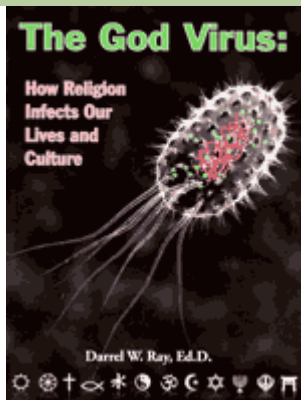


"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ..."
The first words of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution

San Francisco Atheists | October 2009 Newsletter

October Program Meeting: The God Virus



- What makes religion so powerful?
- How does it weave its way into our political system?
- Why is sexual guilt so important to all the major religions?
- Why do people believe and follow obvious religious charlatans?
- What makes people profess deep faith yet act in ways that betray that faith?
- Why are people blind to irrationalities of their religion yet clearly see those of others?

For thousands of years, religion has woven its way through societies and people as if it were part and parcel to that society or person. In large measure it was left unexplained and unchallenged, it simply existed. Those who attempted to challenge and expose religion were often persecuted, excommunicated, shunned, or even executed. It could be fatal to explain that which the church, priest or imam said was unexplainable. Dr. Darrel Ray discusses this and much more in his engaging and entertaining presentation.



Meet **Dr. Darrel Ray**, and learn about his latest book.

Dr. Ray is a psychologist and student of religion, sociology and anthropology. He is also founder of Recovering from Religion. (www.recoveringreligionists.com) His insights on religion and religious infection have been praised by authors and experts like Dale McGowan, Dan Barker, Frank Schaeffer, Edwin Kagin, and many others.

Learn how his revolutionary ideas explain: the fundamentalism of your Uncle Ned, the sexual behavior of a fallen mega church minister, the child rearing practices of a Pentecostal neighbor, why 19 men flew planes into the World Trade Center, why religion protects pedophile priests and how it might affect a person's IQ.

Book signing to follow.

6:00 pm Saturday, October 31, 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 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.

Volunteer Day at SF Food Bank: October 27th



SAN FRANCISCO FOOD BANK Calling all atheist volunteers! Come join your fellow heretics to help out at the San Francisco Food bank on Tuesday, October 27 at 6-8pm. Your volunteer support will mean that thousands of pounds of food will be distributed at meal and pantry programs throughout the city. Thank you for joining the movement to end hunger in San Francisco!

Important note: Due to the Food Bank's production schedule, our group needs to reserve our spaces, so volunteers need to register with Team Leaders **Ona Reiter** at ona_lea@yahoo.com or by phone at (415) 794-0480 or **Sasha Stafford** at alexgstafford@gmail.com. See www.sffoodbank.org for more information.

The San Francisco Food Bank works to end hunger in San Francisco. They provide donated and purchased food to over 400 non-profit agencies, enabling them to give nutritious meals or supplemental groceries to thousands of low-income families and individuals in our community. These agencies range in size and mission, from the city's largest soup kitchens to smaller agencies such as after-school programs, AIDS service providers, battered women's shelters, child care centers, food pantries, health clinics, homeless shelters, residential programs for people in recovery or transition to independent living, senior lunch programs, and street outreach programs. They are the largest distributor of food to non-profit agencies in San Francisco; for many agencies, SF Food Bank is their only source of food. This year, they will distribute 36.5 million pounds of food, or enough to provide 78,000 meals a day.

ATTIRE: It's important to dress in layers, as the temperature in the warehouse is often cool. Because you'll be helping to repack food, please wear casual and clean clothing, long pants, securely fastened jewelry, and

comfortable (no open-toe) shoes. Anyone wearing sandals, flip-flops, or any other shoe with an open toe will not be able to participate in the project.

PARKING: Carpooling is recommended. There is a parking lot and additional street parking is free and abundant.

WHERE TO REPORT: We ask all volunteers to sign in upon arrival. Please report to the south side of the building, entering through the central pedestrian door. Signs will direct you to the volunteer break room.

DIRECTIONS to the SAN FRANCISCO FOOD BANK: 900 Pennsylvania Avenue (PLEASE NOTE: if you are using another website for directions, Cesar Chavez St may be called Army St.) FROM HWY 80/580 SOUTH: 1. Take the Bay Bridge to San Francisco. Stay in the left lane. Exit at 5th Street/Golden Gate Bridge, and go straight (slight left) onto Harrison Street. 3. Turn left on 6th Street. 4. Take 280 South (6th street dead ends into the on-ramp). 5. Exit at Cesar Chavez Street/25th, and immediately turn right on Pennsylvania Avenue. 6. Continue for less than one block on Pennsylvania. The Food Bank is on the left just before the intersection of Pennsylvania and 23rd Street. FROM HWY 101 NORTH: 1. Exit at Vermont Street. Go straight through intersection onto Mariposa Street. 2. Turn right on Pennsylvania Avenue, traveling until you reach 23rd Street. The Food Bank is on the right. Note: If coming from the airport or other locations south of the city, exit from 101 North onto 280 North and follow the directions below. FROM HWY 280 NORTH: 1. Exit at Cesar Chavez Street. 2. Go straight through Cesar Chavez Street intersection onto Pennsylvania Avenue. 3. Continue until just before you reach 23rd Street. The Food Bank is on the left. FROM HWY 280 SOUTH: 1. Exit at Cesar Chavez Street/25th, and immediately turn right on Pennsylvania Ave. 2. Continue until you reach 23rd Street. The Food Bank is on the left. FROM DOWNTOWN SAN FRANCISCO (Surface Streets): 1. Travel south on 4th Street until it intersects 3rd Street. 2. Turn right on 3rd Street. 3. Continue on 3rd Street until it intersects 23rd Street. 4. Turn right on 23rd Street. 5. Continue on 23rd Street until it dead-ends into Pennsylvania Avenue. The Food Bank is in front of you and slightly to the left. Note: An alternate route from downtown is to travel south on 6th Street until it dead ends into the 280 on-ramp, then follow the directions from 280 South as listed above. USING MUNI TRANSPORTATION: We strongly recommend using the Trip Planner on <http://transit.511.org/>.

Prayer Controversy at Lodi City Council Meetings



I was pleased to be able to attend the rally and city council meeting in Lodi on September 30th. This was a special meeting, attended by approximately 700 people, and devoted only to the issue of sectarian prayer at the Lodi city council meetings. The Freedom From Religion Foundation earlier complained to the city about this violation.

We arrived at 5:30, and there were plenty of well-made, clearly visible signs expressing a variety of views in opposition to such prayer. There was a great deal of press present, both television and print. During the

demonstration, we had opportunities to communicate with a few people with opposing views. The press filmed some of this, and interviewed me and others.

The pro-prayer side did not have a large contingent outside to demonstrate. Instead, they went into the theater, and by doing so, were signed up in mass to speak early in the meeting. This resulted in us not being able to voice our views while the television press was in attendance. In the first group of speakers, I think that all but one were in favor of uncensored prayer. There was a very large number of local clergy who spoke on the pro-prayer side. After the first break, our side was able to speak. When my turn came, I was very nervous, as I am definitely not a fan of public speaking. However, I felt it was my responsibility to step forward and be heard on such an important issue, despite my pretty distressing anxiety!

Here are some of my remarks:

"I understand that your community is predominantly Christian. I am here on behalf of those in the minority. I understand that you hold your beliefs dear, and I have no interest in preventing you from expressing your beliefs in non-tax-supported environments, such as with friends, family, at your place of worship, at your home, on the internet. I am just like you in that regard - I want to be allowed and able to share my beliefs freely in those types of environments. But I do not believe that any religious beliefs should be formally expressed in publicly funded meetings or buildings, such as at your city council meeting. Such an act is an endorsement of those beliefs, and I think we can all agree that our government is here to serve all our citizens, not just those who adopt certain religious views.

"I know that freedom of religion is important to you. It would be abhorrent to you to be forced to adopt or support a religion that you know in your heart is wrong. The freedom to worship or believe as you choose must be protected, for all citizens, regardless of what those beliefs are. Please do not put that freedom in jeopardy by letting your city council endorse one set of beliefs over another."

What was most striking to me was the complete lack of logical engagement that was exhibited by many of the speakers supporting uncensored prayer. They were operating from a completely emotional base, and drew support from the reinforcement they received from their cohorts. Their views and beliefs seemed very childlike and simplistic, and many did not understand or appreciate the issues whatsoever. Others used fabricated or rewritten history to support their position. A lot of biblical scripture was quoted, and there were times I had the unpleasant feeling of being in church. I must say there was a point, during one particularly illogical, emotional, vehement expression of religious fervor, when I was very glad that I had chosen not to reveal my full address on the speaker card, which apparently would have gone into public record.

The Council members appeared to understand the issues, but were clearly not willing to go against the strong voice of fanatically religious Lodi residents. Additionally, they seemed to have an issue with being told what to do by those who don't live locally, such as the FFRF and those who traveled from outside of Lodi to come speak at their meeting, so there seemed to be an almost childlike rebellious stubbornness that factored into their decision.

In the end, the Council approved uncensored invocation prior to the council meetings, with the invocation to be listed on the agenda, but said prior to the start of the meeting, before the gavel strikes. It was to be opened up to all religious and nonreligious groups, but it was not made clear how that time would be allocated. The invocation was not to denigrate or elevate any belief system. It remains to be seen how sectarian prayer would not elevate any belief system. They stated that they were willing to stick with such a position, even at the risk of being sued.

-- *Jane Russell*

Joke Of The Month



Quote Of The Month



"As my ancestors are free from slavery, I am free from the slavery of religion."

-- **Butterfly McQueen** ("Prissy" in the 1939 MGM movie "Gone with the Wind"), *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Oct. 8, 1989 .

www.sfatheists.com

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