

SOFFIN Bio for Tubac Historical Society

Dr. Alan Soffin (Ph.D. University of Illinois) has taught philosophy and education at Temple University. After post-doctoral study in documentary filmmaking at the University of Pennsylvania, he received an American Film Institute grant for his *avant garde* feature film, *Confessor* (1968). In photography, his photo exhibition, "Big Sky," was mounted at the Apogee Gallery, Falmouth Massachusetts.

Dr. Soffin has recently published essays on religion, philosophy and culture in the Mennonite magazine, *Dreamseeker*. His work in philosophical theology, *Rethinking Religion: Beyond Scientism, Theism and Philosophic Doubt*, will soon be released by Cascadia Press.

Now in retirement, he teaches courses in epistemology and religion at Delaware Valley College's adult learning center and continues work with both still and moving imagery.

The following is excerpted from the lecture he gave ("The Religious Meaning of Death") at the Tubac Center of the Arts in conjunction with the first (2007) showing of "In a Believer's Graveyard." (The photography comprising the exhibit was accumulated over five years when Dr. Soffin lived half-time in Tucson.)

"During many wonderful years in Arizona, I found myself repeatedly drawn to the small cemetery on the outskirts of Tubac. The photographic and textual work, "In a Believer's Graveyard" is the outcome of that attraction.

For a photographer, the graveyard's lively presence in a vast and silent landscape cried out to be preserved. Yet, early on, I found myself

aware of something else—something more than its flowers and personal remembrances—something of religious import deeper even than its heartfelt doctrines. It was the call of this underlying “something” that returned a non-believer every year to a believer’s graveyard.

For I was also a philosopher—one whose notion of ultimate reality conflicted with the worldview that informed the graveyard’s prayers. Indeed, it was the very starkness of this difference that forced into my consciousness the fundamental sameness of our mortal circumstance.

We desire that death be overcome, that love should have no end. Death speaks to the mystery of our existence, to the famous—or infamous—“meaning of it all.” There, in the graveyard, in the presence of such palpable yearning and sorrow, love and hope, I could not help but be moved, camera in hand, beyond the critical responses of philosophy.”