



San Francisco Atheists | August 2009 Newsletter

August Program Meeting: Jesus' Army



Is Evangelical Fundamentalism taking over our military? Ask the Officer's Christian Fellowship (OCF), an aggressive and coordinated organization including several high ranking officers and numerous powerful field and general grade officers whose goal is to turn the U.S. military into an Evangelical Christian military, and who declare that the constitutional principle of the "Wall" between church and state surrounds the state with its official true religion protected on the inside, to protect America & its military forces from all other outsiders who do not profess the fundamentalist creed – like atheists, Jews, and the “wrong” kind of Christians.

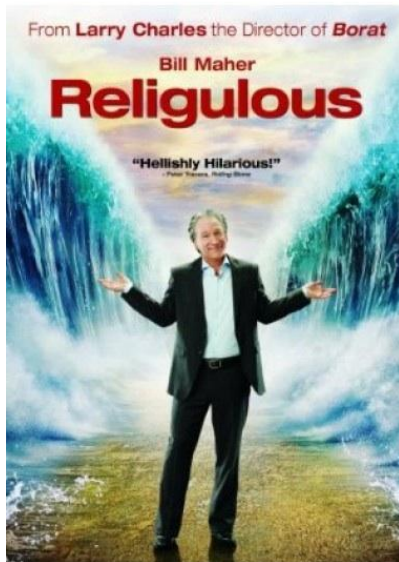
Learn about what former JAG Corps officer Mikey Weinstein's [Military Religious Freedom Foundation](#) (MRFF) is doing to legally challenge military leadership violations of church and state, harassment of cadets, anti-Semitism, Christian groups inappropriately using Pentagon facilities, and other causes for alarm.

6:00 pm Saturday, August 29, 2009

[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 -- now just \$20 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 Bill Maher's *Religulous*. You have probably heard many opinions about this movie, which always manages to find humor in mindless fundamentalism.

What does Maher see as the central message of his movie?

To quote Bill: "The irony of religion is that because of its power to divert man to destructive courses, the world could actually come to an end. The plain fact is, religion must die for mankind to live. The hour is getting very late to be able to indulge having key decisions made by religious people. By irrationalists, by those who would steer the ship of state not by a compass, but by the equivalent of reading the entrails of a chicken. George Bush prayed a lot about Iraq, but he didn't learn a lot about it. Faith means making a virtue out of not thinking. It's nothing to brag about. And those who preach faith, and enable and elevate it are intellectual slaveholders, keeping mankind in a bondage to fantasy and nonsense that has spawned and justified so much lunacy and destruction. Religion is dangerous because it allows human beings who don't have all the answers to think that they do. Most people would think it's wonderful when someone says, "I'm willing, Lord! I'll do whatever you want me to do!" Except that since there are no gods actually talking to us, that void is filled in by people with their own corruptions and limitations and agendas. And anyone who tells you they know, they just know what happens when you die, I promise you, you don't. How can I be so sure? Because I don't know, and you do not possess mental powers that I do not. The only appropriate attitude for man to have about the big questions is not the arrogant certitude that is the hallmark of religion, but doubt. Doubt is humble, and that's what man needs to be, considering that human history is just a litany of getting shit dead wrong. This is why rational people, anti-religionists, must end their timidity and come out of the closet and assert themselves. And those who consider themselves only moderately religious really need to look in the mirror and realize that the solace and comfort that religion brings you comes at a horrible price. If you belonged to a political party or a social club that was tied to as much bigotry, misogyny, homophobia, violence, and sheer ignorance as religion is, you'd resign in protest. To do otherwise is to be an enabler, a mafia wife, for the true

devils of extremism that draw their legitimacy from the billions of their fellow travelers. If the world does come to an end here, or wherever, or if it limps into the future, decimated by the effects of religion-inspired nuclear terrorism, let's remember what the real problem was. We learned how to precipitate mass death before we got past the neurological disorder of wishing for it. That's it. Grow up or die."

Please join us in viewing and then discussing just how Bill presents his case against religion.

Meeting is **Sunday, August 16**, 1:30 - 3:30 PM in the Berkeley Main Library, 3rd Floor Meeting Room. 2090 Kittredge Street

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

The Best of Blasphemy



If you enjoy a healthy dose of blasphemy, join the **Right Reverend RevMo**, [Sister Helen Earth](#) and other local heretics when they host the CD release party for "[The Best of Blasphemy](#)" **6-10 PM August 30th** at [The White Horse Inn](#) (6551 Telegraph Ave. in Oakland). Some of [The Sisters Of Perpetual Indulgence](#) will be there too! Cover charge is \$10.

The Best of Blasphemy is the brainchild of **The Right Reverend RevMo**, who conceived of this project years ago while she was escaping her Catholic upbringing through years of expensive therapy and experimental medications. One night while under the influence of a Native American concoction of dried lizard toenails and organic desert guacamole, she had a vision that

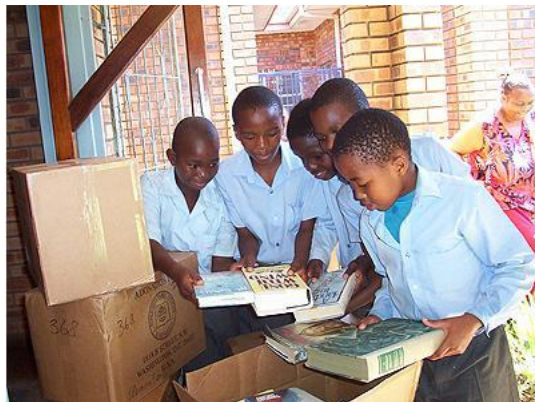
would change her life. She knew she must create **The Best of Blasphemy** to help spread the healing power of musical merriment to others who have been afflicted with SRD*. See the [website](#) for more details. You can also [buy the CD](#), listen to some samples, check out the lyrics, read about the artists who contributed to the project, as well as some other blasphemous shenanigans, including:

- The naked truth behind "[Twenty Naked Pentecostals In A Pontiac](#)".
- The origin of "[Father John](#)" and "[I Guess I'll Play for Jesus](#)".
- [The Devil's Mischief](#) is a one-hour comedy & novelty internet radio show, with an emphasis on material that the DJ deems to be "not for the masses". Including a handy link to [Radio Free Satan!](#)

... and of course [contact RevMo directly](#) to confess your deepest darkest secrets... For all these spiritual developments, see www.thebestofblasphemy.com

**Serious Religion Disorder*

Books For Africa



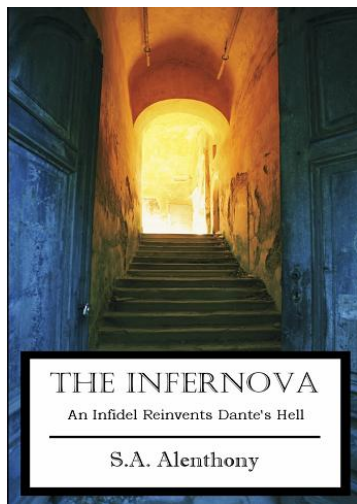
Here's an item that may interest some of you book-lovers. We have heard from one Robert Bwambale, the Director of the **Kasese United Humanist Association**. Where is that? Well, it is in the country of Uganda--Idi Amin's old stomping grounds, and I'm glad to report they have made good progress since those bad old days. However, they are still largely a very poor nation. Mr. Bwambale has sent us an appeal for the donation of used, or new freethought/humanist/atheist-type books:

"We are proposing to set up a public library in Kasese district to be situated in Base camp at our premises, our association plans to open up this library facility to the general public early next year and right now we are in a campaign to solicit for library materials and if possible logistics so that we equip it with literature related to freethinking, humanism, atheism, politics, philosophy, economics, popular science, biographies, studies on controversial issues like abortion, sexuality, prostitution etc, history, geography, critical studies on religions and other essential primary and secondary school subjects all aimed at assisting our members plus all the general public in our community get knowledge. Any kind of book donation is highly welcome

and in case of periodicals, scientific journals, magazines both current and back issues or DVDs, VCD or CD-ROMs with knowledgeable information to pass to our members is also invited."

The books will be placed in their Humanist Library set to open in February of 2010. Anyone interested in donating a book or books to this worthy project can simply bring the book or books to the next S.F. Atheists monthly meeting, or mail it/them to: [Don Havis](#), 439 Grand Blvd., San Mateo, CA. 94401. Thank you for your help in spreading the "good news." -- Don Havis

Book Review: The Infernova



The Infernova

Review by *Don Havis*

S. A. AlenTHONY has presented to all of us freethinkers, of whatever stripe, a truly masterful work of literary achievement. *The Infernova*, as you have probably already guessed, is a parody of Dante Aleghieri's (1265 – 1321) time honored classic, *The Inferno*. The reader does not need to be familiar with the nearly 700 year old original in order to greatly enjoy this new and remarkable "take-off." Perhaps the only thing that it would be helpful for the reader to know is that Dante was the scion of a well-to-do Florentine family and a real toady to the Catholic Church. Dante's imaginary Hell is richly populated not only with ordinary sinners, but is packed with enemies of the Church both real—often identified by name—and imaginary, such as the mythological gods of paganism. Dante's nine circles, or levels, of Hell are filled with suffering souls who range from those who were simply guilty of doubt, to those who led thousands or even whole nations to—the worst sin of all—disobedience of the Church's teachings. Just as Dante was guided on his journey through Hell by a celebrated writer, so too here—but it is the irreverent Mark Twain taking the role of Virgil. What a perfect choice!

In *The Infernova*, as in any good parody, the situation is reversed. In AlenTHONY's Hell, it is the religious who receive their just desserts at various levels of severity. Names are named, from early snake-oil salesmen such as Mary Baker Eddie and L. Ron Hubbard to those who lead larger

movements such as Jim Jones, and Charles Taze Russell. In deeper levels of hell, the founders of national and international religions such as Joseph Smith, Abraham, and Moses are “called out.” Finally, in Canto XXX, our boy J.C.—simply referred to as “Christ”—and the Islamic “Mohammed” are not spared.

The descriptions of each succeeding level of Hell are, like Dante’s original, one of the most fascinating and engaging features of the book. Although AlenTHONY thankfully does not quite share Dante’s fascination for sheer blood and gore, the depictions of each level dramatically involve the reader’s senses of vision, hearing and even smell. Each dreadful circle of Hell is eloquently drawn for the reader to clearly imagine. In addition, the exact punishment chosen for the particular offender is often cleverly devised to perfectly fit the offense. For example, one large group of former humans on earth was transformed into plants and animals, and as Mark Twain explains in Canto XXI, “‘But their awareness kept intact. They’ve been/ transformed to live in a primitive state,/ and to first-hand witness the origin/ of new species. That is the timeless fate/ for Creationists.’ I laughed when I heard/ all this, as the irony was so great.”

Perhaps the most amazing feature of AlenTHONY’s book is his skill and use of the particular narrative poetic form that he employs. The poetic pattern used is the rather difficult form of three line stanzas where the first and third lines rhyme, and the middle line forms the model for the first and third lines of the succeeding stanza. In other words, the rhyming pattern is as follows: ABA, BCB, CDC, etcetera (see above). Each Canto, or chapter, of approximately the same length as was Dante’s—thirty-four Cantos in all—contain a long series of triplet stanzas ending with a dramatic rhyming couplet. All of this is done in such a subtle way, with many rhymes often occurring at mid-sentence, so that the reader is often only dimly aware that there is a regular rhyming pattern at all. The story just flows in a very natural story-telling way. Incidentally, AlenTHONY chose this more rigorous route because it was the exact pattern that Dante followed, even though most translations of *The Inferno* rhyme only the first and third lines of each stanza. Translation from the original old-Italian is just too difficult for the translator to retain both the meaning and the complex rhyming pattern.

It is difficult for this reviewer to come up with even one slight criticism, which I know is somewhat traditional for reviewers to do. If absolutely pushed to the wall, I would say that I might have enjoyed the naming of a few more names of religious rascallions, and a few less naming of extremely obscure ancient Aztec gods and/or the names of millennia-old water-spirits featured particularly in Canto XXXI.

I may be playing personal favorites here, but I’d like to be reassured that the likes of Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, Garner Ted Armstrong, Tammy Fay Baker, and Aimee Semple McPherson, to name just a few, are down there somewhere. However, judging from the books otherwise inclusivity of religious sinners, I can rest assured that they have not escaped AlenTHONY’s Hell.

In summary, I highly recommend this truly remarkable modern day masterpiece.

(Published by **Blackburnian Press**, PO Box 385591, Bloomington, Minnesota 55438. www.blackburnianpress.com, ISBN 978-0-9819678-9-9, 212 pp. paperback - \$14.95)

Call For Volunteers



San Francisco Atheists is managed by a Steering Committee - a handful of unpaid volunteers who run the affairs of the organization. This year, the Steering Committee is looking for a new **webmaster / email editor** to take San Francisco Atheists into an exciting new decade.

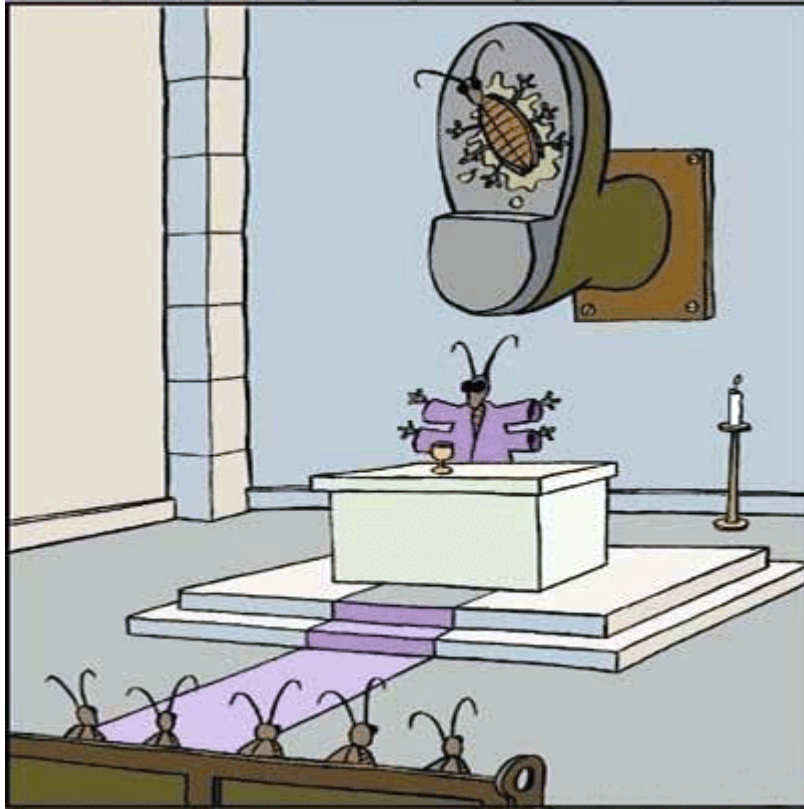
Interested? This potential new Steering Committee member should have some or all of the following basic qualifications:

- Can meet 4:30-6:00 pm, before the monthly program meetings
- Take turns hosting the program meetings
- Participate regularly in the Steering Committee email list
- Ideas and follow-through with action
- Experience with creating and maintaining websites and email list management, or the willingness and ability to expand existing skills to working with the website and email list.

Training and support can be provided.

Can you do the job? Will you do the job? Questions? Please [reply](#) and let us know! We'd like to invite candidates to sit in on a few Steering Committee meetings to get the feel of how this task is run, and to get your input. Help us keep the momentum growing!

Joke Of The Month



Quote Of The Month



Eskimo: "If I did not know about God and sin, would I go to hell?"

Priest: "No, not if you did not know."

Eskimo: "Then why did you tell me?"

-- U.S. writer **Annie Dillard**, adjunct professor of English and a writer-in-residence at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

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