

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

## July meeting program

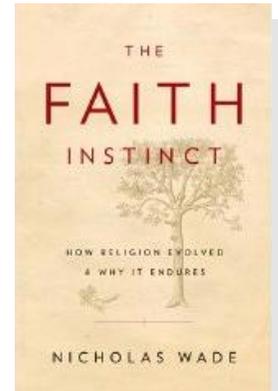
### The Faith Instinct

This month Craig Spitzer has volunteered to give a presentation on *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why It Endures* by Nicholas Wade.

Here are excerpts from the book review in the 12/17/09 issue of the Economist:

“Mr. Wade is convinced that a Darwinian approach offers the key to understanding religion ... He sides with those who think man’s propensity for religion has some adaptive function ... [that] faith would not have persisted over thousands of generations if it had not helped the human race to survive. As well as giving an elegant summary of modern thinking about religion, Mr. Wade also offers a brief, provocative history of monotheism. [This] lays the basis for a rich dialogue between biology, social science and religious history. It also helps explain a quest for collective ecstasy that can take myriad forms.”

Craig will present the arguments of the book, as well as some thoughts about what might be the implications for Atheists and our community. Then he will lead an open discussion on the issues.



Meeting at Schroeder's Restaurant, rear dining room, Saturday July 31<sup>st</sup> at 6:00pm, 240 Front St San Francisco, CA 94111  
Schroeder's Restaurant is two blocks north of Market Street, between California and Sacramento Streets.  
Use California Street cable car, or BART/MUNI Embarcadero stop. Parking on street or at nearby Embarcadero garage.

## June meeting catch up

### Summer Solstice potluck picnic

For the first time, our Summer Solstice picnic was interrupted by a loud voice from Heaven: “ATTENTION ATHEISTS” it intoned, “THIS IS THE VOICE OF GOD. I AM VERY DISPLEASED WITH ALL OF YOU...” Which, of course, we took as a good sign!

It was actually a group of mischievous goofing around with a microphone (who that kind of thing!). However, even the from having a blast at our annual picnic.

Like last year, this year’s picnic took Kaufmann & Margaret Morgan did a with the able assistance of Susan Fink and including plenty of folks from the MeetUp

We also had a surprise visit from the regalia, coming to bless/condemn us; happily, it turned out to be atheist in sheep’s clothing Antonio Catpo, an enthusiastic Bay Area atheist originally with the Asociación Peruana de Ateos (Peruvian Atheist Association).

Our retired webmaster Lenny Maughan received a well-deserved "10 years Of Outstanding Service" award for his brilliant work on the SFA Steering Committee from Dave Kong, who in turn received a round of applause for his own 19 years of service as American Atheists’ Director of State Operations and national board member.

The picnic wouldn’t have been complete without the obligatory atheist picnic games like Hail Mary, where teams compete to be the first to topple a dashboard idol of the Virgin Mary off a post by throwing ice cubes. And of course, there was the ever-popular Bible Toss! Winner for distance was Victor Harris, Jr. (who also brought one of his killer Reuschelle’s Cheesecakes). Accuracy winner was Ski Grabowski and the winner of the under 18 division was a young man named Matthew (last name unknown). NOTE: No actual deities or demigoddesses were harmed during the picnic – Blasphemy is a victimless crime.

You can find a nice clip of the picnic on the San Francisco Atheists Facebook page, as well as spirited discussion about the games! All in all, it was a terrific afternoon of fun, food, and friends – three of the things that make life worth living!



picnickers at the picnic spot next to us apparently forgot that only Christians fall for wrath of God was not enough to keep us

place in the west end of Stern Grove. Larry herculean task of bringing in picnic supplies, Dave Fitzgerald. There was a great turnout, group.

[See Photos](#)

[David Fitzgerald](#)

[See Video](#)

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## East Bay Atheists

### Meeting program

This month we are fortunate to host Dr. Michael Parenti, an internationally known award-winning author and lecturer. He is one of the nation's leading progressive political analysts. He will speak on his new book, God and His Demons.



In this book Parenti brings his critical acumen and gifted writing skills to bear on the dark side of religion, the many evils committed in the name of godly virtue throughout history. This is not a blanket condemnation of all believers. The focus is on the threat posed by fundamentalists and theocratic reactionaries. Historically anchored and biblically informed, this eloquent indictment of organized religions delusions and abuses will be welcomed by secular laypersons and progressive religionists alike.

Parenti delves into a wide and fascinating range of subjects:

The harsh narratives of the Old and New Testaments, from the appalling accounts of violence, draconian justice, and moral turpitude in the older books of the Bible to the latent anti-Semitism in the New Testament.

Creationism and intelligent design in both laughably crude and sophisticated forms.

The duplicities of gurus, with a revealing scrutiny of such icons as Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, various US televangelists, the Dalai Lama, and even Jesus himself.

The hypocrisies of "family-values" religionists and politicians, their rapacious financial schemes and frauds.

The sexual predation, pedophilia, and criminal cover-ups perpetrated under the cloak of religion.

The totalitarian theocratic goals of Christian and Islamic extremists, and the Shangri-La myths about feudal Old Tibet.

The growing strength of secular freethinkers and liberal theologians who are doing battle against the intolerant theocratic usurpers of public life.

Copies of his book will be offered for sale. Please join us for this talk and the discussions afterwards. And don't forget to join the author for dinner after the meeting at a local reasonably priced Chinese Restaurant.

Berkeley Meeting, Sunday, July 18, 1:30 to 3:30pm, Berkeley Main Library, 3rd Floor Meeting Room, 2090 Kittredge St.

One Block From Downtown Berkeley BART. From the 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.

Larry Hicok, Coordinator: 510-222-7580, Ski Grabowski, Treasurer: 510-652-8350, info@eastbayatheists.org

## United Coalition of Reason

### Bay Area chapter of the Coalition of Reason

On June 12 leaders of 7 Bay form the Bay Area chapter of the According to the group's website, national organization that works to the community of reason. Nationally, we do this by conducting campaigns which highlight the fact that nontheists live in every community across America. Locally, we do this by promoting informal cooperation among local groups, hosting a local coalition website, providing group leaders with free public relations training, and funding a publicity campaign. There is no obligation, financial or otherwise, for these services and United COR's efforts are cooperative and supplementary to the work already being done by national and local nontheistic organizations."



Area Freethinker organizations met to Coalition of Reason (COR). "The United Coalition of Reason is a raise the visibility of local groups in

For the last few years many of us have tried to increase the cooperation with other local groups. By joining COR we not only increase our cooperation, but also acquire free training and publicity for our groups. Founding groups were East Bay, Contra Costa, Rossmoor and San Francisco Atheists, along with Humanist Hall in Oakland and San Francisco CFI. GALAH also had a representative and is considering participation. I was chosen as the Coordinator, and Jerry Schwarz of SF-CFI was appointed webmaster.

**Larry Hicok**



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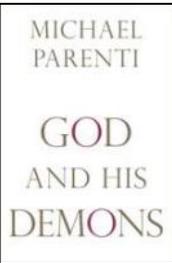
San Francisco Atheists

July 2010 Newsletter

God And His Demons

A review of Michael Parenti's book by Don Havis

First, I confess to being an avid follower of each new book that is critical of religion. For that reason, I immediately purchased a copy of "God And His Demons." I also confess a favorable bias toward politically progressive writers. Therefore, a book by the well-respected progressive writer, Michael Parenti, already has a "head start" before one page is turned. However, in this instance my enthusiasm was tempered prior to examining the book by the notion that "here is one more" in a parade of writers looking to get on the band wagon of interest in what might be termed "atheist's matters." After reading "God And His Demons," I concluded that my last bias was wrong.



"This is not an atheist book," said Dr. Parenti (Ph D from Yale in Political Science) at a recent appearance at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco. It is, as the name implies, strictly a book which carefully documents the record of behavior of God's demons—both his worldly representatives and his conceptual demons such as the "Lucifer", "hell", and their tools, such as guilt, sin, shame, et cetera.

We are thankfully spared all the tired arguments against the God concept or in favor of science as a method of discovering truth.

Similarly, you will read no counter-arguments to the arguments of God's defenders. Instead of such arguments, the reader will find chapters with titles such as, "The Great Exterminator," "The Great Abominator," "Working His Blunders in Mysterious Ways," "Moneyed Gurus and Cults," "Politicos and Other Pharisees," and one of my favorites (Chapter 12) – "Pious Predators." I was surprised, but rather pleased, to find in that chapter detailed information about not only the well-publicized pedophile priest scandal, but also numerous sexual scandals that seem to infect many other non-catholic Christian sects as well as many of the pious leaders of other religions. The entire effect of the very well-researched and well documented book (the 20 page index is worth the price of the book; not to mention the 33 pages of extensive chapter notes) is to thoroughly back up James Madison's famous quote, repeated on page 168: "Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind, and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded project."

If "pushed to the wall" to find a weak spot, I would be tempted to mention two brief (too brief) sub-sections of Chapter 14 – "Church in State." In the section on "Infiltrating the Military," I was surprised not to find at least mention of Michael "Mikey" Weinstein and his relentless crusade of

fighting particularly fundamentalist Christian infiltration of the military with his organization, the "Military Religious Freedom Foundation." The MRFF was founded in early 2006; plenty of time to have earned some mention. Secondly, in the sub-section entitled, "Pastors and Prisons," the work particularly of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, under Rev. Barry Lynn, in bringing several highly effective lawsuits against various religious establishments concerning "faith-based" prison reform efforts deserved, I believe, some recognition.

As mentioned earlier, the intent and very well achieved objective of the book is not to encourage the reader to abandon, or take up arms against religion. ("If it seems to work for you, then it is your right to cling to it" seems to be Parenti's attitude.) However, the overall effect of the book is, of course, to point out and make abundantly clear, the often-deleterious effects of "shackling" your mind. Dr. Parenti's book is not the first attempt to look through history and record such nasty consequences and deleterious effects. James Haught's 1990 book, Holy Horrors and Helen Ellerby's 1995 book, The Dark Side of Christian History come to mind in this regard. Michael Parenti's book, however, does an excellent job of up dating and refreshing everyone's memory about this highly important and highly relevant subject; enthusiastically recommended!

Don Havis

Christopher Hitchens

Author of 'God is Not Great,' Battles Cancer

Author and provocateur Christopher Hitchens, 61, announced this week he would cut short a book tour for his new memoir, "Hitch-22," because he will undergo chemotherapy for esophageal cancer, a serious diagnosis that rarely has a happy ending.

The author explains why he thinks "religion poisons everything." The disease kills 14,530 Americans a year and one type — squamous cell carcinoma — is associated with smoking and drinking, habits Hitchens extolled as virtues in essays and features for Vanity Fair magazine.

Read more





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## San Francisco Atheists

## July 2010 Newsletter

### Sneak Preview: Atheist Film

The Atheist Film Festival: A Film Festival you can believe in

Once again, San Francisco Atheists made history last year when we launched the world's very first Atheist Film Festival. And now it's back! The festival returns with another exciting lineup of fascinating cinema, ranging from the shocking to the hilarious. This year the Festival comes to the Haight-Ashbury district's beloved Red Vic Movie House on Saturday, August 14th.



Truth isn't just stranger than fiction; it's more entertaining... Come join your fellow heretics for a full day of amazing documentaries, mind-blowing fiction, rarely-screened controversial classics and beloved favorites. The screenings begin at 10am, 12:30, 2:15, 3:30, 4:30, 6pm, 8pm, 9:45pm; see [www.atheistfilmfestival.org](http://www.atheistfilmfestival.org) for details

**David Fitzgerald**



### Delusional beliefs

We can rid the world of all these delusional beliefs

Imagine for a moment that you arrive at work one morning. When you step into your office someone has their hands raised to the sky and is speaking excitedly in a language you cannot comprehend. You are an open-minded person so you shrug it off and continue to your desk hoping they will quiet down at some point. While at lunch, a coworker tries to explain to you how she believes that human babies are producible without human sperm and egg coming together. You are not a scientist so anything is possible, but this seems hard to believe. Your politeness restricts you from challenging her. Later that afternoon your boss calls you into his office and tries to convince you that as a younger man life offered only discontentment for him. He retreated to a cave in the mountains for meditation and reflection where he received his first revelation from a supernatural being. His personal account is unsubstantiated by any evidence except: his personal account. He is your boss so you smile and leave his office as quickly as possible.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines delusion as: "A belief or impression that is not in accordance with a generally accepted reality." So are the people in your office delusional? If their belief or impression is generally accepted reality then they are not *officially* delusional.

Our mission as atheists must be to challenge any claims not supported by scientific evidence. We must stop them from becoming generally accepted reality, as so many are today. For example: if the person in your office, speaking excitedly in a language you cannot comprehend, cannot give you scientific evidence that the language they are speaking is valid then what they are doing cannot be "generally accepted reality" and so they are delusional. Once again, if your coworker cannot supply you with repeatable evidence of producing human babies without human sperm and egg coming together; then she is delusional. Finally, if your boss cannot offer any evidence, other than a personal account, that he spoke with a supernatural being: then he is delusional.

Never let anyone off the hook of scientific evidence; this has to be our number one job as atheists. If we do this long enough and consistently with everyone in our lives then, perhaps, we can rid the world of all these delusional beliefs.

**David Millett**

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Quote of the month

Isaac Asimov

Imagine the people who believe such things and who are not ashamed to ignore, totally, all the patient findings of thinking minds through all the centuries since the Bible was written. And it is these ignorant people, the most uneducated, the most unimaginative, the most unthinking among us, who would make themselves the guides and leaders of us all; who would force their feeble and childish beliefs on us; who would invade our schools and libraries and homes. I personally resent it bitterly.

Find out what' is coming up

Click a graphic below to open that calendar

Monthly Meeting  
Saturday, Jul 31, 2010 6:00pm

Atheist Film Festival:  
Saturday, August 14, 2010



Joke of the month



First prize (Professional): "Altar Boys" by Alexander Mattews.