

# JULY 1996

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## President's desk

Did you know that AOF gets tons of newsletters from other Freethought organizations all over the country? Well, maybe not tons, but it's a lot. We have a newsletter exchange agreement with other clubs, so we get their newsletters and they get ours. The newsletters we get are organized into binders that can be borrowed at general membership meetings so you can find out what's going on in other groups across the country. We have about 20 binders put together to date.

I've been reviewing these newsletters and I'm delighted that we can track the progress of the humanist, skeptics and agnostics. Any philosophical differences we may have with these other organizations are far outweighed by the things we have in common, like maintaining the wall of separation between church and state. Maybe "maintaining" isn't the right word at this point, it's more like rebuilding.

It's also reassuring to hear about the similar struggles these other groups have had. Most of them go through the same hassles as far as finding a place for meetings and conducting business. They're shuffled around from libraries to coffee houses to private homes, just like we were before we settled on the Sierra 2 Community Center. They also tackle the problem of getting the word out through advertising and some have considered projects like Toastmasters and cable

access programs. Clubs also grapple with getting members to fill leadership roles and trying to avoid burnout for their all-volunteer armies.

Although AOF is only three years old and is still considered a new group, we have already tackled several of these problems experienced by other groups. We found a secular meeting facility, conduct ongoing charitable and community projects, have volunteers who produce a beautiful and informative newsletter, and present thoughtful presentations and accomplished speakers every month. And now, as a result of Cleo Kocol's participation in the [Atheist Alliance](#), clubs across the country will know just who we are and what we're up to.

Maintaining a relationship with other Freethought groups is important, not only to avoid becoming isolated, but so we can learn from the mistakes made by other groups. Maybe we won't agree on every issue but we can accomplish a lot by putting aside our differences and focusing on the things we have in common. Three cheers for solidarity!

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## Charity Dinner

Thank you to those of you who donated money and/or volunteered your time for making our most recent charity dinner a great success. Kay Stinson did a fabulous job of planning and coordinating the event (no small feat) and the many volunteers made the operation run like clockwork. Over 150 meals were served (including second helpings).

The menu for the evening was fried chicken, chicken-flavored rice, salad, french bread, chocolate chip cookies, lemonaid and coffee. We got many compliments from the guests and many sincere "thank you's."

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## AOF Cleans Up!

AOF really cleaned up - the highway, that is! It was early in the morning on Saturday, June 1 that nine dedicated members sallied forth and did the deed. The egrets were out also and some nests with eggs were found.

All of our previous cleaning made the day's work light, as there was not much litter on the roadside. AOF's adopted highway is a two-mile portion of Highway 99 between Elkhorn Blvd. and Elverta Road.

The next cleanup day will be on Sunday, August 18. We plan to start at 8:00 am., again to avoid the heat. Starting early worked out very well for us this time. More details about this event will be announced in the next News & Views, at the next General Membership Meeting, and on our Voice mail system.

If you would like more information on the Highway Cleanup Project, or would like to volunteer, call our voice mail line and leave a message for Hank Kocol.

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## June Meeting Report

Dan Dugan was the guest speaker at our general membership meeting on June 9th. He spoke about some of his concerns about the Waldorf Schools, which base their curriculum on the philosophy of Rudolph Steiner, an early 20th century German philosopher. Mr. Dugan discussed Steiner's philosophy called anthroposophy, an off-shoot of theosophy. He listed several ways in which anthroposophy can be compared to religious sects. Rudolph Steiner pulled together elements from Hinduism, Christianity, Mysticism, and Zoroastrianism.

Mr. Dugan's concerns also included the pseudo science and rejected science which is still being taught in the Waldorf schools.

During the question and answer period following the presentation, several members of the audience spoke on the importance of keeping church and state separate by not funding schools which teach religion, regardless of the quality of the academics being taught. Other people in the audience identified themselves as being Waldorf parents, teachers and administrators. They urged the audience and the speaker to check out the school for themselves.

For more information regarding Waldorf refer to [People for Legal and Non Sectarian Schools](#)

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## The *Bee* Gets it Right

Recently, the Sacramento Bee contained two articles which should help people see other sides of religion.

One was a story about a Latvian immigrant who is teaching math and science at Highlands High School. Vladimir Gavrilov is a physicist who also works at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory. Many of his students are from the former Soviet Union, and have a Baptist or Pentecostal

background. Gavrilov joked recently, "Not one of my students said the earth was created 6,000 years ago."

The other item was Pete Dexter's column: "Sometimes religion seems kind of weird." He wrote of a story about Curtis Scott who was hospitalized following a "frenzied revival meeting at the house of Prayer Church in Stinking Creek, Kentucky." Scott was handling a 50-inch rattlesnake to prove his faith. Dexter wrote, "You are not supposed to write that the fellow with the snake is not too smart. But it seems to me that when you survey the history of religion, when you review the burnings at the stake, the beheadings, the murders, the unspeakable torture and general carnage which have accompanied our belief over the years in a loving, personal God - when you look at religion in an historical context, ridicule is a completely appropriate response to the sort of thing Mr. Scott was doing last week in Stinking Creek, Kentucky,...[W]hatever you make of life and its meaning, you have to acknowledge that human beings come into this world with a unique potential to reason and learn; it is our fundamental asset."

by **Betty Simonsma**

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## July 1 is La Barre Day

This month the citizens of Abbeville, France, honor the 230th anniversary of the death of Chevalier de La Barre.

Never heard of him? How odd. But I'm sure you've heard many heartwarming tales of martyrs who died for sweet Jesus. The Chevalier was also a martyr. On July 1, 1766, the Church put him to death for failing to remove his hat while walking within 25 paces of a religious procession.

Before his execution, he was tortured. Inquisitors crushed his feet in the Spanish Boots, tore out his tongue with pinchers, and cut off his right hand. Then, the guillotine. Finally, they burned his body at the stake - presumably in case he had survived the beheading.

He was 19 years old.

Never known for half-measures, the Church also accused La Barre of failing to kneel, of singing a secular song, and of owning a philosophical dictionary by Voltaire. One wonders if he had been seen reading this shameless literature while belting out a godless tune as he wandered in his hat about the arcade. Such contumacy. But never mind. No citizen raised a voice in defense of the young Chevalier; such was the power of the Church in Voltaire's day.

Times have changed. In Abbeville, near Paris, eighty-nine years ago, fifteen thousand supporters of church/state separation gathered at the unveiling of the La Barre monument, erected by popular subscription. The monument, which indulges in a forgivable bit of poetic license, shows La Barre tied to the stake in supplication, his head very much in place. The French inscription at the base reads, "*Monument erected by supporters of free human thought.*"

Every year since, the good citizens of Abbeville have celebrated the memory of Chevalier. Demonstrators gather for one hour by the monument, then move to the plaza in front of City Hall for speeches and festivities in celebration of intellectual freedom. Recent gatherings have been smaller, but the La Barre Demonstration continues to bring together freethinkers, civil libertarians, and liberal believers of every stripe.

In a day when some Christians clammer for the abolition of the "separation myth," a return to Biblical law, and organized prayer in public schools, it is worth our while to think of the poor Chevalier, and remember how things really were when religion had a chicken-choke hold on public life.

For my part, I was cheered to learn that at least one monument has been raised to a Freethought martyr. It's a nice present for this summer solstice season.

by **Ken Nahigian**

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## Letters

### [Another Freethinker finds AOF](#)

Dear AOF members,

I just found out about AOF through a friend and I can't believe it! I have always been a freethinker. And now I know I'm not alone. I read the newsletter she gave me and enjoyed it a lot. WOW! I sure hope you keep it going and expand even more. I'm going to inquire more about it. Maybe I will be able to join. I don't know at the moment how my family will react. But I wish you all the luck in the future.

Thanks a million,  
A grateful citizen for now.

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## Tom Leykis Makes Appearance in Sacramento

AM 650 radio talk-show host Tom Leykis appeared in Sacramento on Friday, June 14th. AOF members attended a listener party held on his behalf that evening at Paragary's restaurant near Sunrise Blvd., Rancho Cordova. Tom Leykis occasionally refers to his atheistic perspectives when hosting his radio show, so we went to show our support.

During most of the event, Mr. Leykis surrounded himself with a bevy of beauties so we didn't get to have much contact with him; however a roving reporter with a video camera captured some of our comments. We expressed our appreciation for Mr. Leykis and his atheistic commentary, and we also got in a few good plugs for AOF!

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## **Another Bid for School Vouchers**

That ghastly animal otherwise known as school vouchers has reared its ugly head once again. I was advised that legislation on this issue was introduced and at first, I had a difficult time identifying which bill it was because this time proponents are calling the vouchers "opportunity scholarships." This wording is an attempt to obviate the anticipated screams and howls from concerned citizens (like me).

The "opportunity scholarships" will be allowed upon passage of California's Assembly Bill 3180. As of the date of this writing, the bill will be heard on July 3, 1996 in Senate Education Committee. If/when the bill passes out of Senate Education, then the next step is for the bill to be set for hearing in Senate Appropriations. I will continue to track the progress of the bill.

In a nutshell, passage of AB3180 would authorize pupils who attend "low-achieving" elementary or high schools (as defined and identified by the State Board of Education) to transfer to other public schools or private schools. The low-achieving schools would be required to transfer allocated funds to the receiving school districts or private schools for all transferring pupils. Approximately \$4,500 per child would be lost to the low-achieving schools for each pupil that transferred.

I can understand the concern of parents who want the best education for their children, but how can "low-achieving" schools possibly improve their performance or curriculum when public funds are removed from their budgets? This piece of legislation is an obvious attempt to get public funds to subsidize private (mostly religious) elementary and high schools. Public schools already grappling to make do with insufficient funds will be further strapped to provide quality education for children in California. Worse, private schools (religious or otherwise) are not subject to state teacher qualification standards or curriculum requirements so the public funds lost would not necessarily provide for better education of the transferred students.

I have no problem with parents who want to send their children to private schools (religious or not), but I believe it is inappropriate to use tax dollars to subsidize private schools. If a parent makes that choice for their child, let them pay for it on their own.

California voters soundly defeated a school voucher initiative in November, 1993. Voters were well aware of the initiative at the time and they voted it down by a 2 to 1 margin. In this case, we have to keep close watch on legislation introduced by our legislators, otherwise bills will be passed and issued like this will slip right through.

AB 9180 is being carried by Assemblyman Curt Pringle and is backed by Governor Wilson. As a nonprofit organization, AOF does not support or oppose legislation and some of you may, in fact, approve of the idea of school vouchers. Individuals who have an interest in this issue should write to one or more of the following:

Senate pro Tem Bill Lockyer, Senate Education Committee  
Chairperson Leroy Greene  
Governor Wilson

Letters to the editor of the Sacramento Bee wouldn't hurt either.  
**by Karen Abbe**

*PS: a word from the webster...You do not need to wait for Karen's next update to find out what's going on in our local government. Check out our [Government links](#) on the SFW page ...and don't forget to come back!*

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## • July Program

### **Brian Johnston Speaking on Assisted Suicide**

Mr. Johnston is the executive director of the Human Dignity Institute of Sacramento and has written a book entitled, *Death as a Salesman: What's Wrong With Assisted Suicide*. He considers himself an advocate of the "medically vulnerable" and has provided commentary for McNeil-Lehrer, CNN, World News Tonight, and William F. Buckley.

Mr. Johnston has been fully advised that AOF previously ghosted a speaker from the Hemlock Society, and it is his intention to provide ample time at the end of his presentation to allow for a vigorous question-and-answer discussion period. Join AOF members to discuss this extremely important topic.

**Sunday July 14 at noon, Sierra 2, Room 10 - SEE YOU THERE!**

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## Calendar of Events

July

Sunday, July 14      Newsletter Deadline for Submissions

Sunday, July 14      General Meeting

Tuesday, July 23     Board meeting

**August**

Sunday August 11      General meeting

Tuesday August 13     Dan Barker/John Morehead Debate

Wednesday August 14   Dan Barker Social Event

Sunday August 18      Highway Cleanup