

"Religions are all alike
— founded upon fables
and mythologies."

President Thomas Jefferson

Critical Thinker

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Pope Pius XII: Monster or Saint?

by James E. Archer

President, United States Atheists

Who was Eugenio Pacelli? He was Pope Pius XII, sometimes called Hitler's Pope, because he was Pope throughout the Second World War and a close collaborator with the Hitler regime.

Was he a monster who supported the Nazi mass killings? Not really; the story is more complicated and more interesting than that. Was he a great spiritual/ethical leader as some claim? The answer here is easier: absolutely not. What then was Pacelli?

The key to understanding Eugenio Pacelli lies in understanding his core political nature and how that nature worked itself out in a world at war.

Put simply, Pope Pius XII was an authoritarian. Specifically, he believed that the Catholic Church must be ruled by a Pope with absolute and unquestioned power. His enemies included fellow Catholics who wanted the church to be more democratic and more attuned to the concerns of the laity. The key to his appalling behavior lies in his absolute contempt for democratic principles.

A little known fact about pre-Nazi Germany is the role played by lay Catholics in opposing Hitler. Indeed Hitler understood well that the key to achieving power was to neutralize the power of the Catholic Center Party.

Pacelli was appalled by his fellow Catholics, including many priests, who had publicly spoken out against the Nazis. He spent months negotiating with Hitler over an agreement, called

the Reich Concordat, which defined the relationship between Nazi Germany and the Church.

This agreement, to which Hitler devoted more time than any other such matter, had two main components. First, it granted power to the Pope to impose Canon Law. Second, it guaranteed the Church would not challenge the power of the Nazi Party.

Canon Law consists of rules defined by the Catholic hierarchy that govern Church activity. The Reich Concordat granted absolute power to the Pope, via canon law, over all aspects of the Church in Germany.

The most powerful opposition to Hitler came from the Catholic Center Party. It was dominated by lay Catholics, most of whom were opposed to Hitler. Under the Reich Concordat, the party was dissolved and Catholics were told, in effect, to cease opposition to Hitler.

With the collapse of the party, many Catholics joined the Nazi party, believing they had the support of the Pope in doing so. Without Pacelli's pursuit of absolute power, it is perhaps likely that Hitler would never have become the leader of Germany.

Pacelli, in order to achieve absolute control of the Church in Germany, made a pact with Hitler that eventually resulted in the worst atrocities of recent history. ■



Upcoming Events

Weekly Meetings

Every Tuesday, 7:30pm Join us at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland. Guests and the public are always welcome.

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| July 01 | Speaker: Nancy Powell |
| July 08 | Social/discussion |
| July 15 | Work/discussion |
| July 22 | Open forum |
| July 29 | A Surprise |
| August 05 | Speaker |
| August 12 | Social/discussion |
| August 19 | Work/discussion |
| August 26 | Open forum |

Please note that meeting topics are subject to change.

"Bunk Busters"

"Bunk Busters" is the TV show produced by USA and co-hosted by Jerry Billings and Kendall Auel. It is cablecast through Portland Cable Access on Comcast Cable. For more information, contact Alfredo Torrejon at bunkbusters@unitedstatesatheists.com.

Schedule (subject to change):

| | | |
|-----------|--------|--------|
| Tuesdays | 7:30pm | Ch. 22 |
| Saturdays | 1:30pm | Ch. 23 |
| Sundays | 2:30pm | Ch. 11 |

Web Site

Be sure to check our ever-improving Web site for the latest information. www.unitedstatesatheists.com

Dial-An-Atheist

For a weekly message of common sense, dial 503-ATHEIST (284-3478).

Critical Thinker

For complete submission guidelines, go to www.unitedstatesatheists.com/criticalthinker/. Deadline for next issue: August 15, 2003. Send to criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com. We are currently developing rates and guidelines for advertising in the *Critical Thinker*. For more information, please check our Web site or contact the editor at the e-mail address given above.

Spending Easter With a Group of Atheists

Words and photos by Nancy Powell Vice President, United States Atheists

On Easter weekend I was honored to be a guest speaker at the annual Atheist Alliance International Convention in Tampa, Florida. I have so much to share that I will not be able to get it all in one article, but here are some of the highlights.

What is the Atheist Alliance? The Atheist Alliance International (AAI) is an organization of independent religion-free groups and individuals in the United States and around the world. Their primary goal is to help democratic atheistic societies become established, grow — and work in coalition with like-minded groups to advance rational thinking. All income goes to public outreach projects and to helping member groups increase their membership and effectiveness. The Alliance sponsors annual conventions, publishes *Secular Nation* magazine and the *Freethought Directory*, maintains a Web site that hosts member society's Web sites free of charge and has a national distribution network for atheist videotapes on public access TV.

Why is this kind of coalition important? Blind religious mania is a rising threat to society. It seeks to repeal the advances made in establishing civil



Q&A session. From the left: Michael Newdow, myself, Margaret Downey, Herb Silverman and Michael Shermer. Moderated by "Pastor Deacon Fred" (standing).

rights and civil liberties for all citizens. It seeks to abolish our First Amendment right to freedom of and from religion. It encourages a global population explosion that is destroying the environment and creating immense human suffering. It is, through a heavily-funded political machine, making a major effort to get organized prayer and religious observances into schools and other public venues and creationist doctrines into science classes. Schemes abound to acquire taxpayer funding for parochial schools. Religious zealots, not content with self-regulation, seek to censor the reading and viewing choices of us all. An Inquisitional spirit infects everything from politics to the Boy Scouts — and sometimes even the workplace. The Alliance focuses the power of these diverse, independent groups to facilitate common purposes and give atheism a growing voice in public affairs. With a nationwide, united effort, the Alliance can persuade legislators and educate the public to recognize the threats to freedom from basing laws and policies on religious doctrines.

What the heck did I have to offer? I

the father opposed to the Pledge of Allegiance being recited as policy in his daughter's school. Second was Margaret Downey, who has fought diligently to have the Ten Commandments removed from public court houses. Lastly was yours truly, who is pursuing non-discrimination by attempting to ban recruitment in the public schools by the Boy Scouts of America, who will not allow "our kind" to join or volunteer. I also sat in on a panel of five speakers for a question and answer session. The panel included Michael Newdow, myself, Margaret Downey, Herb Silverman and Michael Shermer. It was moderated by "Pastor Deacon Fred," one of the funniest men I have ever met. Check out his Landover Baptist Church Web site at www.landoverbaptist.org.

The convention was a smash and there were many events I must tell you about! First was a field trip to the water stain version of the Virgin Mary. I thought it looked a bit like Marge Simpson or a large swollen thumb, but what do I know? This stain was caused by a faulty sprinkler shooting water

was pleased to be a part of a three speaker routine entitled "The Supremes." Each of the three speakers has a Supreme Court case outstanding that will help shape the landscape of religious freedom in our nation. First was Dr. Michael Newdow, who is



Richard Dawkins (left) presents the first annual Dawkins Award to James Randi for his lifetime achievement of debunking the supernatural.

What Would Jerry Do?

by **Jerry Billings** Treasurer & Co-host of "Bunk Busters," United States Atheists

God, The Inventor

Imagine an automobile that was claimed to be perfectly designed and made by the gods, as a matter of fact. In fact, this automobile will run for the next two thousand years without ever giving you a problem. And here is the guaranty that the dealer will give you: If anything ever goes wrong with this vehicle, God will personally repair it so that it is as perfect as new. Whenever your car breaks down, just call it to the god's attention and you will see a miracle before your very eyes; your car will be repaired with new parts and the sons who will spring from your loins will be eager to drive this wonderful automobile for the next 500 generations. The Xian says "I want it. How do I get it?" The Skeptic says "Wait a minute here. How do you figure that your car is perfect if God has to perform miracles from time to time to keep it running? Is your god a mere tinker, not quite able to make a car that is really perfect?" The God or gods of the *Bible* are nothing more than tinkers, too. According to their book, it is necessary for repairs to be made to Earth to keep it running. Miracles are performed on a daily basis to keep it in its orbit, to heal humans from various maladies and to speak to the preachers (who have a monopoly on explaining His intentions) so that they can tell us what to do or not to do to keep God happy. A god who tells us that creation of Earth and all life on it are perfect but who is obviously exaggerating his own capabilities cannot be more than a heavenly neighborhood mechanic.

*Jerry Billings, Atheist
(Will the real god please stand up? Where is he?)*

Bible Teaches How to Win the War

If only the believers would read their book. There are clear instructions on how to win the wars in the Middle East. Are you ready? Well, here it is: "But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth" (Deuteronomy 20:16). "Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city [of nonbelievers] with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword" (1 Samuel 13:15). "And that day Joshua took Makkedah, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof he utterly destroyed them and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain: and he did to the king of Makkedah as he did unto the king of Jerico. Then Joshua passed from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, unto Libnah, and fought against Libnah: And the Lord delivered it also, and the king thereof, into the hand of Israel: and he smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain in it" (Joshua 10:29-30). "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (1 Samuel 15:3).

*Jerry Billings, Atheist
that's the way to fight
a war if you are a believer.*

Join us at our weekly Tuesday night meetings, 7:30pm at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland.



"Virgin Mary" sprinkler stain on a building

high into the sky and all over some windows. There were several stains around the windows of the building at lower levels (from natural splashing), but since they looked more like amoeba than virgins, nobody came to see them. What do you think? And more important, how much money will you send?

There were so many quality speakers and so much information to share that I will have to write another piece at some later date. I'll tell you about such things as the "God Helmet," which actually inspired supernatural feelings from brain manipulation, and what Michael Shermer thinks about morality. For now, the important thing is that a representative of United States Atheists was on the scene and we were able to share in this progressive event. I encourage all of you to attend one of the many atheist conventions offered annually, and especially to come to the Oregon Secular Symposium. They are a real thrill! ■

Atheist Alliance International:
www.atheistalliance.org/

Oregon Secular Symposium:
css.peak.org/symposium/

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You may also join at any of our regular meetings held every Tuesday evening at 7:30 at the above address. Contributions are also gratefully accepted at our meetings.

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Welcome to the **new** *Critical Thinker!*
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