

Atheist

Tithing without God

—by Mark Berger

Editor's note: Mark Berger co-founded Aggie Atheists at UC Davis, served on the Steering Committee of San Francisco Atheists, and has dabbled in organized atheism for over 25 years. He currently enjoys membership in ACA and American Atheists, plus the fellowship of job-seekers and lapsed tithers in Austin. This article is adapted by the author with permission from Free Inquiry magazine, 24(1) December 2003/January 2004. Copyright ©2002 by the Council for Secular Humanism.

And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord.

—Leviticus 27:30 (NKJ)

Sometimes the Lord sayeth something worthwhile. That's why she gets the big office. The Christian notion of tithing goes way back, and it's one hell of a program for getting, growing, and keeping cash flow in an organization.

The Pew Forum's US Religious Landscape survey of 2007

reports that over 240 million Americans (78%) identify themselves as Christian. Some Christians (and Orthodox Jews) advocate and encourage the tithe: a commitment of 10 percent of one's income to the church and charities, off the top, before paying more pedestrian living expenses. If I were to build a church, I'd do the same. There would be regular cash flow, guaranteed monthly contributions that probably outpace inflation, and the chance to strike it rich when one of my "children" finally bets on the right horse. Now, most generous Christians fall short of the full tithe: they contribute an average of about 2.6% of disposable income, according to The State of Church Giving Through 2007 report. Still, American Christian churches collect about \$55 billion each year from tithing and by just asking for it. That's just plain brilliant, and it sucks for us.

Tithing has a long and storied history well-covered in *Free Inquiry* and other publications. Your local librarian will be happy to help you if you wish to research the subject. Take the case of Collette Larsen, a home-



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maker and mother, who found herself divorced and abandoned with two handicapped children. She started a direct-marketing business, worked diligently from her home, and took care of her kids. In five years, she was the top rep, had a great income and a huge enthusiasm for her work. She also gave the first 10 percent of her millions to her local church and to support cystic fibrosis (CF) research. In 2002, Collette was the world's top individual contributor to the fight against CF. In memory of the daughter she lost to this awful lung disease, she has committed to remaining so for the rest of her life.

Too bad she's not one of us. Her combination of skill, drive, upward mobility, and success—plus her willingness to tithe monthly—make her a valuable supporter of her causes. Financial planners will tell you to pay yourself first. Fund your 401(K) before you pay the mortgage,

buy the groceries, or spend it on beer. The money set aside comes out of your paycheck before you even see it, and you don't even miss it. After a few years, you realize you have some serious money saved up. And when you retire, you're going to love eating smoked salmon instead of Fancy Feast.

We should be doing the same for atheism. OK, so we grew out of the God thing, and we don't go to church on Sunday (we go to Threadgill's). But we have needs. We need a voice in Washington, some magazines to read, advocates in every city, a legal fund, and a moment of science in every single school—and we need some money to make it all happen. And you know what? We all have a little bit—some more than others, some hardly any at all, but we all have something to share, I'll bet. My voice isn't quite so

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About ACA

ACA provides opportunities for socializing and friendship, promotes atheistic viewpoints, encourages positive atheist culture, defends the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, opposes discrimination against atheists, provides outreach to atheists in the greater Austin area, and works with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

ACA produces a live cable access TV show and Internet radio show, presents a monthly lecture series, maintains a library of freethought books, protests in support of civil liberties, and participates in various community service activities.

ACA operates in an open and democratic manner to provide a community of like-minded people for social interaction and support.

ACA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational corporation made up of volunteers. The membership is restricted to atheists, but does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, or disability.

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Aug. _____	July 1
Sept. _____	Aug. 1
Oct. _____	Sept. 1
Nov. _____	Oct. 1
Dec. _____	Nov. 1

Tithing

—continued from page 1

booming as God's, and I can't really smite you with locusts or sores, but let me try handing down a little commandment: Give the first 2% of your income to something you really love. Give the first 2% to the noble

struggle to create a post-religious world, a world where we live fully in the life we have rather than for the afterlife we won't get. Two percent is still less than the believers give, so is it really too much to ask? Take my word for it: it only hurts a little, and it feels really great.

Endowing a nonprofit organization with regular and reliable

income is like helping someone to retire with a fat pension. It's like being General Electric's Jack Welch—the money is there, the stuff you want is paid for, and the bourbon is really, really smooth. Every person who wants to change the world in his or her image can help create this sort of financial independence and security in their favorite organizations. Make a monthly contribution, automatically deducted from your checking account, and try to forget about it. After all, you don't sweat every latte you drink, do you? A few bucks a few times a week and you've got some real money there. Keep drinking the coffee, by all means, but give a few cups' worth to the fight against loopy thinking and the celebration of science, reason, compassion, and pleasure.

Two percent, that's all I ask. Do it today, before you spend it on beer. ■

Special Events

The ACA Pub Crawl with slither from Dog & Duck Pub on March 20th at 6:30pm. Organizer Tony VanderHeyden has plotted a route and made up limited edition t-shirts. Check the Web site for event details.

ACA Member Manuel Serratos is collecting books to be given to prisons to provide educational material to the inmates. There are plenty of religious books

in prisons, but very little free thought or scientific material. The Inside Books Project (www.insidebooksproject.org) is seeking to remedy this problem. Manuel notes that religious books have little impact on reducing crime. If you have books that you no longer want, consider bringing them to a regular Sunday meeting and giving them to Manuel on behalf of this charity. ■

ACA CALENDAR

THURSDAY, MARCH 4

• 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

SUNDAY, MARCH 7

• 8 a.m.-?: AHH Giveaway (7th under I-35. For more information, see www.atheistvolunteers.org/Austin)

• 10:30-11:45 a.m.: Pre-lecture Brunch Meet-up (Hickory Street)

• 12:15-1:45 p.m.: ACA Lecture Series (Austin History Center) Kathleen Johnson from MAAF will talk about church-state separation in the military; Free

• 4:30-6 p.m.: The Atheist Experience (Channel 16)

• 6:30 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, MARCH 11

• 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, MARCH 13

• 2-3:30 p.m.: Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show (See Web site for details)

• 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting (Romeo's)

SUNDAY, MARCH 14

• 12:30-1:30 p.m.: Board Meeting (Romeo's, outside)

• 4:30-6 p.m.: The Atheist Experience (Channel 16)

• 6:30 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, MARCH 18

• 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, MARCH 20

• 6:30 p.m.-?: ACA Pub Crawl (Dog & Duck Pub). The crawl departs at 6:30 p.m. or meet at Fado around 7 p.m.

• 11 a.m.-12 p.m.: Adopt-a-street Clean Up (North Location: Jack-in-the-Box on the Northeast corner of Burnet & Anderson)

SUNDAY, MARCH 21

• 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting (Romeo's)

THURSDAY, MARCH 25

• 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, MARCH 27

• 2-3:30 p.m.: Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show (See Web site for details)

SUNDAY, MARCH 28

• 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting (Romeo's)

• 4:30-6 p.m.: The Atheist Experience (Channel 16)

• 6:30 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (Threadgill's)

REGULAR LOCATIONS:

- **Austin History Center**, 9th and Guadalupe. Building opens at noon. Lectures are free and open to the public.
- **Dog & Duck Pub**, North of the Capitol, 406 W. 17th at Guadalupe, 512.479.0598. Informal gathering; food available.
- **Hickory Street**, 8th and Congress
- **Romeo's**, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.
- **Threadgill's**, 301 West Riverside Drive (at Barton Springs Rd.)

Unless otherwise indicated, events are open to all atheist and atheist friendly people, regardless of ACA membership status. Check the calendar on the Web site <www.atheist-community.org/calendar> for last minute changes.

Membership Renewal Time

—By Don Baker

The ACA membership year starts on March 1st. This means that most members need to renew their membership. Dues have increased this year for the first time in years. Individual memberships are \$30 per year. For families, it is \$45. For students and retirees, it's just \$15. Lifetime membership is still \$1,000. To renew online, please log in to the ACA web site and click on the "Renew Your Membership" link on the left. Doing so will help us keep our records current. You can pay directly via PayPal using your credit card or

send your check made out to "ACA." If you would like to add a donation with your payment, please note that fact on your check. Alternatively, you may use the form below to renew. Either mail in the form or bring it and your check to a meeting and give it to one of the board members. Ultimately, it will go to ACA Treasurer, John Iacoletti, who will process your membership. Cash payments are discouraged.

Your membership allows you to receive the Austin Atheist

newsletter and other official ACA communication. It allows you to vote in elections, and membership is necessary to run for the ACA board. Being a member tells us that you are invested in the ACA and its activities and you are a participant in the group's success. A large membership base gives the ACA influence within our larger community. Numbers matter, and larger groups are taken more seriously. Your membership helps the ACA have an impact. Currently, we have over 170 members.

ACA Board elections will occur at a special election meeting on May 2nd at the Austin History Center in lieu of our usual lecture. All members are encouraged to attend and we encourage interested members to run for President, Vice President, or one of the at-large board seats. The February 2008 Austin Atheist (available online) had an article on the election process and board member responsibilities. ■

Renew your ACA Membership

Membership fees are \$30/year for individuals, \$15/year for students and retirees, and \$45/year for a family. Lifetime membership is \$1000. Our membership year begins on March 1st.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION for the ATHEIST COMMUNITY of AUSTIN, INC.

Please fill out the information below if your information has changed or make corrections to your mailing label, as necessary, on the opposite side of this form.

Last Name

First Name

Companion's Name (for family membership):

Last Name

First Name

Street

City/State/Zip

Phone

E-mail

Please make your check out to ACA in the amount above depending on your membership type. Any amount over the membership fee will be considered a tax deductible contribution to the ACA.

New members must complete the following membership affirmation:

This is to certify that I am a non-theist, that I have read the Purpose Statement of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. (appearing on Page 2), and that I am in agreement with the principles stated therein. I understand that membership is only open to non-theists.

Signature

Date

Signature (Companion)

Date

Please return this form and payment to: Atheist Community of Austin, Inc., P. O. Box 3798, Austin, TX 78764 or bring it to any ACA event and give it to an ACA board member.



Atheist Community of Austin
 P. O. Box 3798
 Austin, TX 78764
 www.atheist-community.org

ATHEIST EVE

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What do you call a
 Fundamentalist Muslim
 who reads the Koran?

"Faithful"

What do you call a
 Fundamentalist Christian
 who reads the Bible?

"Faithful"

What do you call a
 Fundamentalist Christian
 who reads the Koran?

"Skeptical"

What do you call a
 Fundamentalist Muslim
 who reads the Bible?

"Skeptical"

WHAT DO YOU CALL SOMEONE WHO CRITICALLY EXAMINES OTHERS' BELIEFS, FAR DIFFERENTLY THAN HIS/HER OWN? "HYPOCRITICAL"

Atheist wear available at www.cafepress.com/atheist_eve