

General Meeting -- Sunday, July 8

Pallo Deftereos will speak on "National Missile Defense (NMD) vs. the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM)." Pallo Deftereos is the Chairman and founder of the Sacramento Committee for Nuclear Arms Control since 1998.

After the speaker and Q/A session, a short workshop will be held so that everyone has the information they need to write their letters for "The Day That Counts," see inside for Tips for Writing.

June Speaker review

**"Illusions, Magic Pills, and Magnetic Bracelets –
A Skeptical Perspective"**

presented by Ray and Kit
submitted by Kevin Schultz

June's meeting featured the lively husband-and-wife team of Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser, founding members of The Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT). As stated on their web site, Ray and Kit are co-authors of 34 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the Skeptical Inquirer. They are also former co-editors of the Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS). Their writing focuses on reaching the young adult audience on topics of science and critical thinking.

Ray began the presentation by discussing his past experiences and how they have shaped his path to skepticism. Since a very early age, he stated that he wanted to be a writer. He learned much from his family, which includes an award winning journalist, a bank robber, and a professional con man. Ray learned much from each of them, although, he confides, he feels lucky that he learned the most from his journalistic uncle. Growing up in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, he realized that the tricks plied by his professional confidence-man uncle were pretty much the same as the methods utilized by religion to convince people of a belief in god.

The main point which he attempts to show people is how gullible they are. He quotes Richard Feynman -- "Science is a good way to keep from fooling yourself." Ray admits that pseudo-science

is where the market is today, unfortunately. He states an interesting point that while most people who believe in ghosts are high school dropouts, an alarming number of post graduate students believe in ESP. Overall, he argues that we should question and doubt everything. Learn. As Clarence Darrow once said, "Doubt is the beginning of wisdom." Honest people can be cheated. The art of the con man is in perceiving what people want, and then giving it to them.

Contact SORT at: (916) 978-0321, or
<http://www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html>

Dan Barker in Sacramento

submitted by Hank Kocol

On Wednesday, July 25, 2001, 7 pm, Dan Barker, Freedom From Religion Foundation, will debate John Morehead, Loomis Evangelical, concerning the resurrection. As AOF members know, this will be the third meeting between these debaters, the first on the existence of god, and the second also on the resurrection at the AAI Convention in Sacramento in April, 2000. This debate is sponsored by the

Bayside Covenant Church of Granite Bay.
8303 Sierra College Boulevard
in building called the "Dock" next to the church

There is no entrance fee for the debate. However, space is tight, so latecomers may not be seated.

AOF Board Members

*President: Kay Dickey
Vice President: Jody Craig
Secretary: Kevin Schultz
Treasurer: Ken Nahigian
Directors at large:
Mynga Futrell
Betty Simonsma
Don Knutson
Dave Flanders*

AOF Committees

*Atheist Alliance liaisons: Mynga Futrell, Hank Kocol
Highway cleanup project: Don Knutson
Internet website: Pat Kelley
Meeting facility: Betty Simonsma
Newsletter editor: Jody Craig
Voicemail system: Karen Abbe
Membership database: Betty Simonsma*

Atheists and Other Freethinkers is a member of the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies and Atheist Alliance, International.

MONTHLY FEATURE NEWS FROM ATHEIST ALLIANCE, INTERNATIONAL

Atheist Alliance Grants Funds to Atheist-Directed Project By Marie Alena Castle

In June the Atheist Alliance Int'l (AAI) board of directors voted to donate \$2,500 to Atheist Centre in Vijayawada, India. This donation is to help support an expansion of their criminal reform project.

Background info on the Atheist Centre:

The Atheist Centre, one of the original members of the Alliance, is unique among our member associations. Whereas many atheist groups engage in community service projects and activities in their local communities, none do so to the level or in the challenging conditions of this particular member society. Within its region, the Atheist Centre makes available social services quite varied in nature. (Some of its activities are akin to those that a Catholic Social Services or Jewish Family Services here might provide under contract with the government.)

Engaging in a criminal reform project in India is not the same as in the United States. When India was under British control, they actually established criminals as a caste and confined them to certain areas.

The caste system is India's primary hindrance to progress. It does no good to promote atheism *per se* in India because the culture is totally immersed in Hinduism, which is totally immersed in belief in reincarnation and the caste system. To undermine religion in India, it is essential to undermine the caste system.

The Atheist Centre's many projects focus on that in a number of ways. For example, the SAMSKAR criminal reform project to which AAI is contributing includes *interdining* as a means of reforming criminals who are actually designated as a caste (meaning that's how you are born, must live, and die.) This involves having members of different castes eat together – taboo in India. To the extent that you remove the taboo you weaken the hold of the caste system and therefore the hold of Hinduism, and therefore you advance secular thinking and the idea that one's destiny is one's to control and being a criminal is not foreordained.

India is a large, densely populated country, so any project will not have a major impact that is immediately noticeable. All anyone can do is chip away at problems. As someone said, those who wait until they can do a whole lot of good all at one time never do any good at all. In India, the options are to do what little one can or do nothing.

We hear about the wonderful works of Mother Teresa in India. The Atheist Centre does much more good many times over in many ways for many more people. But we don't have the propaganda machine of the Catholic Church working for us.

On the matter of cost. The SAMSKAR criminal reform project is projected to cost \$25,000. That may not sound like much in terms of the project's scope, but the dollar is valued above the rupee many, many times over, so \$25,000 goes much, much farther in India than it would here.

Two members of the AAI board, Marie Castle and Barb Stocker, have visited the Atheist Centre and have seen what they have there and how much they do, and it is very impressive, especially in comparison with the rest of the culture. We have every reason to be proud that Atheist Centre is a charter member of AAI.

Community Meal in Davis

Association of Farmers??

Five AOF members (Kay, Don, Sheree, Ken, Kevin) showed up at the last Davis Community for the setup and serving shift. New member, Sheree McDonald comments "It was rather comical when a woman from one of the other organizations asked what AOF stands for. She thought it possibly stood for Association of Farmers (or something like that--I believe she mentioned it to Kevin). Anyway, I really enjoyed working with everyone that evening. You can count me in for the next time. " Our next Davis Community Meals day is clean-up for the July 31 meal at St. Martin's church. We need 5 or 6 volunteers at 5:30 pm.

Freedom Fair

We had plenty of shade and a booth right next to the entrance for this year's tabling at a Lambda event. We remembered to take a sign up sheet this year and came home with over 20 names of persons interested in getting one of our free newsletters! The table was staffed in shifts by Kay, Jody, Hank, Cleo, Mynga, Jerry, Don, Paul G., Paul S., Dave F., and Kevin. We all enjoyed the opportunity for socializing, people-watching and listening to a variety of music.

SNR Letter

Paul Storey's reply to "True Nonbelievers" (May 3 issue) was published in the May 31 issue of *Sacramento News and Review*.

Greetings,

Your article entitled "True Nonbelievers" in the May 3 issue was entertaining and fairly objective, but I think Ching Lee missed a crucial point. Atheists don't believe, the same as scientists don't believe. A concept must be demonstrated, with its predictions tested and proven, in order to be accepted. Every theory is constantly open to revision, if new evidence alters old conclusions. This is the key difference between atheism and religious thinking.

The article mentioned belief, disbelief and faith numerous times. Significantly, the article did not contain any mention of objective evidence, double blind experimentation, reasoning, logic, critical thinking, conclusions leading to contradictions or fallacies. These are the tools atheists, similar to scientists, use to weigh the merits of competing hypotheses which are being postulated to explain our universe. Belief and faith lead to unchecked human folly, like human sacrifice to appease

bloodthirsty Mayan gods, the Inquisition, modern day Jonestown, Heaven's Gate and perpetual religious wars. Reason and the scientific method, as opposed to belief and faith, are the tools leading humanity out of the quagmires of mythology, superstition and religion. -- Paul Storey

My "Tax-Cut" Plans

by Kay Dickey

I have been thinking lately about how to spend the "tax-cut" check which will presumably be sent out sometime this summer by the Internal Revenue Service. My first thought was to donate the entire check to a political party. Then, I thought (briefly) about ripping up the check. Finally, I happened upon the idea of donating some of it to worthy organizations. AOF was the first organization that came to mind. I have several other non-profit groups in mind for smaller donations as well. Therefore, I am pledging to donate \$100 to AOF, and a lesser amount to several other organizations. I will at the same time be sending a letter to President Bush letting him know where I spent my "tax-cut" check. I refuse to spend it all on utility bills or at the gas pumps!

With all that's going on regarding religion and government, this summer seems to me to be a great time to make a tax-deductible donation to AOF. We nonreligious need to stand up and be counted. Besides Mr. Bush, perhaps I'll let even more of the folks in Washington know how important the issue of separation of church and state is to me.

Summary of AOF Board Actions and Announcements (June 24, 2001)

1. Motion passed to transfer \$500 from money mkt fund to checking to avoid account fee.
2. Discussed committees and need for help.]
3. Discussed setting up dinner plans during Dan Barker's visit.
4. Discussed August program.
5. Comic Press Ad will now include "No Brainer" Quip or Quote.
6. Discussed request for endorsement for debate between Paul Storey and preacher.
7. Discussed formation of speakers bureau to provide approved AOF speakers to outside organizations.
8. Develop e-mail tree for alerts.
9. Help write brief message for Sherry to deliver in Washington DC

Full board meeting minutes avail at general meeting.

Tips For Writing from www.thedaythatcounts.org

On July 17, **THE DAY THAT COUNTS** campaign hopes to mobilize hundreds of thousands of Atheists, Freethinkers, Humanists and others of "no belief" to flood Capitol Hill with a loud, clear message -- we oppose public funding of faith-based social programs! We are asking you, as one of the 27 million Americans who has no religious belief, to contact your elected officials, speak out against this legislation and stand up and be COUNTED!

Here's how you can help...

- Send a fax or "snail mail" to your Congressional Representative and U.S. Senator, or make a personal phone call. We suggest sending your letters so that they arrive on or near July 17. [Check the front section of your "Yellow Pages" for addresses of Congressmen or come to the July AOF meeting + workshop](#).
- Officials receive millions of e-mail messages every year. Unfortunately, e-mail does not carry the "weight" or impact which personal letters -- especially when handwritten -- do. Faxes are given more consideration than e-mail, but less than regular postal communications.
- Be sure to include your name, return address and phone number in your letter. Sign your letter at the bottom.
- Be polite and concise. Tell your elected representative that you oppose public funding of faith-based social programs. (Check out "[Talking Points](#)" section for background). We suggest that your letter not exceed more than one or two pages in length, at the maximum.
- Ask your Representative or Senator to respond, and give his or her position on this important constitutional and legislative issue.
- Consider including some of the following points in your letter...
- Public funding of faith-based social programs violates the constitutional separation of church and state, and forces millions of Americans who are Atheists, Agnostics, Freethinkers and others with no religious beliefs to fund organized religion.
- Already, there is evidence that "public" money cannot be separated from the religious mission of many groups eager to accept government funding for faith-based social programs.
- Faith-based initiatives and "partnerships" allow groups to discriminate in hiring and other practices on the basis of religious belief.
- Evidence is lacking to support claims that faith-based social programs are more effective than their secular counterparts. Even if these programs WERE more effective, though, they still amount to the imposition of a "Religion Tax" on the American people.

Together, we can defend the First Amendment separation of church and state. Stand up and be COUNTED!

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AOF's Statement of Purpose: The purpose of the association, Atheists & Other Freethinkers (AOF) is to promote the understanding and acceptance of Atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend Atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

Newsletter items should be submitted online to jjcraig@jps.net OR to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. Strongest preference is given to articles submitted online in a PC compatible word processing format such as WORD, WORDPAD, or NOTEPAD. Then attach (or insert) your file to the e-mail and send. Any info that is written in the regular e-mail format is actually in something like hypertext and requires considerable editing on my older computer before it looks presentable in a newsletter, so only MAC users should use regular e-mail to send submissions--**HAVE A HEART**--attach your file!

THANK YOU, Jody Craig, ed.

Newsletter Freebie Policy: We'll send one free newsletter to any individual upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$8 per year. Or become a member and get this newsletter free as part of your membership!

Atheist Programming on Comcast (Sacramento) Cable

Channel	Date	Time	Title
74	Thur Jun 28	5:01 PM	Atheist Alliance Presents - Origins of Christianity
74	Thur Jul 5	5:01 PM	Atheist Alliance Presents - Democracy vs Theocracy
74	Thur Jul 12	5:01 PM	Atheist Alliance Presents - Grand Canyon Celebration
74	Thur Jul 19	5:01 PM	Atheist Alliance Presents - Carl Sagan
74	Thur Jul 26	5:01 PM	Atheist Alliance Presents - History's Silence About Jesus
74	Thur Aug 2	5:01 PM	Atheist Alliance Presents - Atheist Questions

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P. O. Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182

Name(s) _____ Phone (____) _____

Street _____ Apt _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Annual Subscription/Memberships

_____ Newsletter Subscriber only.....	\$8.00	_____ Family membership.....	\$30.00
_____ Low-income Member.....	\$10.00	_____ Patron.....	\$50.00
_____ Single Membership.....	\$20.00	_____ Donation.....	\$ _____

_____ Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.

**AOF
P.O. Box 15182
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182**

Calendar of Events

General Meeting, Sunday, July 8, noon - 2 pm, Sierra 2 Community Center.

Community Meal in Davis, July 31.

Board Meeting, Sunday, July 22, 9:30 am, open to AOF members.

Movie at Tower Theater, Sunday, July 24, 1:15 pm, 16th and Broadway.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

AOF meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Sunday of every month, from noon to 2:00 pm, at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Board meetings are held at alternating sites so please inquire about location. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue.

**Internet Website Address:
<http://www.rthoughtsfree.org>**