

# Atheist Coalition

*AN INVASION OF ARMIES CAN BE RESISTED, BUT NOT AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME*

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*Founded 1991 • An Independent Democratic Atheist Organization • Member, Atheist Alliance*

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## God Is Alive and Well in Santee

by Jeff Archer

At our last meeting, a member brought to my attention the website for the City of Santee. On the page for Mayor Voepel, at the end of his short blurb, was his motto: **GOD DUTY HONOR COUNTRY**. His motto was in much larger letters than the rest of his article and they were capitalized and bolded. I wrote to the mayor and received a response. Following are my letter and his:

Dear Mayor Voepel,

This is Jeff Archer, president of the Atheist Coalition of San Diego. At our last meeting, a member gave me a print out of your webpage and I saw that your motto is: **GOD DUTY HONOR COUNTRY**. And, those words were capitalized and in bold print.

Your affinity to God does not breach the American tradition of separation of religion and government, yet by putting it in such a conspicuous place on your biography page, it brings the question of insulting people to the forefront.

I, as president of the Atheist Coalition, and as a private individual, have no problem with your belief system. However, as an elected official, to thrust this out in bold lettering is quite crass considering there are atheists living in Santee. It infers that atheists are second-class citizens.

Under no circumstances, if I were an elected official, would I choose to put the word **ATHEISM** or **GODLESSNESS** as a part of my motto to the public. This would, as you have done, ostracize members of the community.

I have heard the argument many times that atheists are too touchy over issues such as this. We are for good reason. In eight states of this country, we are not allowed to hold

public office. There is no other group in the United States that is so blatantly officially discriminated against in our society. Holding public office is a right for Americans of all colors, religions, national backgrounds, sexual preferences, height, weight, and ages (over the minimum age to hold office). Yet, atheists are not allowed to contribute to the political structure of eight states.

Please keep in mind what I said by trying to put the shoe on the other foot. If an atheist public official denigrated believers, I would be as adamant in my disapproval as I am with people of a religion who do the same. By mentioning **COUNTRY** in your motto, I am sure you would agree that all U.S. law-abiding citizens should have equal rights. As a creative and productive citizen of this country, I find your motto contradictory as well as discriminatory. As a private citizen, you can state anything you want. As an elected official, however, you represent those who do not agree with you as well as those who do.

Sincerely,  
Jeff Archer

January 9, 2004  
Mr. Archer,

I am writing in reply to your January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004 email. Thank you for your comments on my Biography section on the City of Santee Web Page. I am very empathetic to other people's feelings and positions and understand how you may negatively react to my personal beliefs. Please understand

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this is the personal biography page of the web page. Most people understand this has personal information on each elected Mayor and Council Member. If you are personally offended that I believe in God, I am sorry you are upset over a personal belief, by a public person.

In our Republic, one piece of important information is any belief system the elected person operates by. I feel it is vitally important for Santee citizens to know what personal belief system I as a leader operate under. Everyone knows that George Bush is a devout person, if a voter likes that, they vote for George W, if not they vote for another candidate that is as close as possible to their thoughts and beliefs. That Sir is democracy.

You may be surprised that I do support the separation of church and state. I am very careful to make sure my position, as Mayor is not associated with my personal beliefs. The fact of the matter is, I am a Christian, a war veteran, a father and all the other things listed on this Bio-page. My religious beliefs are simply a fact of my life, thus part of my Biography. In my public life, I respect and am charged under my oath of office, to protect your right to what you believe in. I also have first amendment rights, I equate my motto of God, Duty, Honor, and Country, as the equal of the motto of "In God we trust" on currency.

Respectfully,

*Randy Voepel*

Mayor

The only positive aspect of this is that he wrote back. In the past few years, I have written letters, on behalf of the Atheist Coalition, to Mayor Dick (appropriately named) Murphy of San Diego and Assistant Mayor Jack Feller of Oceanside protesting bigoted remarks they made about atheists. Neither has responded.

Other than Voepel's responding, his assessment of the situation is scary. Basically, he told me (and all atheists), "Fuck you!" He did not respond to my points and he gave me a caustic lecture on freedom of speech. And, he uses George Bush as a role model. Bush is the biggest liar in the history of the U.S. presidency who has created an unheard of budget deficit in such a short time in the country's history. He has ordered the killing of tens of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans, all in the name of freedom. Evidently, Voepel, with his love of God, thinks these actions are commendable.

The stakes are becoming higher. Until a few years ago, being an atheist meant begrudgingly putting up with religion and its implications. Today, however, religion (in particular, Christianity) is so strong in our country that nonbelievers have been ostracized socially and economically. When a mayor of a city responds in the manner of Randy Voepel, it is evident that we are not relevant in our society. Bush made that clear in his 2004 State of the Union message in which he endorsed a constitutional ban on gay marriage because of religious reasons and his touting the faith-based agenda he is pushing.

Our struggle is just beginning.

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## **The 30th Annual National Convention Of AMERICAN ATHEISTS**

**April 9-11, 2004 — San Diego, Calif.**

By Heather Campbell

A year and a half after an outstanding Freedom From Religion convention, San Diego will host yet another major event, this time the 30th annual national convention of the American Atheists. If I were a god-fearing woman, I would say that San Diego has been blessed. But I'm not, so I won't.

We members of the Atheist Coalition may call ourselves lucky, however. As members of an affiliated organization, we receive a discount on the registration fee — \$85 rather than \$100. The venue will be the Shelter Pointe Hotel and Marina on Shelter Island (convention rates available to those who may want to spend the night).

The dates, April 9-11, happen to coincide with Easter weekend.

Following is a list of the scheduled speakers. More can be found on the website, [www.atheists.org](http://www.atheists.org).

**ELLEN JOHNSON** is President of American Atheists. She has served with the organization for over two decades, and since 1994 has co-hosted "The Atheist Viewpoint" television program carried on dozens of cable systems throughout the nation and on the internet.

Last year, Ms. Johnson served as Chairperson of the Godless American March on Washington (GAMOW) Task Force, which organized the first national gathering of diverse Atheist, Freethought and Secular Humanist groups in Washington, D.C.

**EDDIE TABASH**, Attorney and First Amendment political activist. Mr. Tabash is a Constitutional and civil rights attorney from

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# Pictures from Baghdad



Former U.S. Marine Tom O'Keefe burns his U.S. passport in Baghdad



U.S. tanks and military vehicles surround a boys school in Baghdad. Soldiers arrested and beat over 50 students (12-16 years old) because they had a picture of Saddam Hussein.



Donkey cart used by Iraqi freedom fighters in staging rocket attack on U.S.-occupied buildings in Baghdad. In this case, old technology beat hi-tech security.

*(The above photos are from Dahr Jamail, an independent U.S. citizen who is in Baghdad and attempting to chronicle the U.S. occupation in a real manner, not what CNN shows. He has granted me permission to use over 1,000 original photos for my upcoming book, The Sledgehammer and the Ant.)*

— Jeff Archer

# Some Toys U.S. Manufacturers Offer



The Uday Hussein “Dead on Arrival” Action Toy from Herobuilders Toys



This is not a joke. KB Toys has released a George Bush “Elite Force” aviator doll. Bush was an AWOL Army reservist who never saw one minute of military action.



This is KB Toy’s best seller. The company is sold out of its production for “Foward Command Post.”

California who will speak on "ATHEISTS ENGAGING THE POLITICAL PROCESS: How to Effectively Support and Oppose Legislation..."

Mr. Tabash has emerged as a key force in raising political awareness throughout America's diverse community of nonbelievers. He serves on the Platform Committee and State Central Committee of the California Democratic Party.

**ALEXANDER WAUGH**, Novelist and music critic. Born in 1963, Alexander Waugh comes from a line of distinguished writers and thinkers. He is the grandson of the popular distinguished British writer Evelyn Arthur St. John Waugh (1903-1966, author of *Brideshead Revisted*, *Decline and Fall* and *A Handful of Dust*., and the son of columnist Auberon Waught and novelist Teresa Waugh.

Alexander Waugh is also a publisher, a cartoonist and illustrator, and he composed the music for the award-winning stage hit, "Bon Voyage!"

Mr. Waugh will be speaking on his latest work, *God*. We are pleased to also host a book signing for this distinguished author following his lecture.

**DEBRA OLSON** is the granddaughter of the late California Governor Culbert L. Olson (1938-1942). She graduated from UCLA Magna cum Lauda with degrees in Business and Political Science. In addition, she has been involved in philanthropic and social justice movements, active in the Children's Global Village; and served as Co-Chair of the Women's International Advisory Committee. Today, Ms. Olson also develops strategies for grassroots advocacy organizations, and advises groups on everything from voter participation to fundraising and coalition building.

**ARUP CHATTERJEE** is the author of the critically acclaimed book *The Final Verdict* which probes the life and sordid legacy of Mother Teresa.

Mr. Chatterjee was born in Calcutta, India; his father was an attorney, Atheist, and involved in politics. After studying medicine and two years of hospital practice, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1985 where he pursued graduate studies, married and started a family. It was here, and not in India, where he first began seeing western media coverage and celebrity-fascination with Mother Teresa. An intellectual who had taken up the Western Enlightenment weltanschauung — and skeptical, then tired of the uncritical adulation of the Catholic nun — Arup Chatterjee began investigating.

Mr. Chatterjee's exhaustive work blows the media gloss off the life and deeds of Mother Teresa. There will be a book signing for the author at the Convention.

**FRANK ZINDLER** is the Director of the American Atheist Press, and Editor of the quarterly American Atheist Magazine.

He is a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the American Chemical Society and the American Schools of Oriental Research. He is also a member and participant in the Jesus Seminar, a global community of scholars probing the early history of Christianity.

Mr. Zindler will be speaking on "NOAH'S SECOND FLOOD: Religious Domination in the Media and the Great Disinformation Inundation." He explores how America's broadcast, electronic and print media have been flooded with disinformation on a myriad of topics all manufactured by religious propagandists. The truths of history and science are being swamped by a rising sea of noisome religious revisionism. What can skeptics and others who are guided by the scientific method do about it?

**TIM SLAGLE** is a nationally famous entertainer whose politi-

cally-charged style of comedy has appeared on MTV, C-SPAN, Showtime and other media outlets. You may know him from his boisterous, witty and controversial delivery at the Libertarian Party National Convention in Washington, DC where he burned an American flag while producing a copy of the Bill of Rights. "It wasn't the real flag, only forty-nine stars. Rather than amend the constitution to protect the flag, I though I'd just amend the flag to protect the Constitution!"

**CHARLIE BOY** is a rapper, humorist, and, yes, an Atheist! His latest CD, *Da Fearless Weirdo* has been released to critical acclaim. He touches on a reality that most rappers have ignored. Blending harsh humor, poignant jokes and expressive rhymes (Is he the next Nelly?), it has been described as one of the funniest rap albums in history. Dave Kong describes "Weirdo" as having "solid musical underpinning," and "the coolest rap CD I have ever heard."

**CONRAD GOERINGER** is Editor of AANEWS and a frequent contributor to *The American Atheist Magazine* and the Newsletter. He is a former antiquarian book dealer and investigative reporter. His articles on organized crime, international politics, First Amendment concerns and cultural and scientific issues have appeared in such diverse publications as "Schism," "New Times" and "Sky & Telescope."

Mr. Goeringer will speak on "Searching for Frances Farmer, the Lost Atheist." For years, he has relentlessly pursued the story of Frances Farmer, the famous 30s and 40s-era actress who starred in such stage-and-screen hits as "Come and Get It!," "Golden Boy," and "Son of Fury." But while popularly acknowledged as a Hollywood beauty queen and celebrity, Farmer had a parallel life as an heretic, radical political activist, crusader for peace and social justice and an intellectual. At age 16 she shocked and outraged much of the nation with a controversial Atheistic essay. As she rose to stardom, Farmer never abandoned her political principles and as an advocate for victims of the Spanish Civil War, for strikers and the working men and women of America including the dispossessed farm laborers of California. She ran afowl of the law, spent years in an oppressive mental institute where, some say, she was subjected to inhumane experimental treatment, perhaps a lobotomy, and the loss of her rights. Using published and original archival information not unearthed for decades, including censored FBI files and other historical resources, Mr. Goeringer gives us a glimpse of who Frances Farmer really was. Goeringer is working on a forthcoming book, *Frances Farmer: Heretic, Radical, Feminist...*

This lineup promises to be quite stimulating! See you there.

## NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Atheist Coalition of San Diego will be held on Tuesday, January 27, 2004 at the North Park Recreation Center, 4044 Idaho Street, San Diego at 7:00 pm.

The subject of discussion will be Pantheism, with several representatives of the local Pantheists, including Tom Brower, giving the presentation. Questions are encouraged.

**ATHEIST COALITION**

**APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP**

**OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES [BYLAWS, ARTICLE 2, SECTION 1]**

The primary objectives and purposes of this organization shall be:

To promote separation of government and religions, which means to educate the public about the value of secular government, alert the community to government/religion separation violations, and work in all lawful ways to ensure separation of governments and religions;

To promote atheism, which means to educate and inform the public about atheism, presenting it as a worthwhile, life-affirming, and wholesome point of view, protect the civil and constitutional rights of atheists, clarify and explain atheist ideas for atheists and non-atheists, and develop opportunities for atheists to learn more about each other, and;

To coordinate activities with other groups to achieve common goals and objectives, in affiliations which do not compromise the autonomy of ATHEIST COALITION;

To educate means to disseminate ideas and materials by publication, lecture, broadcast, tape.

I am an atheist. I have read and agree with the objectives and purposes of the ATHEIST COALITION and hereby apply for membership. My annual dues for \$20 are enclosed.

Membership becomes effective at the meeting following the meeting at which the application is completed and dues are paid.

[A "low income" applicant may pay annual dues of \$10 in lieu of the standard dues by sending a letter or any other document showing "low income" status. A majority vote of the Board of Directors approves a "low income" dues application.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE (DAY): \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

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*FIRST CLASS*