

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

August 2009

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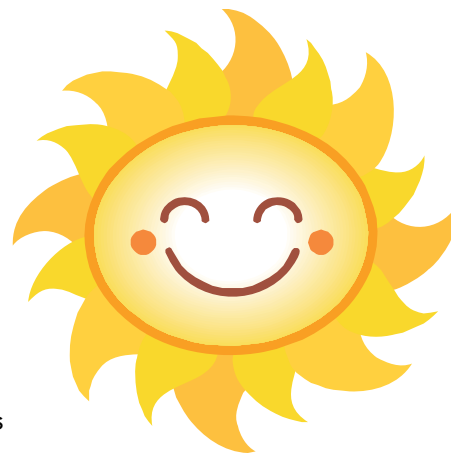
Sunday, August 9, 1:30-4:00PM Add Your Sizzle (& Win \$50?) Annual AOF Summer Sizzler Event!

It's time once again for another Summer Sizzler — AOF's combination of a cool **SUMMER SALAD POTLUCK** with **ORATORY CONTEST**. (The last was in 2007.) Bring your dish to share, and share what's on your mind, too! This year, this event is also a joint AOF/HAGSA Early August Potluck.

AOF's August meeting will consist of food first, followed by a program of short speeches. This year's competition is special. For the first time ever, AOF is offering a **NIFTY CASH PRIZE!**

Come and hear what others have on their minds. Or, better yet, **HAVE YOUR SAY!** (All you need do is sign up (to present) and then follow the rules in preparing and delivering

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September 13 Tentative AOF Speaker Dr. Bahman Fozouni, CSUS: US-Iran Relations in Historical Perspective

Our tentative Sept. speaker is Dr. Bahman Fozouni, a CSUS professor in the Dept. of Government. The talk that he has been giving to other groups in recent months is titled "U.S. - Iran Relations in Historical Perspective." This may change—watch for additional details in next months newsletter!



June 30th Event Recap

AOF at Davis Community Meals

By Don Knutson



Left to right: Ken Nahigian (not pictured), Nancy Gilbert, Mynga Futrell, Ruth Rezos, and Paul Geisert. Photo by Don Knutson.



Left to right: Ken Nahigian, Nancy Gilbert, Mynga Futrell, Ruth Rezos, Paul Geisert. Photo by Don Knutson.

AOF Board (2009)

President: Beverly Church

Board Chair: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Steve Campbell, Debora Smith, Jillian Stanley

AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail aofboard@aofonline.org for direct contact to relevant personnel.

Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, Debora Smith)
Meeting Matters / Logistics (Team Coordinator, Open)
Social Activities (Team Coordinator, Open)

Membership Committee

Members Tracking (Team Coordinator, Ken Nahigian)
"Freethought Friends" (Team Coordinator, Jillian Stanley)
Outreach / Recruiting (Team Coordinator, Steve Campbell)

Communications Committee

Beverly Church, Chair
AOF News Team (newsletter editor, events editor, public editor, postmaster, webmaster)

Education, Activism and Service Committee

Service Projects Coordinator: Don Knutson
Education/Action Coordinator: Mynga Futrell

Freethought Day 2009: Sunday, October 11

Beverly Church, Chair. (Save the date! – It's a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

Darwin Day 2010: Sunday, February 7

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs
(Save the date! – It's a celebration of science and humanity)

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

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

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz
Postmaster: Jerry Sloan; Ruth Rezos and Ken Nahigian (temporary for this month—thanks!!!)
Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel, Kevin Schultz (Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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Neutrality: The Educational Goal; Part 4 in a Series

Untaught Teachers

By Mynga Futrell

In public schools, neutrality regarding matters of religion is the educational goal. In fact, it's the law. Not favoring any one religion over others is an absolutely essential aspect for protecting the liberty of conscience of all. Teachers need to know that. And, when properly schooled on this issue, most teachers will understand their roles and avoid showing partiality in their classrooms.

If not adequately instructed on neutrality during their programs of educational preparation, teachers will be prone to give privilege to what is most familiar to them. That is, they will tend to favor their own outlook. (Religious skeptics are as likely as religious adherents to lack a neutral stance.) Teachers must be given to understand that they are to be approach matters of religion *academically*, and not personally.

Neutrality between religion and nonreligion is another aspect of the neutrality law. That fact, then, is something else that all public school teachers need to know. But, let's face it. Too few do. I have learned that this type of neutrality is not always made clear within teacher preparation programs. The consequence is that, whether or not they

are themselves religious (most are), teachers in general leave their programs of preparation with a "half-view" of the religious neutrality issue.

By way of academic training, teachers also are typically prepared more on one side of the matter than the other. The side on which they are likely to graduate more knowledgeable is the *religious* side of the liberty of conscience coin.

Courses in world religions and philosophy are available to teachers, although not usually required in their programs. (Even social studies teachers may begin teaching without having had a sound academic look at material they will be engaging in the classroom!) Still, seldom do world religions classes treat topics of open inquiry and freethought. Opportunities for prospective teachers to be objectively informed about the *nonreligious* side of the coin thus are limited. Most teachers know little about freethought history or philosophy. Or, about people who today have a naturalistic worldview.

Interestingly, teachers who have a

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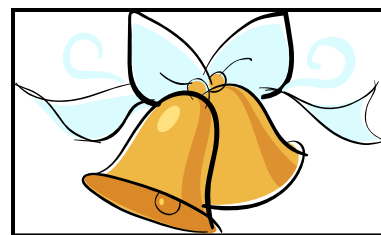
AOF Program Continuation

(Continued from page 1)

your talk. You will have an awfully good chance at going home with **FIFTY DOLLARS** in your pocket or purse.) Contest rules are on page 7.

We'd like to hear what you think. Is something bugging you? Or, do you have a sure-fire solution for the problems of all humankind? The topics are likely to range from freethought issues to civics to world affairs. You won't know until you come August 9 (1:30 to 4)!

—Mynga Futrell



Wedding bells for Kevin Schultz and Dawn Hustig on June 2. Kevin was married to his long-time sweetheart in a civil ceremony in Fair Oaks. The couple plan two celebrations in June 2010 in California and Wisconsin to accommodate their "current" and "traditional" families.

Got family news you would like to share? Send the details to newsletter@aofonline.org for consideration in an upcoming issue. Thanks!

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 of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Print subscription \$12 per year, e-mail subscription free to all on request.

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 Comics Series

Archie's Christian Adventures

By Ken Nahigian

Archie Andrews, the carrot-topped icon of high school comics, built a publishing mini-empire and has sustained it for over a half century. He has been a superhero, served as a secret agent, befriended a witch (Sabrina), even inspired a bubble-gum rock band (the Archies, who tagged the charts with "Sugar, Sugar" in 1969). Archie is not *cool*, of course, but so what? The nuances of his story are part of modern folklore Americana: Jughead's misogyny, the rivalry with Reggie Mantle, the jalopy, Principal Weatherby, Pop's malt shop, and the unspoken erotic potentials of the Betty/Veronica love triangle. Who hasn't wondered, how long have they all been in high school anyway? And just what is Jughead's real first name? (Spoiler: it's Forsythe.)

One of the stranger Archie episodes, and surely the oddest lacuna of his life, was his tenure as a fundamentalist Christian.

Archie began as a filler. He first appeared in *Pep Comics* in December 1941, two weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, as a backup to adventure heroes with names like The Shield, Hangman and Madam Satan. The sole original supporting characters were Jughead Jones and Betty Cooper. But they proved popular; by mid-1943 Archie & gang had edged out the other strips. The publisher (formerly "MLJ") reinvented itself as Archie Comics. New characters proliferated; spinoffs and ancillary titles appeared. According to some authorities, the Rivendell mélange has occupied more ongoing titles than any other comics series.

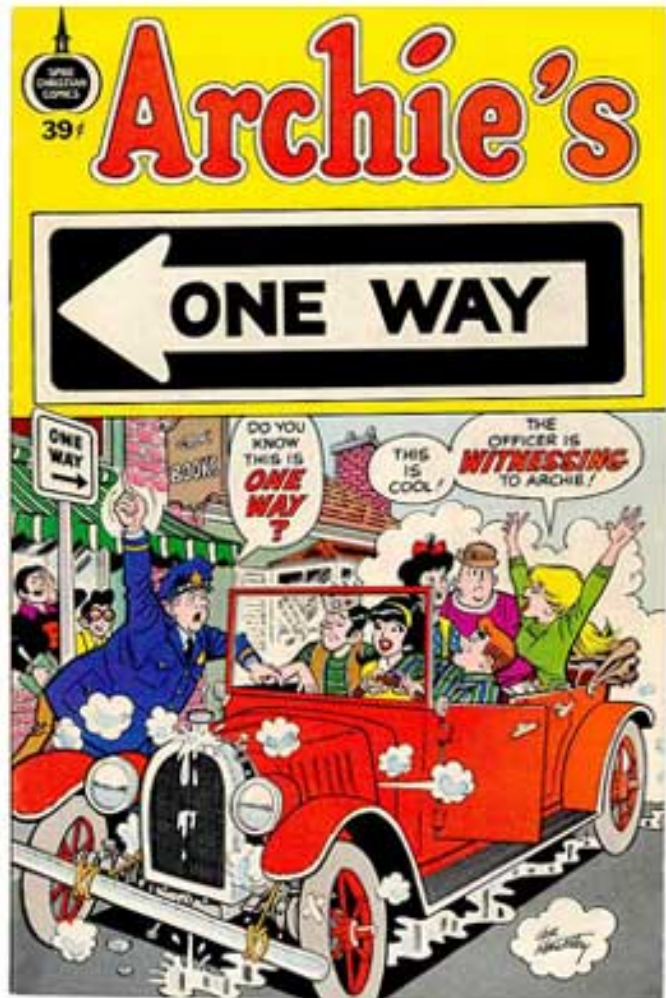
But in 1972, the Archie's comics universe took a strange turn.

Chicago evangelist Dwight Lyman Moody, founder of the Moody Bible

Institute, also founded a book house in 1870, which by 1970 was the Fleming H. Revell Company, a pioneer of mass market Christian publishing. President William Barbour Jr. and co-manager Hugh Revell Barbour sought new inroads for evangelism, a way to win younger souls. Their inspiration was comic books. Under the banner of Spire Christian Comics, they published colorful comics based on true conversion stories, Christian novels and inspirational movies. These sold well

enough, mostly to churches and Christian schools, but did not break any barriers, at first.

One of their chief artists and writers was Al Hartley, son of conservative congressman Fred Hartley. Al also worked for Archie Comics at the time. His connections helped him wangle permission to use the Archie characters in some of the Spire Comics. The first Christian Archie issue was *Archie's Clean Slate #1* in 1973, a packet of vignettes about faith and redemption. Quickly following were *Archie's Sonshine*, *Archie's One Way*, *Archie's Love Scene* and fourteen others, many of which are available



on the Web if you care to search. (Really, it's worth it.)

Despite cheesy storylines and a level of humor clearly below the accustomed grade, the comics sold widely, perhaps because Archie and gang already had a strong customer base, and the art matched the "regular" titles down to Archie's freckles and crosshatched hair. Crisp and cheery as the original, it was nevertheless a mutant-universe Riverdale, where Jughead discovers Christ at a church-sponsored pizza feed, or Betty prays over her cafeteria meal to the shock of a reporter digging for

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“teen dirt.” If a Spire comic found its way to a main-market comics rack or bin, a young Archie fan might well snatch it, and not realize he had been evangelized until it was too late.

A pop-culture blogger from British Columbia was particularly miffed to be taken in this way. "I was a huge, huge Archie guy. ... I remember finding [a Christian] Archie comic, which excited me very much. I didn't know what it was, initially. ... Betty Cooper is praying in the cafeteria, and Archie is like, 'That's Betty Cooper. She's praying before her meal. We all pray in Riverdale.' I'd read probably 500 Archie comics at that point. I knew Archie pretty well, so his statement that 'We all pray in Riverdale' made me mad. I was like, 'Archie, you're lying! None of you pray!' I thought he was pretending to be a Christian." (From a 2006 *Vanity Fair* article.)

Spire kept Christian Archie in print for some years, issuing the final title in 1982. In 1981, Hugh Barbour began his own company, Book Bargains, to become Barbour & Company. Barbour acquired the rights to republish many of the Spire Christian Comics under the imprint of "NEW Barbour Christian Comics," keeping them in print until 1988.

Today the Christian Archie comics have a semi-mythic status among comics aficionados; a mint copy may fetch prices from \$7 to \$20, depending on the title. If you find one, grab it!

Quick Quote

“ *Death is a very dull, dreary affair, and my advice to you is to have nothing whatsoever to do with it.* ”

— *W. Somerset Maugham*

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skeptical or agnostic outlook may be no better off than their religious colleagues. (At least when it comes to having acquired background that presents the nonreligious side of things formally and objectively, they are similarly positioned to their peers.) Neither group has been engaging in coursework where the nonreligion side is presented in an *academic* context. It must be said, though, that on that score it is the religious teachers who seem particularly disadvantaged in terms of their overall preparation.

Religious teachers learn about atheists and agnostics and other freethinkers almost solely from their own upbringing and the cultural milieu. In society, people holding a naturalistic worldview are usually rather closeted. So, even on a personal level, what can they learn? They have little experience to help them to deal *neutrally* with certain aspects of curriculum and with some current events. Media and popular sources are chock full of narrow, negative labeling and rife with condescending views regarding the morality of people who have a naturalistic worldview.

It is no wonder that so many teachers who hold even very lightly to religious outlooks end up discomfited when faced with firmly secular points of view. (*Part 5 in this mini-series will address helping such classroom teachers be more even-handed.*)

 “Untaught Teachers” is the fourth in a series of mini-commentaries on society and education by Mynga Futrell, Ph.D., director of OABITAR (*Objectivity, Accuracy, and Balance In Teaching About Religion*). They are adapted from an article published in the quarterly of the California 3Rs (*Rights, Respect, Responsibility*) Religious Liberty Project in May 2008.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP + 4 _____

E-mail address (please print!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

Patron (\$50) Family (\$30) Individual (\$20) Low-income (\$10)

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

___ Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

___ Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductible as

permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

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

Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

July Meeting Recap

Cleo Kocol on Dolley Madison

(Find out why that is not a typo!)

By Jillian Stanley

At AOF's July meeting, Cleo Kocol entertained and enlightened a small group of attendees with a lecture on the lives of James and Dolley Madison. James Madison, born to a successful Virginia planter, is known for being rather short; he was also frail in health and something of a hypochondriac. Cleo commented that he was a man of contrasts: for example, though easy-going and calm, and someone who preferred compromise to conflict, he was nevertheless a very good debater. After courting, and being jilted by, two women much younger than himself, he seems to have fallen in love at age 42 with a wealthy and vivacious widow seventeen years his junior. Dolley Payne Todd was also a southerner, but her father had moved his family to Philadelphia after becoming a Quaker. There she married, but her husband died in a yellow fever epidemic. Cleo pointed out that Dolley was unusual for the time in being a literate female, which no doubt was part of her appeal to Madison.

Madison, often called the Father of the Constitution and the Father of the Bill of Rights, was appointed Secretary of State by President Thomas Jefferson. Because Jefferson was a widower, Dolley often acted as hostess. When Madison became president, she continued in the role that suited her so well, although her low-cut gowns and lavish headgear appalled some high-society ladies. Yet she was far from a brainless socialite: a well-known story about the war of 1812 is Dolley's rescuing of many items and papers when the British attacked Washington, DC, burning the president's residence.

Madison held fast to his convictions, refusing to declare a national day of prayer and fasting when asked to do so by Congress during the war. He was devoted to the idea of the union and in retirement spoke out against disruptive states' rights factionalism. The picture presented by Cleo was of two people who, in addition to their importance in our national history, are quite interesting as individuals, each with their own idiosyncrasies and contradictions. Note: I have used the spelling "Dolley" as that is how her name is most often spelled. However, the cupcake brand was spelled "Dolly Madison"!

Other announcements: Ken described the duties of the AOF "postmaster," a position desperately in need of being filled. Rena Lowry has her first art exhibit this week, at the Brickhouse Gallery. Mynga talked about the Summer Sizzler and reminded everyone of the AAI conference coming up in October in Burbank. Jerry Sloan invited us to attend the 25th anniversary of his debate with Falwell, on July 13th. Bev announced that Camp Quest is taking place (NOTE: big front page article in Bee!). After the meeting, some members joined Cleo and Hank Kocol at Crepeville up the street for conversation.

AOF August Summer Sizzler Rules

Enter the Freethinkers' Oratory Contest

Win the Fifty Dollar Prize!

To participate, simply pick some topic on which you would like to edify the audience. **Act in advance to register your SPEECH TITLE and CATEGORY.**

Participants may choose to enter either of the two available oration categories: [Category 1] — **TWO** minutes tops!

In this category, you must present your point(s) quickly! You have just a minute or two on your subject! This category is especially nice for simply spouting off.

[Category 2] — **FIVE** minutes tops!

Here you can develop a topic a bit better, but be sure not to go over your time! Whichever category you choose, if you exceed the limit, your **chances to win the \$50 will go down!** Hint: You might want to carefully develop and practice your speech. The time limits are strict!

To Register: Full information and the **ADVANCE REGISTRATION FORM** were included in AOF's July newsletter. It is first come/first serve in the signups, so choose a title and a time slot and sign up soon. (*Mail-in registrants during July get priority, but it's not at all too late to get involved. Participants will be added to the program as long as "presentation time" remains. Best not to wait until the meeting to sign up, or it may be that no time is available for you.*) If you don't have a form on hand to mail in, you can phone the **VOICE MAIL** (447-3589) and leave your phone # for a return call.

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.

Whereby We Get Letters to the Editor

Dear AOF:

My letter to the editor of SNR got published this current issue. Check it out on page 7. A whacko full page add advocating God formed the US on 4th of July 1776 under the 10 Commandments appeared on the rear cover of our local SNR. Check out the attachment. It was too bizzare to believe, especially when paid for by a cannabis organization! Here is my response, trying to bring some sanity into their minds.

Also, there is a National Day of Prayer event coming up in Lodi on 5 August. <http://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/calendar/10910893>. Come participate and help us keep this erroneous interpretation of US history from encroaching into the government you and I have to live under.

Paul Storey

Thanks Paul. While we do not have space this month to print your letter to the editor, interested readers may find it at the Sacramento News and Review web site, while it lasts: <http://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/content?oid=1039451>. We encourage anyone interested in attending the Lodi event to contact the AOF board to get the latest info. See page two for contacts.

Dear AOF:

MUST ATHEISTS SUPPORT HOMOSEXUALITY? by Patrick BENS (pat_bens@yahoo.com). I am a life-member of American Atheists and a family man and I do not support gay rights....

Patrick BENS

Thanks for your 700+ word letter. There is no officialdom in the world of atheism. AOF members only have to support our goals (page three).

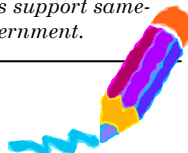
That said, an atmosphere of safety and acceptance at AOF meetings is what we want to foster. That is, after all, how we will thrive. AOF accepts everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, and so forth. I think an overwhelming majority of AOFers support same-sex marriage. We gather, however, to support separation of religion and government.

Want to send a letter to the Editor?

E-mail newsletter@aofonline.org!

Newsletter Freebie Policy

This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.





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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

August Calendar of Events

AOF Highway Cleanup Saturday, August 1, 8:00-10:00 a.m.

AOF Dinner Social @ Queen Sheba Restaurant,
1704 Broadway. Contact: 419-2105 or
shastaseer@sbcglobal.net

Thursday, August 6, 6:30 p.m.

AOF August General Meeting Sunday, August 9, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

August AOF Board Meeting Sunday, August 16, 9:30-12:00 p.m.

AOF September General Meeting Sunday, September 13, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

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" (Oct 2009), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2010-02-07). 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.

