

# JUNE 1996

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## Ex-Fundamentalist Speaks to AOF

*AOF member Jon Pederson, who was once a fundamentalist preacher, addressed our group at the general meeting in May. The title of his presentation was "Fundamentalism: A personal Perspective." He began by saying that he would speak about what fundamentalism is and what it is not, about his journey, and about the future of fundamentalism. The following is a summary of his presentation.*

When I was a fundamentalist, I all but memorized the entire Bible and it was very near and dear to my heart. The Bible is accepted by millions of people as an unquestionable authority and this provides a strong foundation and basis of power.

What is the appeal of fundamentalism and how has it gone on from generation to generation? I suggest that the appeal is in the answers that the Bible provides to the basic questions of life: Why are we here? What is it all about? What's going on?

There is something about a childlike faith that is very touching. It is an incredible experience when we believe, when we live that faith.

Fundamentalism offers a structured way to be right. It offers a transcendent reward, and that reward is heaven - kingdom, rulership, something beyond death, something in the life "hereafter." This is very powerful. What an incredible book, to offer eternal life.

When I got out of fundamentalism I realized just how sexist that belief system really is. In fundamentalism most of these lords and positions of leadership in the "kingdom" seem to be only for men. In preparing for this talk, I went on the world-wide-web and encountered an old friend from my days as a fundamentalist. He has changed his name from Jacob Hawkins to Disrael Hawkins and he has a very impressive web-site at Yahweh.com. One of the items you can find there is "Unveiling Satan - Her True Identity Revealed." Part of the text reads, "Civilization as the dragon, that old serpent called the devil or Satan, prince of the power of air, the deceiver of all mankind, she, yes she, has made the statement, though incorrect, that no man would ever reveal her identity." This is a primary concept of fundamentalism that is not in mainstream Christianity.

Fundamentalism focuses on sin and redemption. The following three concepts paint a picture of this whole idea:

1. Obedience, especially to the elders and other church leaders. It is no accident that the New Testament talks about the flock, sheep and shepherds. The idea of obedience gives the shepherd a lot of power.
2. Fundamentalism values the collective whole more than the individual. Organizationally, this leads to things like fellowship and people being shunned if they are "disobedient."
3. With this emphasis on sin, fundamentalism trades on the powerful emotions of judgement, guilt and fear.

Fundamentalism offers a safe haven, an opportunity to share with other believers a faith in a stern, critical, austere, inflexible, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent being whose "love" is very conditional. The price is high, it demands your life.

A few things that fundamentalism is not. It is not rule by committee. The structure consists of the elders, usually men, and even they have a ranking order. When I was in high school, I learned that one of our teachers was very active in the LDS (Latter Day Saints) church. One time I told him, "Life is so confusing, I just wish I could go to a phone on the wall and talk to God." He said, "You can. We have a prophet in Salt Lake City who is in constant contact with God at all times and if you have a question, you tell me, I'll pass it along, and our prophet will give you an answer directly from God."

With fundamentalism, your personal, individual needs largely go unrecognized. Most of the time you do what the preacher says and it doesn't matter how you feel about it. For a while I was a Seventh Day Adventist. This was the only group I have been associated with that openly accepted therapy for people with emotional problems.

Fundamentalism is not a one-hour-a-week, two-holidays-a-year belief system. Fundamentalists tend not to be open to the idea that theirs might not be the one true religion on earth. This thought carried me along. Mr. Hawkins says on his Web page, "Welcome to the House of Yahweh, the pillar of truth. These are the only prophets at work with the creator for this time period on earth. Provides your first hypertext link to the truth and life eternal on this information superhighway. Congratulations! You have found the site that they don't want you to find."

Now for a little about me and my programming. As a child, I started out in a congregational church which was later combined with the United Church of Christ. Then my parents sent me to a Seventh Day Adventist parochial school for the fifth and sixth grades. At the age of ten, I took a vow of temperance. I never dreamed that I was carrying in my genes an addictive disease, and that years later I would have to struggle with alcoholism. This made that vow completely meaningless. That is one of the problems I have with the Bible today. Despite the claims of fundamentalism that this book has the answers, it doesn't help you much with physical ailments. Nor does it have the pragmatic answers to help people get along in the world.

For a while I was a member of the Quakers, Society of Friends, who are very nondoctrinal and definitely not fundamentalists. About that time, I was listening to a radio broadcast by Garner Ted Armstrong. I was hooked by his talk of the "plain truth of the world tomorrow." I became a coworker of the Worldwide Church of God. I was told later that they never would have baptized me because I asked too many questions.

A fellow who was working in the legal office at the Worldwide Church joined a group called the Assemblies of Yahweh in Pennsylvania. I was in my twenties, still searching, sort of a lost soul when he asked me to go live with him in Pennsylvania in 1972. I met my first wife there. I became the right-hand man and son-in-law of Jacob O'Myer who, to this day, is the leader of the Assemblies of Yahweh in Pennsylvania. I just discovered they have a Web page!

My marriage broke up in the 1980's. I came to Sacramento and for the next six years I became interested in physics, science, and new age science. Interestingly, new age science has sort of become a religion. In June of 1986 the *Sacramento Bee Magazine* had an article about ex-fundamentalism. As I read the article, I felt that they were talking about me. I identified with the people who had problems with sleep, anxiety, worry. I checked out the group they talked about, Fundamentalists Anonymous, and felt like I was with people who felt the same way I did and were struggling like I was. It was like an ugly divorce, or worse, to have invested my entire life in fundamentalism, the Bible, the beliefs, the organization, and then to just walk away from it all.

Our group met every week for about a year. Jerry Sloan visited our group several times and I still have many friends that I met in Fundamentalists Anonymous. What I learned from F.A. is that you can pick up the pieces and go on, and, realize that you are not alone.

Six months after joining FA, my thirteen year old son, Jeremy, was killed in an automobile accident. Another member had lost a five year old child in a drowning accident years earlier. I joined a support group, Compassionate Friends, for bereaved parents. I became very involved with them and was editor of their newsletter. This is where I met my present significant other and we've been together for 7 1/2 years.

Science continues to bring amazing discoveries to us, especially in the area of medicine and genetics. Human behavior, on the other hand, is becoming increasingly bizarre. Science and religion have combined to bring us longevity and uncontrolled population increases. I fear that some form of fundamentalism may win out because it is so effective in controlling huge masses of people. Two examples would be the Roman Catholic church and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Creationists have a minor problem with science today, and that is the fossil record. They're not really eager to talk about the fossil record. They've made up their minds and they don't want to be confused with facts. Huge masses of people can be manipulated and taught to believe a total lie, because they are too afraid to question it.

I worry that the social problems today could fuel a passion for a type of fascism, a simplistic black and white way of being in the world which is fundamentalism. I'm concerned about a potential revolt against technology, against government, and even against freedom. We've already seen evidence of that recently in this country.

Finally, as you think about fundamentalism, remember that there is a word that goes with it, and that is hypocrisy. No human being can measure up to the impossible doctrinal standards arbitrarily set by fundamentalists, and at the same time, be a sensitive, loving, giving, compassionate person.

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## Quote of the Month

I would call your attention to the importance of correcting an evil that, if permitted to continue, will probably lead to great trouble in our land before the close of the 19th century. It is the acquisition of vast amounts of untaxed church property...In a growing country, where real estate enhances so rapidly with time as in the United States, there is scarcely a limit to the wealth that may be acquired by corporations, religious or otherwise, if allowed to retain real estate without taxation.

The contemplation of so vast a property as here alluded to, without taxation, may lead to sequestration without constitutional authority, and through blood. I would suggest the taxation of all property equally, whether church or corporation.

- Ulysses S. Grant  
Message to Congress  
December 7, 1875

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## President's desk - Pride

At first with great reluctance, but now with great anticipation, I will serve as AOF's new president. I'm energized and looking forward to the next twelve months. There is interest from other members to run for president next year, so my job will be to keep the club in good shape, then turn it over to new leadership for the next term.

Having served on AOF's Board for the past three years, I know the history of our club and its past presidents. During our first year, Jeanie Brent formed the organization nearly out of thin air! Our second year brought the illustrious and ingenious Paul Geisert who devoted a great deal of time, energy, and talent to AOF. Our third year brought a kinder, gentler Betty Simonsma, who showed compassion and understanding to believers and non-believers alike. How will I make my mark? My plans for our fourth year will be to:

1. Cheerfully conduct General Membership and Board meetings in an orderly and timely fashion.
2. Enthusiastically support and recognize AOF's active members and project leaders.
3. Vigorously support projects like the highway cleanup, charity dinners, Freethought forum discussion group, and other non-AOF projects like the Freethought cable access program.
4. Strongly encourage the promotion of AOF (especially display advertising) to increase AOF's membership.
5. Happily serve as Program Chairperson, scheduling knowledgeable and enlightening speakers from both AOF's membership and outside organizations.

And, to be clear, my plans for the upcoming year do **not** include speaking on behalf of AOF as a church/state separation issue expert, or engaging in debates about religion with local media or other groups. Instead, I will provide information about AOF's goal to promote the understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community.

Should any of you have concerns or questions about AOF's leadership or direction during this new term, please drop me a line or call me, or talk to me at a General Membership meeting, or attend a Board meeting to express your concerns. I will be responsive to your questions and ideas and will address important issues to the best of my ability. Thank you, and I hope you all enjoy AOF's fourth year in Sacramento.

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## New AOF Board Elected

The election of the AOF Board of Directors was held at our May General meeting. The results are as follows: President, Karen Abbe; Vice-President, Cleo Kocol; Secretary, Kay Dickey; Treasurer, Ed McConnell; Directors-at-Large, Don Massey, Edgar Brichta, Heather Lucio, Roland Roberge, and Kay

Stinson. Congratulations and thank you to our new board as well as to those officers who have just retired.

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## **Charity Dinner**

AOF will be serving up another delicious dinner for those in need on Friday, June 21 from 4:30 to 6:30 pm. The location has moved from the Hagginwood Center to the Robertson Community Center on Norwood Avenue, which is a larger, newer, facility.

As usual, we will need cash donations and volunteers to serve the meals and to clean up. Kay Stinson, who is in charge of the project, has planned a no-cook menu this time so cooks and bakers will not be necessary.

If you would like to volunteer to help out, you may sign up at the next General meeting on June 9th, or leave a message on our voice mail system (916) 920-7834). Kay will get back to you with the details.

If you would like to donate cash you may do so at the General Meeting or you may send a check (payable to AOF) to PO Box 15182 Sacramento CA 95851-0182.

Thank you for all your generous support of this very gratifying project.

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## **FYI Freethought News You Can Use**

**Freethought, Critical Thinking, Independent Reasoning, Open Inquiry**

### **OABITAR (Objectivity, Accuracy and Balance in Teaching About Religion)**

The OABITAR Program is the only viable and available educational program for achieving objectivity, accuracy and balance in teaching about religion in public and private schools. It is urgently needed to counter the assault on our public schools and "the wall" separating religion and government. OABITAR deserves our active support. Please buy the book and learn how Freethought has been present throughout the centuries.

## Read any good books lately?

If so, would you like to share them with the rest of us? Many times word-of-mouth is the only way that we can learn about good Freethought (they certainly aren't reviewed in the mainstream media). If you have read a book that you think others would be interested in, please write to us at *News & Views*. We'll publish the title and other pertinent information about it in the next newsletter, and in this way we can all become better educated and more enlightened freethinkers.

**News & Views, PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.**

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## Atheist Radio Host Comes to Sacramento

Tom Leykis, early evening talk radio host on KSTE, 650 am, whose discussions occasionally involve his atheism, is coming to Sacramento on Friday, June 14.

Mr. Leykis will do his broadcast from the station, and then host a listener party from 6-10 pm at Paragary's at Gold River, 2220 Gold River Drive, next to Chevy's. To get there, take Sunrise Blvd. to Gold River, turn north on Gold Express Drive, then turn onto Gold River Drive. Reservations are required as space is limited. If you want to reserve your place in the AOF crowd, call AOF and leave a message for Heather Lucio. ASAP!

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## Freethought Forum

The Freethought Forum will resume discussions on Sunday, June 16 at 4:00 pm at Peggy Lucas' home. The theme of the afternoon will be "Open Minds, Open Hearts, But Empty Pockets...or...How Can We as Caring But Cashless Iconoclasts, Communicate Creatively?" Please contact Peggy via our voice mail system (916) 920-7834) if you are interested in attending this forum.

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## June Program

AOF's General Meeting on Sunday, June 9 will feature Dan Dugan, who will present a scathing review of Sacramento City Unified School District's conversion of Oak Ridge Elementary School to a Waldorf "alternative" public school. Most people are not aware that Waldorf Schools promote the

pseudoscientific ideologies of Rudolph Steiner and his Anthroposophical Society. Anthroposophy is a religion based upon Rudolph Steiner's personal revelations of the "spirit world" and include the worship of a "sun god."

Mr. Dugan is a parent whose child was a student in a Waldorf school in San Francisco. He later removed his child from that "system" when he learned of the daily curriculum and practices of the school, such as beginning each class with a prayer "to God and the spirit powers of the soul."

As a charter school, the new Waldorf school in Sacramento will be publicly funded. In fact, \$100,000 in federal grant money is currently being used to train Oak Ridge Elementary School teachers in the Waldorf practices.

The Sacramento Bee (May 17, 1996) reported that Assembly Bill 198, which would increase the number of charter schools from 100 to 300, was passed by the Assembly but was defeated by the Senate Education Committee on May 15, 1996. However, the bill may be reconsidered at a future hearing.

Don't miss this opportunity to become more informed about this very crucial issue regarding the encroachment of religion into our public schools.

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## Five Positive Reasons to be an Atheist

*August Berkshire is on the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Atheists (member [Atheist Alliance](#)). His article (copyright 1986) is reprinted from their newsletter.*

Atheism is much more than simply not believing in a deity or other supernatural beings; it is a way of life. The following are five positive reasons to be an atheist.

1. *Intellectual honesty* This starts with a healthy dose of skepticism. It ends with the realization that holy books and beliefs should be examined critically. When this is done, they all fail the tests of reason and evidence. Supernatural beings are the product of imagination and indoctrination. You begin to think clearly, without religious contradictions or blind faith.
2. *Freedom* Because religion cannot prove its case, it must impose itself upon society. This includes a number of ridiculous rules and rituals you discard once you realize that have no basis in common sense or fairness. You are no longer a slave to arbitrary authority. You are free to think and act for yourself, and to develop your own code of behavior and ethics based on experience, compassion, and liberty.
3. *Power* Once you are honest with yourself and free from superstition, you are in a better position to help yourself and others. Blind faith and prayer are replaced by thinking and action. You no longer feel like a victim of fate or divine whim. You are in control of your destiny, able to take action on your own behalf.



4. *Compassion* Many religions, especially Christianity, advocate doing good works because a god will reward you. This is a selfish, dehumanizing concept, since it treats the recipient of aid as no more than a pawn - a staircase to heaven. An atheist helps another, not because of divine fear or bribery, but out of genuine compassion, doing good for its own sake. This caring may extend to other forms of life as well, since you no longer believe you have a "soul" that sets you apart from other animals and were sent here by a god to exploit the rest of nature. You realize you are a part of all nature and that we must all do our share to contribute toward a better world.
  5. *Self-respect* This occurs when you realize you are not a toy of the gods, playing out your life on earth's obstacle course. Since you have no belief in an afterlife or reincarnation, this life becomes much more valuable to you. And you take pride in knowing you have the ability to think, act, and care on your own, free from arbitrary authority and superstitious bribes and punishments. This is a tremendous responsibility and there are no easy answers. But the fulfillment that results is real and benefits not only yourself but all humanity.
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## Our Roman Year

The Bible quote, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," may have been the first historical reference to separation of church and state. The saying is familiar to most of us. Are we as familiar, however, with holidays that have been patterned after Roman celebrations?

### Easter

Easter is a holiday older than Christianity. On the day of Eostra, the goddess of planting and growing, the Romans gave their friends eggs dyed in various colors. These eggs symbolized the new life that returns to the earth each spring.

### Mother's Day

Americans first began to honor mothers nationally in 1911 due in large part to an unrelenting campaign by Anna Jarvis. She also suggested the wearing of white carnations, her late mother's favorite flower. Mother's Day, which many of us grew up believing originated with Jarvis, may have had its beginnings in the ancient spring festival, Hilaria, which was dedicated to the mother goddess, Cybele. The Romans called their version of this day, Matronalia, which they celebrated on March 1. In the United States, Mother's Day evolved from a regional church celebration to its secular national status today.

### Memorial Day

On this day in the United States, the decoration of graves occurs on a date nearly corresponding to the Roman's Rosaria (rose festival) when the Romans remembered and honored their dead. It's interesting to note that the Romans universally practiced cremation, not burial. The Caesar's left no bones to be studied, nor shrouds to be analyzed.

## **Christmas**

The pagan Saturnalia became today's Christmas, Pope Liberius, in the 4th century CE chose the date of the Roman holiday, probably because the people were used to celebrating at that time. Thus, he declared December 25 to be the birthday of Jesus Christ. Other ancient customs practiced during Saturnalia sound familiar today. People carried small lighted trees in procession and decorated their houses with greenery.

By celebrating these holidays in modern times the Roman legacy is carried on.

**by Cleo Kocol**

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## **Third Annual Hike**

The third annual AOF hike took place on April 27, 1996. Six AOF members met at the parking lot of the Nimbus Fish hatchery at 10:30 am. The day was perfect for hiking, warm but not hot, a bit of breeze, a cloudless sky, and compatible friends with whom to spend the day. We walked from the Fish Hatchery downstream along the American River Trail to Sacramento Bar where we stopped for lunch and conversation. Discussions ranged from anthropology and psychology to travel and philosophy. After a rest of approximately ninety minutes, we hiked back to the Hatchery, arriving at about 2:00 pm. everyone agreed that it was a day well spent, and we all look forward to next year's hike.

**by Hank Kocol**

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## **Cable TV Group to Meet**

Anyone interested in discussing or taking part in bringing about an atheist/Freethought cable TV program to Sacramento is invited to meet at Peggy Lucas' home on Sunday June 16 at 2:00. Call the AOF voice mail system and leave a message expressing your interest (*and name, phone, etc, of course*) 916 920-7834.

## **AOF Receives Check from United Way**

In May, we received our first check from United Way since Pat Kelley signed us up to be on their list of donees. Last year, when the United California State Employees Campaign passed through her office, Pat got the brilliant idea that AOF should be added to the list of charities and non-profit groups that state employees could donate to on a monthly basis by payroll deduction. We were on the list by December 1995 and Pat has been contributing to AOF in this way from that time.

86% of the amount donated is distributed to the donee groups. The amount of our check was \$103.00 Pat says that the amount of her payroll deduction is \$10 per month so we know that someone besides Pat is contributing to our cause. We don't know who that someone (or someones) is but we thank him/her/ or them and Pat Kelley for their generous support.

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## Calendar of Events

Sunday, June 9	General Meeting
Sunday, June 9	Newsletter Deadline for Submissions
Sunday, June 16	Freethought Forum Discussion Group
Sunday, June 16	Cable TV Group meeting
Wednesday, June 19	Board Meeting
Friday, June 21	Charity Dinner
Sunday, July 14	General Meeting