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 (SORT)

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For past issues, bibliography, links to other skeptics, and more, check out the SORT Website:

[www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html](http://www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html)

For more about the co-founders of SORT, see

[www.spangenburgandmoser.com](http://www.spangenburgandmoser.com)

**December**  
**SORT Meeting**  
**Tuesday,**  
**December 28, 2004**  
**7:30 P.M.**

La Sierra Community Center  
 Room 800, 5325 Engle Road  
 Carmichael, CA

# The **SORTified NEWS**

**"Doubt is the beginning of wisdom."**

—Clarence Darrow

## **Dec. 28 SORT Meeting** **IS SANTA CLAUS COMING** **TO TOWN?** **The moral dilemma of** **Christmas**



In the spirit of the holidays, we thought that we would take up an old and perplexing question for the December 28 SORT meeting. It might also take us back to our own childhood—the days of Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, ghosts on Halloween, and dozens of other fantasies and fairytales that filled up, and to be honest often brightened, our childhoods. Most of us grew up with these stories and somehow along the way we discarded them. Now, though, as we raise our own children, help raise our grandchildren, or find ourselves in a corner when the bright-faced nephew or niece asks hopefully, "Is there really a Santa Claus, Uncle Ray?" we find ourselves facing a small but awkward moral dilemma. Sometimes we may try to get around answering the question (at least in the case of a

**MEETING DAY:**  
**TUESDAY EVENING**  
**LOCATION:**  
**ROOM 800**

We are meeting in Room 800 at La Sierra Community Center in Carmichael on the last Tuesday (the 28th) of December 2004, returning to the customary last Wednesday of the month in January 2005.

*Driving directions on page 3.*

grandchild, nephew, or niece) by shifting the responsibility, "What did your daddy or mom say?" If mom or pop told the truth, then we can just smile and say something like "It's still fun though isn't it?" But if the child hasn't asked them, or was told that of course there is a Santa Claus (or Easter Bunny, Tooth Fairy, or three wise men who found their way to a manger), how do we reply? A small dilemma perhaps but one that puts us on a spot. How we answer may mean as much to us as the child.

Join us and include an interesting evening of intelligent discussion in your holiday plans. As usual, besides the splendid talk, we will have free coffee, cookies, soft drinks, and other goodies on hand to keep the cold winter night at bay.

Remember that due to circumstances beyond our control the

December meeting will be Tuesday, the 28th (the last Tuesday of the month), at La Sierra Community Center, Room 800.

We will be returning to our usual last Wednesday of the month schedule in January.

## CASTING THE NET

Well as usual this time of year book deadlines, grinch-type editors, and the busy nature of the holidays have taken their toll on our freewheeling web roving. We have managed a few good catches, though. In keeping with our belief that we should always know as much as we can about the other side, and in this case excuse the pun, you might want to take a look at the International Survivalist Society web site at [www.Survivalafterdeath.org](http://www.Survivalafterdeath.org). It not only gives you some up-to-date information and insight on what's currently going on in the circles of what used to be called "spiritualism," but more importantly is packed with information, biographies, interesting papers, articles, case histories, and books on the historical aspects of this fascinating area of human belief.

While we are on the subject of web browsing, if, like us, you've become a little tired of downloading fixes for Microsoft holes, you might want to give the free Firefox browser from Mozilla a try. It's neat, clean, and simple, uncluttered with unnecessary bells, whistles, and sloppy workarounds. It also has its own pretty effective pop-up blocker, downloads in only a few minutes and is open source software. You can find it at [www.Mozilla.org](http://www.Mozilla.org)

Hold on to your IE browser in case you're not satisfied with Firefox but we've been running

ours for a couple of weeks now. No problems so far and we are quite happy with it.



## ON THE BOOK BEAT

Responding to a query in a discussion after the last SORT Meeting, we managed to squeeze out a little time to search our files and bookshelves, turning up a number of interesting articles and papers on the influence of Christianity on the occult and supernatural. In the process we pulled from our shelves once again the excellent book entitled *The Supernatural, the Occult and the Bible* by Gerald A. Larue, published by Prometheus Books in 1990. As a measure of the book's excellence we should note that even in the midst of deadline pressure Ray started to take a few notes and ended up spending the evening until the wee hours reading it through again, cover to cover. You're not too likely to find it anymore at any of the major bookstores, but you might be able to find it by checking a good library or used bookstore, or by getting in touch with Prometheus Books. A few copies may also be available at Amazon.com It will be well worth any effort you put into it. Larue, a highly respected biblical scholar, lays out a pretty solid body of evidence for his argument that Christianity must

## The Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT) . . .

- Is dedicated to the promotion of rational thinking in all areas of life.
- Upholds the superiority of science over the mystical.
- Promotes and supports all efforts of intelligent communication that provide a counterpoint to the strong waves of anti-rationalism, irrationalism, and mysticism sweeping the world today.

## Toward these ends we . . .

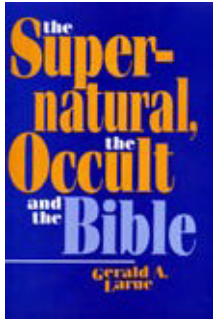
- Host a monthly discussion group.
- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Host special events, talks, and presentations.
- Host a web page.

While SORT began with and still continues to be concerned with the promotion of critical thinking in areas dealing with the pseudo-scientific, the paranormal, the mystical, and the fraudulent, we strongly promote critical thinking in *all* areas of human thought and endeavor.

The core of SORT activities is our discussion group. The art of intelligent conversation is not dead. We at SORT believe that rational conversation--the meeting of minds, the free exchange of ideas and the provocative stimulation of critical questions-- is one of the most civilized and enlightening of all human activities.

SORT discussion topics have ranged from UFOs to the Holocaust, from "alternative medicine" to the problems in communicating science to the public, from classic and recent cons and scams to the teaching of critical thinking. Our discussions are hosted by one of the SORT founders, and participants are by no means limited to experts (although they may include experts) but are made up of intelligent and questioning people concerned with the topic of the evening.

carry a major portion of responsibility for, as the book's dust jacket explains "some of the more foolish and often dangerous excesses of occult practice." Closely examining the Bible and occult beliefs and texts, again quoting the book jacket, Larue "examines the scriptural underpinnings of occult and supernaturalistic notions that survive in contemporary society."



Along the way Larue argues his point with close looks at Biblical passages, verse and belief, and such occult and "new age" beliefs as channeling, Satanism, guardian angels, astrology, faith-healing, out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, psychics, seers, and witchcraft. How many bad trails has the "good book" laid the foundations for? Larue provides some insights and answers some will find disturbing, while others will nod their heads in sad agreement.

**SORT MEETING**

**Tuesday, December 28**  
**Room 800**

**7:30–9:30 p.m.**

La Sierra Community Center  
5325 Engle Road  
Carmichael

**A FINAL WORD**

As the depressing, violent, and occasionally surreal year of 2004 ends and an unknown and perhaps frightening new one begins, it might help to keep in mind a few words from Marcus Aurelius: "Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present."

Happy holidays, and take care – your editors, Ray and Kit

**BOARD OF ADVISERS**

**Terry Sandbek**  
Psychologist

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**Bob Steiner**  
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**Lauress Wise**  
Mathematical Psychologist

**About the Founding Members:**

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 52 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

*For more information, contact:*

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**GETTING TO LA SIERRA COMMUNITY CENTER**

**From Highway 50:** Take the Watt Avenue exit and head north. Turn right on Marconi, by the Raley's store. Travel east on Marconi to Walnut and turn left. Travel north on Walnut to Engle and turn right. Turn left at La Sierra Community Center. Follow the road past the main parking lot and along the east side of the building. Room 800 is in the second building on the left (just past the open, grassy area). Park, look for the SORT sign, and come on in!

**From I-80:** Take the Madison exit and head east. Turn right on Garfield and head south. Turn right on Gibbons and left at La Sierra Community Center. Follow the road along the east side of the building. Room 800 is in the last building before the open, grassy area. Park, look for the SORT sign, and come on in!

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## RATIONAL COMMUNITY

# CALENDAR

### **December 28: *SORT Meeting***

*Topic:* “Is Santa Claus Coming to Town? The Moral Dilemma of Christmas”

*Time:* Last Tuesday, 7:30–9:00 p.m. (social period until 9:30)

*Place:* La Sierra Community Center, Room 800, 5325 Engle Road, Carmichael.

Everyone is welcome and all meetings are free. (In January, mark your calendar for the 26th, the last Wed.)

### **January 14: *Sacramento Skeptics***

*Second Friday:* To be announced.

*Topic, Time, and Place:* To be announced.

For details, contact Liam McDaid, (916) 558-2005, [mcdaidw@scc.losrios.edu](mailto:mcdaidw@scc.losrios.edu)

### **January 9: *Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF)***

*Time:* Second Sunday, 2:30–5:30 p.m.

*Speaker/Topic:* To be announced.

*Location:* Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10, 2791 24th Street. (South of Broadway). Light refreshments. The public is welcome.

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*Educating Ourselves  
and Educating Others*

**Sacramento Organization  
for Rational Thinking  
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED