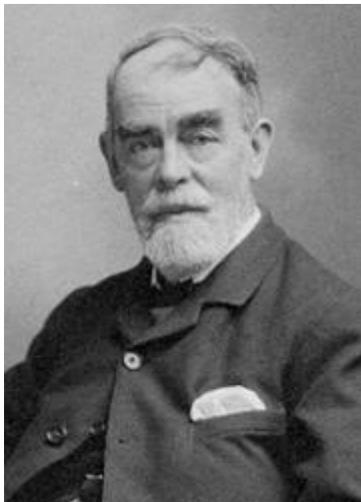
I said, 'Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?'

He said, 'Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915!'

I said, 'Die, heretic scum,' and pushed him off.

-- *Emo Phillips*

Quote Of The Month



*"Prayers are to men as dolls are to children.
They are not without use and comfort,
but it is not easy to take them very seriously. "*

-- **Samuel Butler** (1835-1902) "Unprofessional Sermons," *Note-Books*, published in 1912

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