

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

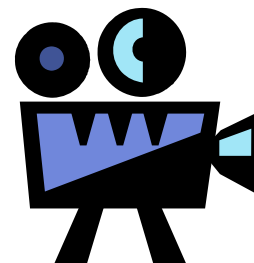
May 2007

Special Points of Interest

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Sunday, May 13

Clark Adams Presents: The Increase of Atheism and Religious Satire in Popular Media



This month, Clark Adams travels to Sacramento from Las Vegas to present, *The Increase of Atheism and Religious Satire in Popular Media—A Multimedia Presentation*.

Clark Adams is past-president of the Internet Infidels. The Internet Infidels run the Secular Web, <http://www.infidels.org>, the largest website devoted to atheism, agnosticism, humanism and a scholarly critique of religion. The Secular Web is getting approximately 800,000 hits per day and is seen by over 400,000 unique visitors per month. The Secular Web has arguably introduced more people to freethought than any other single vehicle in the history of western culture.

Clark is founder and president of the Las Vegas Freethought Society. This local organization has the youngest median age of any non-student freethought organization in the country. Clark is past president of *Halvason*, the Humanist Association of Las Vegas and Southern Nevada. This active organization was

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Standard Fare

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Key Focus on Long-Term Planning

AOF Board Plans June Retreat

By Kevin Schultz

AOF board members plan to hold a strategic planning retreat in June. The board deemed the retreat necessary to address issues normal board meetings cannot address in depth, such as: financial stability, including budgeting; issue advocacy; educational development; fundraising; Internet presence; media relations; public events; local group benchmarks; organizational issues; building community; marketing and group growth; and five-year strategic goals. An ambitious list! If you want to help support this project in any way, please contact the AOF board by e-mail or voice-mail (see page two for details).



Peering into AOF's future—stay tuned to hear more about what's happening in the years ahead!

Awakening to Theocracy?

AOF Line

By Don Knutson

The odious decision of the U.S. Supreme Court last month criminalizing a seldom used abortion method and denounced by Justice Ginsburg as "demeaning to women" serves as another reminder to the secular community of the constant burden of religion on American society as we struggle to move toward a sense of justice and fairness for all. But there is one consequence of American religion that often flies under the radar of secular society—America's unquestioning support of Israel, a nation built on theocracy.

This June 6 will mark the 40th anniversary of the Israeli occupation of Palestine when Israel invaded the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the 1967 war and never left. Most Americans will ignore the date and prefer to blame the Palestinians for their plight much like primitive so-

The purpose of the organization, AOF, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community.

cieties worldwide have traditionally blamed rape victims for bringing shame to their families. Israel practices what is called a "Jewish Democracy" where non-Jews, more specifically Arab Israelis, must live in deprivation because disproportionate national resources and laws are devoted to favoring Jews. When I visited Israel and Palestine in 2005, I saw the discrimination against Arabs in Israel as being akin to Jim Crow days and the persecution of the millions of Palestinians in the occupied territories as being deliberate but gradual ethnic cleansing. Christian Zionism constitutes a significant part of modern Christian fundamentalism which carries significant influence in the American neo-conservative ideology practiced by our government and our corre-

(Continued on page 7)

Support Your Local Adopt-A-Highway Sign

Adopt-A-Highway: Sunday, May 27

By Kevin Schultz

The May AOF Adopt-A-Highway event falls on Sunday, May 27, from 8-10 AM, at the Park-And-Ride on Hwy 99 at Elkhorn Boulevard (south-west corner of the clover-leaf). Afterward, AOF board member **Beverly Church** once again treats volunteers to a light Sunday social and brunch. More info: 916-447-3589.

This month we honor the **memory of Michael House**, a volunteer who passed away in late 2006 (see write-up on page five).



AOF Board (2007)

President: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jerry Sloan

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Beverly Church, Kay Dickey, Kevin Schultz, Paul Storey, Susan Vergne

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 7, 2007

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

Darwin Day, Feb. 10, 2008:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell, Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell, Kay Dickey, Ken Nahigian,

Ad Hoc Committees:

Web Portal (Kevin Schultz, Richard Langley); Alternate Meeting Place/ Time (Jerry Sloan, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz); Youth Outreach (Jerry Sloan, Tina Burgess, Mynga Futrell); Connections (Kevin Schultz, Betty Simonsma); Growing AOF Membership (Jerry Sloan, Kevin Schultz)

Archive: Jody Craig, Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Betty Simonsma

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI)
Hank Kocol (CSH)
Kevin Schultz (AA)
Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website: Kevin Schultz

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian
Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database:

Ken Nahigian

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail at **447-3589** if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at

aofboard@aofonline.org

Meeting Recap

Bobbie Kirkhart

By Your Esteemed Editor

Bobbie Kirkhart traveled from Los Angeles to Sacramento on April 8 to participate as AOF's featured speaker.

Ms. Kirkhart spoke on the subject, *Why Don't Atheists Unite?* Ms. Kirkhart immediately shifted the presentation to a discussion of why atheist diversification improves the overall marketability of atheism to not only the general public, but to atheists as well.

Ms. Kirkhart handed out a sheet listing the prominent organizations acting on the national and international stage. She then proceeded through the list, describing each group's history, focus, and why some might view them more favorably than others.

In defense of unification, Ms. Kirkhart noted the emergence of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA), in which she serves as Vice President. The SCA represents the first American organization dedicated to

She strongly encouraged everyone in attendance to sign up for the First Freedom First (FFF) campaign (<http://firstfreedomfirst.org>), a joint project of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Interfaith Alliance Foundation. The FFF web site lists the SCA as a supporting organization.



Bobbie Kirkhart, immediate past president of AAI and vice-president of the Secular Coalition for America.
(Photo: Kevin Schultz)

Ms. Kirkhart also strongly encouraged AOF members to cut checks to organizations to show financial support. As part of her talk, she noted several organizations, the SCA included, which represent actions in need of financial support.

Following the talk, Ms. Kirkhart answered questions about activism and the current state of atheism on the national and international scene. After the meeting, Ms. Kirkhart chose to attend AOF's regular post-meeting social event—this month at the Mayflower Chinese Restaurant on Alhambra and K Street.

AOF Program Continuation

(Continued from page 1)

awarded AHA's 2002 Chapter of the Year. Clark has participated summit meetings for leaders of US based national freethought organizations. Clark is one of the founders of the Secular Coalition for America—<http://www.secular.org>, a 501(c) (4) lobbying organization for the rights of nonbelievers. Clark has been the primary organizer and emcee of the annual July gathering at Lake Hypatia, the largest annual godless gathering in the Southeast. Clark has been published in *Freethought Today*, and various freethought and humanist newsletters. Listed in *Who's Who in Hell*, Clark has spoken at two Atheist Alliance conventions, two Secular Student Alliance conventions, at Hypatia several times and to various local and student freethought and humanist organizations. Clark is listed in various quote lists and quote books with his quote, "If atheism is a religion, then health is a disease."

Clark lives in Las Vegas and is a commercial real estate appraiser by day who can claim that he has worked on the appraisals of two legal brothels, and has appraised a church and an adult bookstore in the same week.

Sacramento Community Events Calendar for Freethinkers

<http://sacportal.humanists.net/calendar>

We can't list all the events here—but we can online!

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the **Atheist Alliance International** ("a positive voice for atheism"). AOF

also maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF's Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic 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.

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Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Historical Figures Series

Hong Xiuquan and The Great Taiping Rebellion

By Ken Nahigian

It was the bloodiest of civil wars, perhaps the worst war ever, and it was a Christian war. The body count topped 20 million—by percent of world population the toll may have well exceeded even World War II. Yet in the West, few know much about this conflict: the great Taiping Rebellion of China, 1851–1864. The story is tragic and fascinating.

Born in 1814 to a poor peasant family in Fuyuanhui Village near Canton, **Hong Xiuquan** (or Hsiu-ch'uan) was eager to enter civil service. Four times he took the essential exams; four times he failed. In his dark night of despair, he had dreams. He also received a religious tract and learned the rudiments of Christianity. It led him into serious study with a Southern Baptist minister. (China had banned Catholicism but was open to some Protestant missionary work at the time.)

The new teachings impressed and haunted Hong. Suddenly he understood why he had failed the exams. God was saving him for a divine purpose. He was to be a new messiah, banish demons, bring China to the faith, and lead it into a millennial peace.

Immediately Hong burned his Confucian and Buddhist statues and books. Local Confucians, considering the act sacrilegious and insane, attacked him. Fleeing to Guangxi, he met Feng Yunshan, a kindred spirit. They began preaching an iconoclastic blend of Christianity, militarism and anti-Manchu sedition. Because of rough translation and sketchy memory, Hong's vision was not strongly orthodox; he believed in a literal Bible, in Creation, in Noah's flood and in the Exodus from Egypt, but Christ and Jesus were separate—a belief called Nestorianism in primitive Christianity. Curiously, the Nestorians were once the main Christian denomination in China, circa the 6th & 7th

Centuries. Other tenets included gender equality, abolition of property, slavery, polygamy, concubinage, foot-binding, gambling, alcohol, opium and tobacco. Finally, and most importantly, Hong saw himself as the younger spiritual brother of Christ and Jesus. The new sect, at first consisting mostly of Hong and Feng family members, called itself *The God Worshippers*.



Hong Xiuquan, c. 1860, Leader of the Taiping Rebellion.
Image: Wikipedia, public domain

The Worshippers drew followers in the mountainous part of Kwangsi, a province known for rebellions. Soon millions of peasants, miners and women had joined up. They saw themselves as one of the Lost Tribes, destined to overthrow the Manchu Dynasty and set up the Taiping t'ien Kuo, the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace, with Hong as theocratic ruler. Alarmed authorities began to persecute them in 1850. The response was open war.

First a ten-thousand strong Heavenly Kingdom army routed Imperial troops in the town of Jintian. Turning north, between 700,000 and 800,000 rebel soldiers took Nanking in March 1853, killing 30,000 Imperial soldiers, and slaughtering civilians like insects.

The rebels' strength was in their high level of discipline and devotion. Heav-

enly Kingdom forces typically wore a uniform of red jackets with blue trousers and had long hair. Combat was bloody and brutal, with scant artillery but huge forces equipped with small arms. Their strategy was to take a city, consolidate their hold, then march out into the surrounding countryside to pick off the Imperial troops.

Women served in the army on an equal footing, impressively defending against Chinese imperial forces that included British and American officers such as Charles George Gordon and Frederick Townsend Ward. (Western powers favored the Manchu dynasty, regarding it as more stable.)

The Heavenly Kingdom held power in one region or another for twelve years, until finally it began to deteriorate and loose ground. Even in retreat, fighting was bloody. At the Third Battle of Nanking in 1864, more than 100,000 died in three days.

As his fortunes turned, Hong withdrew from leadership, descending more and more deeply into religious visions and private revelry. Some reports say he finally committed suicide by poison. When imperial forces overran the rebel headquarters, they found his body, wrapped in royal yellow cloth, floating in a sewer. The God Worshipper movement was dead, the Heavenly Kingdom a memory.

But the memory lives in numerous Chinese novels, plays and television dramas, even the game of Mahjong, which Heavenly Kingdom officers created to pass the time. And it stands a testimony to the flexible, cloud-like nature of Christianity: how it conforms to the spirit of its age, flowing like light on water, like a lotus unfolding, or like the dreams of Hong Xiuquan: changing, melting, adapting, inviting us into new mysteries and new interpretations.

Malnutrition By Anatole Lubovich, Republished Posthumously

Anatole Lubovich's poems and character touched many AOF members during his time in Sacramento. Since his death in November 2005, Do Gentry, Anatole's partner and administrator of his estate, has published a number of his poems in local publications. With Do's permission, AOF continues selected republication of Anatole's poems. After republication, AOF will post the poem to <http://aofonline.org/resources> for public distribution —
Editor

I wish I could say
that I was brought up
by God-fearing atheist parents,

but voices were raised
to glorify God

in orthodox show of adherence.

Same voices were raised
in anger, but not
to strangers, for the sake of appearance.

Inquisitive probes
of logical thought
were thwarted by creed's
interference.

Instilled was the faith
with efforts to shield
from ecclesiastical errants.

The cobwebs' dark screen
resisted attempts

to peer into rational clearance.

Their heavenly crowns
were hoped to be earned
by gray lives of earthly forbearance.

I wish I were reared
by daylight of reason,
not doctrinal, dark perseverance.

I wish I could say
that I was brought up
by God-fearing atheist parents.

—Previously published in *Selected Poems of Anatole Taras Lubovich* (The Live Oak Press LLC, Palo Alto, 2006).

Remembering AOF Member Michael House (1953-2006) By Mynga Futrell

Michael House wanted to participate in AOF activities, and when he was up to it, he did, despite suffering from hepatitis since the early 1990s. Sad to say, he died on November 11, 2006 while awaiting a liver transplant. In addition to his wife, Suzanne McNamee, and son, Adrian, Michael is survived by his parents, three brothers and three sisters, as well as several nieces and nephews.

Michael was born June 1, 1953 in El Paso, Texas, and he attended Saint Joseph's Elementary and Cathedral High School. After graduating in 1971 as a National Merit Scholar, he was accepted at Rice University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in both English and Philoso-

phy. While working in Houston after graduation he met Suzanne, whom he married in 1981. They resided in Sacramento.

Michael was an avid reader throughout his life. And, in addition to being a member of AOF, he was active in the Sacramento Friends of the Public Library and the Sacramento Chess Club. At the time of his retirement in 2001, he was an assistant editor for the USDA Soil Conservation Service in the Office of Public Affairs.



Michael House, at the 2005
Winter Solstice Potluck
Photo: Kevin Schultz

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P O Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) _____ Phone () _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail address (print legibly!) _____

Check your preference:

Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12) Family Membership (\$30)

Low-income Member (\$10) Patron (\$50)

Single Membership (\$20) Donation (\$ _____)

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

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

We can arrange to deliver your monthly newsletter electronically via the e-mail address you print above. Please check the mode you prefer. E-mail Postal mail

Tom's Tidbits

Atheism discussions on the internet By Tom Nicolette

The internet is crackling with new and fresh voices, struggling with the eternal mysteries of the universe. How was the universe made? How and is there a why to the existence of human kind? What is the purpose of life? Is there a God?

If you're onboard in your readings of the latest popular books of **Sam Harris** and **Richard Dawkins**, you know that within them there is a *Call to arms* for atheists to no longer just allow one's Christiafriends to prattle on in silliness about the supernatural but to gently but firmly confront their supernatural prattle with reason and rationality.

Many are engaged in this *Good fight* on the Internet. Some are eloquent and are great communicators; others unfortunately are not—and burst into personal attacks.

In this article I want to inform you where you can look in the Internet to read and observe these interactions as well as become a participant.

If you only have a 56K connection (commonly called a dial up connection) I am afraid you're limited as to where you can participate. You can find many lively *newsgroups* through Outlook Express your e-mail program. I subscribe to one called *alt.atheism*. Be forewarned that many of these newsgroups are not moderated. Therefore you're going to encounter *the good, the bad, and the ugly* within them.

The costs have gone down for high speed internet connections and you can, if you look, find one for about the same price you used to pay for a 56K dial up connection. Which is good news! With a high speed internet connection you can view and create home made videos on You Tube (<http://youtube.com>). This is where the action is currently on the internet amongst the atheists. There are several bright, young, articulate and just plain sharp people engaging in video debates on You Tube.

Two of my favorite You Tube members are **Trenholmes** and **Albert10110**. Trenholmes uses precision reason and

logic much like a skilled surgeon would use a scalpel to dissect an argument. Here are links to several of my favorite videos by Trenholmes:

- A Response to Nine Questions For Atheists: <http://tinyurl.com/3c7wg6>
- Why Not? <http://tinyurl.com/2wa8cc>

Albert10110 uses bursts of energetic, carefully shaped rational thoughts to make his points—much like a torpedo skillfully directed against an enemy ship. Here are links to several of my favorite videos by Albert10110:

- An Atheist Response: <http://tinyurl.com/2w2vkl>
- A Response to The Richard Dawkins Delusion: <http://tinyurl.com/3cbks2>
- What Science Isn't: <http://tinyurl.com/2pwepa>

For pure fun and bright witty entertainment you cannot beat the videos of the **MisterDeity** group on You Tube. Each video is complete in and of itself:

- Mr. Deity and the Evil: <http://tinyurl.com/t6kp4>
- Mr. Deity and the Really Big Favor: <http://tinyurl.com/uhd2m>

Enjoy!

AOF/HAGSA Movie Night

Friday, May 11, 7:00PM

Home of Beverly Church, 24 Adkinson Court, Sacramento. More info:

916-359-5423

(Continued from page 2)

sponding militaristic foreign policy. The tenets of Christian Zionism include Jews being the "chosen people", having a divine right to the land of the Middle East, and Arabs being the permanent enemies of "God's people". Dispensationalism, the conviction that humanity will go through seven periods of divine testing, culminating in Armageddon and the second coming of Christ, constitutes the heart of Christian Zionism which requires Israel to control Judea and Samaria—roughly Israel proper and Palestine minus Gaza. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson are adherents of these tenets and both have been awarded Israel's highest civilian honors.

American aid to Israel ranges anywhere from \$3 to \$8 billion annually, which figures out to thousands of dollars per capita while each and every African on average, in comparison, receives about 2 cents in American aid. In addition to the annual American aid are the numerous vetoes of U.N. resolutions condemning Israeli human rights abuses. I firmly believe that our country's apparent incestuous relationship with a nation built upon religion can only be corrosive to the wall separating church and state and that secularists should shake out of their lethargy in the matter. Ultimately, Israel is not deserving of this 40-year-old favored treatment.

Want the latest AOF board minutes? E-mail aofboard@aofonline.org!

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor at this e-mail address:

newsletter@aofonline.org

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Notepad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

Monday, May 14—Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Sacramento Meeting

By Kevin Schultz

The Sacramento Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) meets Monday, May 14, from 7:00-9:00 PM, at the SMUD Customer Service Center, 6301 S Street, Sacramento, in Room Sequoia #3. AU Sacramento invites all AOF members to attend. Please RSVP to president@au-sac.org, or call 916-369-1370.

This meeting represents the second of three meetings for 2007. Present members of AU will also elect officers for the 2007 calendar year.

The AOF board strongly encourages members of AOF to support AU on both the local and national level. Membership costs \$30 per year—and if you join, you become a member of the local Sacramento chapter, automatically.

On a national level, AU supports separation of church and state for

members of both naturalistic and supernaturalistic worldviews. As a member of a local chapter, you'll have the opportunity to work with pagans, mainstream Christians, Wiccans, and atheists to support church-state organizing and activism in *your* community.

AU Sacramento tables at both Darwin Day and Freethought Day, and in the past has featured national speakers such as AU President Barry Lynn, church-state plaintiff Michael Newdow, landmark 1963 plaintiff Ellery Schempp (*Abington School District v. Schempp*, which ruled public school-sanctioned bible readings unconstitutional), and others.

AOF proudly partners with AU Sacramento on many issues—I hope you will too! For more info, please visit <http://au.org> and/or the local AU web site <http://au-sac.org>.

AOF Volunteer Job Board

The right volunteer with the right activity makes a world of difference. Send us your ideas for projects and/or volunteer using the contact info on page two. *Thanks!* Open positions:

- *Archive Committee*
- *AOF Librarian*
- *Program Committee Volunteer(s)*
- *Caring Committee Volunteer(s)*
- *Publicity Volunteer*
- *Freethought Day/Darwin Day*

Contact 916-447-3589 for more info!

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!



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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

May Calendar of Events

AOF Blood Drive In Honor Of National Day of Reason	Thursday, May 3, 12 - 1 PM BloodSource Central Sacramento, 1625 Stockton Boulevard, Sacramento
AOF/HAGSA Joint Movie Night	Friday, May 11, 7 - 9 PM
AOF General Meeting	Sunday, May 13, 1:30 - 4 PM
AOF Board meeting	Sunday, May 20, 9:30 AM
AOF Adopt-A-Highway	Sunday, May 27, 8 - 10 AM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (2007-10-07), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2008-02-10). Watch the newsletter for details.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

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. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

