



Orange County

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Orange County Chapter

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

2781 W. MacArthur Blvd., Suite B, Box 152, Santa Ana, CA 92704-7095 714-299-4551

On the web at www.au-oc.org Email us at OrangeCountyAU@yahoo.com

You Are Cordially Invited To a Private Dinner Party

*with **Barry Lynn, Executive Director***

Americans United for Separation of Church & State

Join Us As We Celebrate Darwin Day and Hear Plans
*For Americans United in 2012 and Raise Money for our
Orange County Chapter*

Tickets: \$100 -members and guests

\$125 for non-members and guests

Seating Is Very Limited

Date: February 12, 2012

Time: 4:00 PM Cocktails

Dinner at 5:30 PM

Dress: Business Attire



Purchase Tickets Through: AU-OC.org/PayPal

Or send check to:

AU-OC, 2781 W. MacArthur Blvd, Suite B, Box 152 Santa Ana 92704

VERY IMPORTANT NOTICE

In 2012 we have a NEW meeting date and time

We Now Meet: 1st Saturday at 1:30

Irvine Ranch Water District

15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine

Jan-Mar 2012

Vol. 8, Issue 1

Steve Trunk: The Mt Soledad Cross Case
Saturday, January 7th Doors Open at 1:00 pm
Irvine Ranch Water District—15600 Sand Canyon Ave, Irvine



The Mount Soledad cross is a 29-foot tall cross (43 feet tall if you include the base) that was erected in 1954 on top of Mount Soledad in La Jolla.

Litigation around the legality of the cross over whether or not it is a violation of the First Amendment has been going on since 1989 and over the years there has been continuous litigation regarding its legal status. When the original plaintiff of the Mt. Soledad cross case, Phil Paulson, was dying he asked Steve Trunk to take over as plaintiff.

The current state of the Mt Soledad case is that in Jan-

uary 2011, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled the cross unconstitutional. Judge McKeown wrote for the court, "Overall, a reasonable observer viewing the Memorial would be confronted with an initial dedication for religious purposes, its long history of religious use, widespread public recognition of the Cross as a Christian symbol, and the history of religious discrimination in La Jolla."

But the case is not over. The opposition wishes to take it to the highest court in the land. The question is whether the Mt. Soledad Easter Cross is a war memorial or the unmistakable symbol of Christianity. To date, the courts have consistently agreed that the Mt. Soledad Easter Cross fosters an excessive entanglement by government with religion.

Please join us for an interesting discussion which will enable us to learn about this case from its source. ###

Flicks for Thought

Film: "God In America: A New Eden"
Saturday, March 3rd Doors Open at 1:00 pm
Irvine Ranch Water District—15600 Sand Canyon Ave, Irvine



In 2012 for our "Flicks for Thought" series we are presenting episodes from *God in America*. This series explores the intersection of religion and public life in America, from the first European settlements to the 2008 presidential election. The series examines how religious dissidents helped shape the American concept of religious liberty and the controversial evolution of that ideal in the nation's courts and political arena; how religious freedom and waves of new immigrants and religious revivals fueled competition in the religious marketplace; how movements for social reform -- from abolition to civil rights -- galvanized men and women to put their faith into political action; and how religious faith influenced

conflicts from the American Revolution to the Cold War.

In March we will be presenting the episode called "A New Eden." considers the origins of America's experiment in religious liberty, examining how the unlikely alliance between evangelical Baptists and enlightenment figures such as Thomas Jefferson forged a new concept of religious freedom. In the competitive religious marketplace unleashed by this freedom, upstart denominations raced ahead of traditional faiths and a new wave of religious revivals swept thousands of converts into the evangelical fold and inspired a new gospel of social reform. In a fierce political struggle, Catholic immigrants, led by New York Archbishop John Hughes, challenged Protestant domination of public schools and protested the daily classroom practice of reading from the King James Bible.

Board Member Rich Gillock will facilitate the discussion following the film. Don't miss seeing the film with us! ###

Jason Torpy: Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers

Saturday, February 4th Doors Open at 1:00 pm
Irvine Ranch Water District—15600 Sand Canyon Ave, Irvine



Ever since our engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan following 9/11, there have been issues relating to the promotion of religion in the military and its impact on members of the military who were outside of evangelical Christianity. This

has been particularly impactful to non-believers.

Helping us to understand the scope of this issue, we will present Mr. Jason Torpy who serves as the President of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), a national non-profit building community for nontheistic service members. Jason has spoken to large audiences at national conventions, awards banquets, outdoor events, and press conferences, as well as radio appearances on programs such as BBC World Today, Alan Colmes, Michael Medved, and Michael Smerconish.

Mr. Torpy has been active with the nontheist community since entering the military. He has addressed issues of separation of church and state and equal opportunity for nontheistic service members in Army basic training, Army parachutist training, military academy programs, and in combat situations. His education includes a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering Management from West Point.

Mr. Torpy enlisted in the Army in 1994 as an Intelligence Interceptor. After earning top graduate honors from two intelligence training programs, he was offered direct admission to the United States Military Academy. Upon graduation, Mr. Torpy was commissioned as an officer and served for five years in Germany, Kuwait, and Iraq with the Army's 1st Armored Division. He left the service in 2005 at the rank of Captain to pursue an MBA.

Please join us to talk with Jason Torpy and learn more about the problems of religion within the military. ###

January is Membership Renewal Month



Membership in Americans United is just \$25 a year and that provides you with a one-year membership in our National Organization AND you can also be a member of our Orange County chapter at no additional charge. We urge you to renew through us to help support your local chapter. We can't do it without you!

What does \$25 give you:

- ◆ Church and State—the monthly magazine from Americans United for Separation of Church & State
- ◆ Quarterly newsletter from your local chapter with an expanded electronic edition on the web and via email
- ◆ 11 interesting and provocative programs right here in Orange County
 - * In January we bring you a speaker from San Diego
 - * In February we bring you a speaker from Washington, DC
 - * In February we bring you our Executive Director, Barry Lynn
 - * In March we bring you an important film
- ◆ Please send your renewal in through PayPal on www.au-oc.org or mail us a check to:

AU-OC, 2781 W. MacArthur Blvd., Suite B, Box 152, Santa Ana, CA 92704-7095

Message from the President

I would like to wish everyone a very happy New Year. I hope that 2012 proves to be a strong year for our organization and that we can continue to successfully promote the separation of church and state here in Orange County as well as support the activities of our national organization.

I would especially like to thank everyone who was at our annual meeting in November. At that time we elected new officers as we said farewell to others. I would especially like to thank Carl Weibel for his great service to our chapter. Carl has moved to Los Angeles, following his job. Although I hope we will continue to see Carl from time to time he is no longer able to be a part of our Board. In his years with AU Carl has done phenomenal work as our treasurer and also handling all of our tabling events over the years. We will miss him. Another departure is Alison Young who has been with us from the beginning. Alison is retiring from our Board as Vice President but will continue to be an active member on our Steering Committee.

As you may know we have staggered elections on our Board so that we can support a transition between one group of officers to the next. This year we had openings to replace our vice president and treasurer and we now have a second vice president for Membership. Congratulations to our new officers: Shirley Lorenz, 1st VP for Programs, Steve Huang, 2nd VP for Membership

and Rich Gillock for Treasurer. There's still lots of work to be done so we hope that you will help support our team with your ideas and join our Steering Committee!

As this is 2012 we will once again be focusing on elections. For AU this means monitoring politics from the pulpit, educating groups and houses of worship on what's legal and what's not. We will be speaking to a variety of groups on this topic this year. If your organization would be interested in a speaker on this topic please contact the chapter at our email address: OrangeCountyAU@Yahoo.Com.

In addition to issues around candidates there will be the usual plethora of initiatives to wade through. At this writing there are 34 initiatives cleared for circulation, 2 that are pending signature verification and 41 pending at the Attorney General's office. Initiatives that we will be following closely include the perennial anti-abortion parental notification initiative, a personhood initiative and attempts to repeal SB 48 which would repeal the bill that ensures the contributions of gays are included in school texts.

So, yes. We will be busy in 2012. I hope you will join us in our meetings and activism.

Steph Campbell

Evolution Censorship in Turkey

Reported by the National Center for Science Education: "Evolution" ranks alongside pornography and terrorism as topics that the Turkish government's controversial new Internet filtering scheme keeps out of the hands of children," according to a post on the ScienceInsider blog (December 9, 2011). The Hürriyet Daily News (December 8, 2011) reported that a website explaining evolution was blocked for children by the new filtering scheme." Users choosing the "children profile" for their internet connection are able to access "only several types of web pages such as public and educational websites," the newspaper explained.

Acknowledging that the block was subsequently lifted, ScienceInsider observed that nevertheless, "science advocates and Internet freedom activists say it's a

worrying sign of the government's attitude toward evolution." Aykut Kence, a biologist at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, told the blog that the censorship "shows the mentality of people censoring the websites ... Apparently they thought that this was deleterious for kids." Kence added that the creationist websites operated under the Harun Yahya name were available "without any restriction."

For the ScienceInsider story, visit:

<http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2011/12/controversial-turkish-internet-c.html>

For the Hürriyet Daily News story, visit:

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/internet-filters-block-evolution-website.aspx?>

Religion: A growing, changing God lobby in D.C.

<http://pewforum.org/Press-Room/Pew-Forum-in-the-News/Religion--A-growing,-changing-God-lobby-in-D-C-.aspx>

The number of organizations engaged in advocacy work linked to religious issues has increased fivefold in four decades. Believe it or not, politicians used to be able to assume that when the U.S. Catholic bishops spoke on an issue, that meant that the nation's Catholics had spoken.

That was so mid-20th century. Before long, Catholic liberals — backed by Playboy's Hugh Hefner and others — would dare to create a pro-abortion-rights group called Catholics for Free Choice.

Before long, American Catholics would become so divided that traditionalists felt the need to form a group called Priests for Life.

Catholics were not the only believers rocked by the earthquakes of the 1960s and '70s. Evangelicals ventured out into the public square, inspired first by a born-again Democrat from Georgia and then by the Hollywood Republican who promised to defeat him. The Protestant mainline declined and then splintered. Pluralism and globalization tested old coalitions and inspired old ones.

All of this caused radical changes in the nation's capital. The number of organizations engaged in advocacy work linked to religious issues has increased fivefold in four decades — from 37 in 1970 to at least 211 today.

"No matter how small the group, everyone feels the need to open an office in Washington, D.C., so that their voices can be heard," said political scientist Allen D. Hertzke of the University of Oklahoma, lead researcher for a new study of religious advocacy groups conducted by the Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life. "All of this is evidence of the growing pluralism on the American scene and the fact that religion is playing an even more prominent role in our politics."

According to this survey, Catholics of one stripe or another are behind one out of five (19 percent) advocacy groups with offices in Washington, and evangelical Protestants support almost as many (18 percent). While 12 percent of these groups are Jewish, only 8 percent represent the old Protestant mainline. In fact,

Muslims support 17 advocacy groups, while the historic mainline churches now have 16.

Hertzke said it's significant that the largest category — one-quarter of the groups studied — consists either of interfaith groups or organizations that work on religious issues that involve believers in multiple faith traditions. Nearly two-thirds of these groups work on both domestic and foreign issues.

While one church-state lawyer's "advocacy" is often another's "lobbying," 82 percent of the groups in the Pew Forum study operate as nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations. Thus, they focus most of their work on public-policy issues broadly defined, as opposed to specific legislation or candidates.

However, the survey's broad definition of "religious advocacy" included "attempts to influence, or urge the public to influence, specific legislation, whether the legislation is before a legislative body, such as the U.S. Congress or any state legislature, or before the public as a referendum, ballot initiative, constitutional amendment or similar measure." It also included "efforts to affect public policy, such as activities aimed at the White House and federal agencies, litigation designed to advance policy goals, and education or mobilization of religious constituencies on particular issues."

It was easy to describe the groups doing this work in the years after World War II. They were "largely denominational," explained Hertzke, each representing a specific body of believers — Catholics, Jews, Baptists or mainline Protestants, such as Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians and Lutherans.

By the start of the 1970s, evangelicals were gaining power through the growth of nondenominational groups, educational institutions and media ministries. Then *Roe v. Wade* changed the shape of American politics — especially for evangelicals and traditional Catholics.

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Meanwhile, President Jimmy Carter inspired some Baptists and infuriated others. The ground was moving.

Many of the advocacy groups launched during this period were ecumenical or interfaith, uniting liberal and conservative believers on opposite sides of hot-button social issues. At the same time, some historic churches began to splinter.

In the '90s, religious activism went global in a world transformed by the fall of the Soviet Union, digital

communications and growing Third World concerns about poverty, human rights, AIDS and religious liberty. Meanwhile, the face of religion in American began to grow more complex before and after 9/11.

"There has definitely been a globalization of religious advocacy work, with all of these trends and issues making their way back to Washington," said Hertzke. As a result, "ecumenical and interfaith work is now normal."

We all live and work in the same world, now. Everything is connected." ###

What To Ask At A Candidate Forum



Americans United and the Interfaith Coalition have come up with ten questions to ask candidates at town halls and political events.

Pick the one you like and ask.

- 1) Leaders on the religious right often say that America is a "Christian Nation." Do you agree with this statement?
- 2) Do you think Houses of Worship should be allowed to endorse political candidates and retain their tax exempt status?
- 3) Do you think public schools should sponsor school prayer or, as a parent, should this choice be left to me?
- 4) Would you support a law that mandates teaching creationism in my child's public school science classes?
- 5) Do you think my pharmacist should be allowed to deny me doctor-prescribed medications based on his or her religious beliefs?
- 6) Will you respect the rights of those in our diverse communities of faith who deem same-gender marriage to be consistent with their religious creed?

7) Should "faith-based" charities that receive public funds be allowed to discriminate against employees or applicants based on religious beliefs?

8) Do you think one's right to disbelieve in God is protected by the same laws that protect someone else's right to believe?

9) Do you think everyone's religious freedom needs to be protected by what Thomas Jefferson called "a wall of separation" between church and state?

10) What should guide our policies on public health and medical research: science or religion?

If you get an answer don't forget to let us know we'd like to publish them in our next newsletter. Just tell us the candidate, the office, the question and the response. Thank you!



Top Ten Peacemakers in the Science-Religion Wars

http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/science/5508/top_ten_peacemakers_in_the_science-religion_wars



This year has marked, I believe, the beginning of the end of the war between science and religion. Creationism cannot last. The New Atheists are now getting old. And between these camps the

middle ground continues to expand.

Indeed, many folks have been hard at it, doing a new kind of peace work. Some have done it intentionally, some have not. Outliers, both atheist and religious hardliners, continue to wage battle but they look increasingly irrelevant.

Here are ten who, in small ways and large, have helped to spread seeds of peace on the blasted-out battleground of science and religion.

10. Karl Giberson, *science & religion writer and former physicist, for reminding evangelicals that science is not the enemy*

This has been a big year for Giberson. In February his book, *The Language of Science & Faith*, co-written by Francis Collins, was published; October saw the release of *The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age*, which Giberson penned with Randall Stephens. In both books Giberson comes forward as an evangelical Christian who embraces science.

It is in *The Anointed* that Giberson most forcefully carves out a uniquely evangelical space along the science-and-religion spectrum. This is a good thing, because in recent decades evangelical Christianity has found itself sidelined (due in large measure to its own mistakes) from a host of broader cultural and scientific conversations. Giberson writes, "The intellectual isolation of evangelicals has led to their near-universal rejection of evolution... a 2005 Pew Research Center survey revealed that almost two-thirds of evangelicals believed that 'humans and other living things have existed in their present form only.'"

Knowing that no expression of faith that rejects science can long survive, Giberson has cleared new science-friendly space for his co-religionists.

9. Jon Huntsman, *US Ambassador to China, former Governor of Utah, candidate for the 2012 Republican nomination for president, for decoupling conservative politics and creationism*

You know it's bad when a candidate draws attention to himself for openly trusting scientists to do science. But that's the kind of year the GOP's having. This year's field of Republican presidential candidates has distinguished itself as possibly the least science-friendly in history. Rick Santorum's over-the-top infatuation with creationism aside, Michele Bachmann has been especially vocal about her dislike of evolution. "I support intelligent design," Bachmann told reporters earlier this year. "There is reasonable doubt on both sides." As if this was not enough, in November she cried censorship (!) when asked if the teaching of intelligent design did not violate the First Amendment:

I think what you're advocating for is censorship on the part of government... if you look at scientists there is not a unanimity of agreement on the origins of life... I think the best thing to do is to let all scientific facts on the table, and let students decide.

Rick Perry's and Ron Paul's views are not noticeably different, despite Paul's non-retraction retraction of his opinion expressed in 2007.

In the midst of this, Jon Huntsman tweeted in response to one of Perry's comments about evolution and climate change, "To be clear. I believe in evolution and trust scientists on global warming. Call me crazy." Huntsman is currently behind and looking to independents in New Hampshire to draw his name back into the light at that state's Jan. 10 primary. One wonders if his August tweet has anything to do with his current prospects.

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Whether or not it does, one thing is clear: his not-so-subtle suggestion that conservative politics is capable of standing apart from creationism is—if nothing else—refreshing.

Oh, Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich get honorable mentions for not embarrassing themselves—on the evolution question, at least.

8. Jon Stewart, *political satirist, for shining light on American Atheists' frivolous lawsuit against the inclusion of the Ground Zero cross in the 9/11 memorial museum.*

In July American Atheists filed a lawsuit against those who planned to display a cross-shaped piece of wreckage at the 9/11 memorial.

In their statement, American Atheists said that the cross was a reminder to Christians “that their God, who couldn’t be bothered to stop the Muslim terrorists or prevent 3,000 people from being killed in his name, cared only enough to bestow upon us some rubble that resembles a cross.”

Predictably, FOX News had a field day. Glenn Beck called the lawsuit “hateful.” Mike Huckabee mixed it up with American Atheists president David Silverman. And no one in the center cared, because that’s what supposed to happen. The missiles flew overhead. We yawned tremendously.

Then, into this scene stepped a most unlikely player: Jon Stewart. In a hilarious three-minute clip, Stewart made the lawsuit look exactly as silly as it is and pointed out its hurtfulness to the cause of... atheists. Mimicking Silverman, Stewart declared that, “As president of the American Atheist organization, I promise to make sure that everyone, even those who were indifferent to our cause, will f---ing hate us.”

Like it or not, Stewart’s opinion matters. I suspect his three-minute jab did more to moderate the discussion and alienate the outliers than anything Beck or Huckabee could ever dream up.

7. Nidhal Guessoum, *astrophysicist, for reminding us that, in the minds of nearly 1.6 billion people, “science and religion” does not mean “science and Christianity”*

The creationism-science debate is leaving American shores. It is being held in Arabic, not English, and focuses on the Qur’an, not the Bible.

As Islam has no central teaching authority, there is no easy way to gauge worldwide Muslim opinion of evolution and there are few hard data on Muslim views of evolution. Yet what data there are indicate that full acceptance of the theory is very low, somewhere between 10 and 20 percent. Salman Hameed, writing in Science, says, “Biological evolution is still a relatively new concept for a majority of Muslims, and a serious debate over its religious compatibility has not yet taken place.”

Guessoum, a professor at the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, is one of the few devout Muslims who are actively advocating the full-fledged acceptance of modern science. In January I.B. Tauris published his book, Islam’s Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science. It has helped shape the debate in powerful ways. Hameed writes of the book,

There are very few good books out there that tackle the issue of Islam and science in a rational way. Often we find apologetic writings that grossly misunderstand science and end up doing a disservice to both Islam and science. Then we have books that address the issues of science and religion, but without a deeper understanding of religion. It is very rare (and I’m quite familiar with the terrain) where the writer takes both religion and science equally seriously. Nidhal’s book is in this rare category.

Thanks to Guessoum for charting new territory.

6. Jack Templeton, *surgeon, president and chairman of the John Templeton Foundation, for bringing science into the church.*

You’d think science education would be easy and enjoyable: Look, kids! Isn’t the world amazing? Isn’t it wonderful?

But no. It’s been tough slog in 2011 to keep even good science curriculum in the classrooms of some states. But textbooks are a tiny problem compared to *getting science teachers to teach science*.

According to a study published by *Science* in January, only 28% of all biology teachers consistently teach evolution, 13% consistently teach creationism (intelligent design), and 60% waffle around in the middle somewhere, consistently failing to present evolution as the established scientific theory it is. Among the 60% are those who “teach the controversy,” fooling kids into thinking that what is not science, is science; that science and opinion are interchangeable; and that there is scientific disagreement about evolution, when in fact there is none.

Where does all of this start? I’ll tell you: in American churches. Many churches are responsible for perpetuating the lie that evolution is scientifically controversial; many are responsible for painting science as intrinsically godless; many actively work against science education. But many more sit by in silence, not asking questions about evolution, thinking it doesn’t matter or being afraid of the answers.

Here’s the good news: earlier this year, the John Templeton Foundation put nearly one million of its dollars into local churches, with the goal of empowering parishioners—mostly science professionals—who have personally reconciled the claims of science and their religious commitments.

These churchgoers will be leading classes on evolution in their churches, advising church staff on how to incorporate science into curriculum at all levels of instruction, holding forums in churches on a range of scientific topics, and generally bringing the excitement of modern science to congregations everywhere.

5. Chris Stedman, *interfaith activist and super-swell atheist guy, for decoupling atheism from science, and for being the face of a kinder, gentler atheism.* This year saw the softening of the atheist universe. Perhaps the Four Horsemen came out hard because they had to, but in their wake have emerged atheists who are more interested in dialogue and shared values than in pounding the snot out of other people’s notions of God.

Don’t get me wrong; Stedman is the real atheist deal. He’s just not throwing grenades. In a May *HuffPo* piece he told the story of a Christian who challenged his atheism, saying, “OK, but tell me this, Mr. Atheist: Where did we come from? How did all of this get

here?” Stedman writes, “I answered: ‘Well, I’m not a scientist, but to be honest, that question doesn’t matter all that much to me. I’m not especially interested in how we got here; what concerns me, given that we are here, is what will we do?’”

It is a real step forward to have a public atheist who treats atheism as a perfectly plausible philosophy that does not obsessively look to science to prop it up. Of course he may, if you were to ask him, say that science told him there is no God. But he may not. We’ll have to wait for his memoir, (F)a(i)thiest, due out next year, to find out.

4. Rachel Held Evans, author, speaker, blogger, for making science and religion her thing, but not her main thing.

Rachel Held Evans’ first book, *Evolving in Monkey Town*, came out in 2010. Her next, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, will see daylight in 2012. So this may seem an odd year to recognize Evans. But it’s not.

During 2010 she publicly engaged the likes of Albert Mohler and Ken Ham, insisting that her generation of evangelical Christians is turned off by the debate on which they are so fixated. In *USA Today* she is quoted to say, “My generation of evangelicals is ready to call a truce on the culture wars. It seems like our parents, our pastors, and the media won’t let us do that. We are ready to be done with the whole evolution-creation debate. We are ready to move on.”

Her full acceptance of evolution will not be lost on the thousands who read her upcoming book, and the next, and the next, whatever the books may be about. That she is taking a mature and battle-tested view of science into her evangelical future is a game-changer for science and religion dialogue in America.

3. All Those People Who Are Not Backing the Ark Park, *for keeping the sure-to-be-divisive Ark Encounter from its scheduled August groundbreaking*

If they don’t build it, they won’t come. A field of dreams sits waiting in Grant County, Kentucky, not far from Cincinnati and less than an hour’s drive from Answers in Genesis’ Creation Museum. The dream? Ark Encounter, a “one-of-a-kind historically themed attraction, centered on a full-size, all-wood Ark, which should become the largest timber-frame structure in the USA.”

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All year, I have been watching the fundraising thermometer at the [Ark Park blog](#). It's been moving really slowly. I wish I had recorded the data as the months rolled by, but it seems safe to say that, at current rates, it will take another five years to meet the \$24.5 million goal set by the Ark Encounter masterminds (this is a small fraction of the project's \$150 million price tag). I suspect that's not what they have in mind; they have publicized an opening date of 2014.

Is there a connection between the glacial fundraising rate and the groundbreaking that wasn't? I suspect so, but perhaps not. I don't have access to the [financial details](#), and I know enough about fundraising to know that these things aren't always so simple.

But the fact remains: fundraising has not moved along at the hoped-for pace. Someone out there, lots of someones really, have opted out of supporting the park.

I thank them. Such a park would only harden the edges of science-and-religion debate, distract many from the depth of scripture, harm science education, and be the occasion for much heat and little light on the good discussion brewing out here in the middle.

Here's hoping the lights never go on for the overwrought, divisive dream called Ark Encounter.

2. Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, for reminding us that being ethical does not depend on belief in a personal God—nor, particularly, on science

Long an advocate for the harmonious coexistence of science and religion, HH the Dalai Lama this year brought us [Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World](#). In it he calls for us to look to our shared inner values. They are “kindness, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, and generosity,” and they represent the greater part of ethics.

In contrast, the particularities of different religious traditions tend to divide: “Any religion-based answer to the problem of our neglect of inner values can never be universal, and so will be inadequate.” And science, “for all the benefits it has brought to our external world, has not yet provided scientific grounding for the development of the foundations of personal integrity.” He therefore looks beyond both religion and science for a secular ethics. Although His Holiness has spent the overwhelming number of his years in a monk's robe, it is the man's great humility that allows him to see beyond his own tradition to the needs of the

greater world. For he must know that all religious systems—his own included—are merely signs pointing beyond themselves.

1. Terrence Malick, filmmaker, for reminding us that art may be the most compelling way to reconcile science and religion

“Preachy,” [they said](#). “Self-absorbed,” [they said](#). “A gargantuan work of pretension,” [they said](#). Overwrought, pompous, ponderous, and just plain too much.

But this was the minority opinion of Terrence Malick's [The Tree of Life](#), released in May.

“The only other film I've seen with this boldness of vision is [Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey](#) and it lacked Malick's fierce evocation of human feeling,” [they said](#). “The sheer beauty of this film is almost overwhelming, but as with other works of religiously minded art, its aesthetic glories are tethered to a humble and exalted purpose, which is to shine the light of the sacred on secular reality,” [they said](#). “Shot with a poet's eye, Malick's film is a groundbreaker, a personal vision that dares to reach for the stars,” [they said](#).

True to its title, [The Tree of Life](#) is [explicit about its biblical roots](#). The opening quotation comes from Job: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” The pastor in the film preaches on Job and the central couple, Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien (played by Brad Pitt and Jessica Chastain), lose a child. And, just as happened to old Job, Mrs. O'Brien is counseled by a well-meaning but insensitive woman who offers nothing but platitudes: “He's in God's hands now.” (Mrs. O'Brien's response: “He always was.”).

Shortly after this scene, just as happened to Job, we are treated to expansive scenes of creation. But we get more than Job did. The biblical writer knew of the starry firmament and of the beasts of the land, sea, and air, but we 21st-century Jobs get more: cosmic evolution; the formation of the Milky Way and its spiral structure; the ignition of the Sun's nuclear fire; the molten, churning mass that Earth once was.

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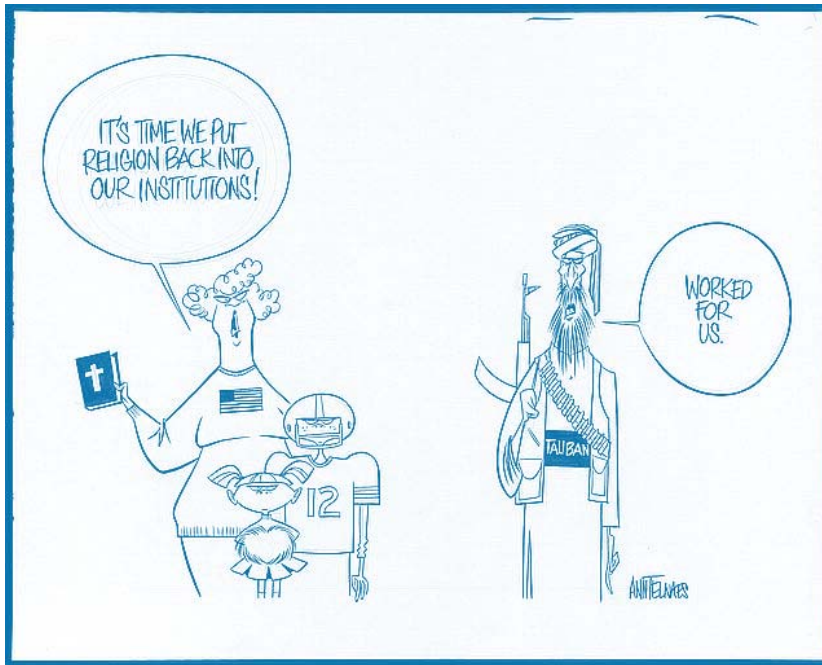
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We also see the development of life at its most rudimentary, molecular level; the emergence of life from ocean to land; several dinosaurs; and eventually primate and human life.

All sincere efforts at answering big questions draw near to the abyss of silliness, and some critics expressed woe at the juxtaposition of late Cretaceous dinos and middle-class 1950s Waco. I'm good with it. Those dinosaurs were here, really here, in our world, for nearly two hundred million years.

It is indeed a strange and beautiful world. Malick, in his graceful and courageous film, reminds us that it is made stranger and more beautiful the more we open ourselves to it.

Both the closed-hearted scientism of atheist hardliners and the narrow creationism of religious fundamentalists kill our strange and beautiful world by flattening it beyond repair. They deny its depth and mystery. Malick, in joyous contrast, has shown us—through art and not through argument—just how wondrous and surprising it is to live life out here in the middle. ###



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We're on the web
at www.au-oc.org

Americans United-OC Chapter
2781 W. MacArthur Blvd., Suite B, Box 152, Santa Ana, CA 92704-7095
Email: orangecountyau@yahoo.com



Special Event! February 12

Barry Lynn

**Americans United for Separation of Church and State—
Executive Director**

Jan 7—1:30 pm “Mt. Soledad Cross” with plain-
tiff Steve Trunk.

Feb 4—1:30 pm “**Religion and the Military**”
with Jason Torpy of Military Atheists and Free-
thinkers.

Mar 3—1:30 pm—Flicks for Thought.
“**God In America: A New Eden**”

All regular meetings are at:
Irvine Ranch Water District
15600 Sand Canyon Ave, Irvine.
Steering Committee meets after
each general meeting. All are invited.

Keep Up To Date with Americans United-Orange County

In addition to the newsletter, keep informed with what's going on in the fight to preserve separation of church and state, as well as our calendar via the web at www.au-oc.org. Visit us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Americans-United-Orange-County-CA-Chapter-AU-OC/242192172475419>

or follow the discussion at our Yahoo! Group. If you're not on the Yahoo! Group, send an email to: au-oc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

We meet every month except December at the Irvine Ranch Water District, 15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine on the 1st Saturday of the month at 1:30 pm, doors open at 1:00 pm. Come early for a good seat.

Irvine Ranch Water District neither supports nor endorses the cause nor activities of organizations which use the District's meeting rooms that are made available as a public service.

Membership Form

Basic membership is \$25 and includes an annual subscription to Church & State magazine. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and donations beyond the \$18.00 value of the subscription to Church & State magazine are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Email any questions to orangecountyau@yahoo.com.

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***Renewal notices are sent to members at the beginning of each calendar year
with a thank-you gift incentive for renewal in January or February.***