

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

February 2010

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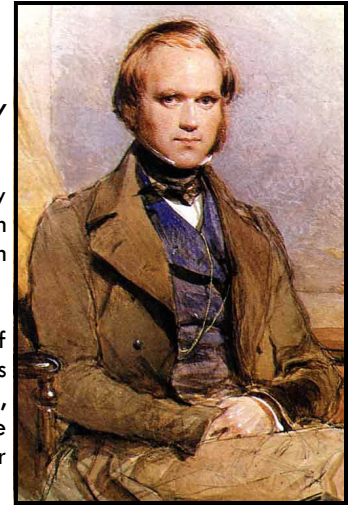
Sunday, February 7, 2:00-5:00 p.m. 13th Annual Darwin Day Sacramento Birthday Gala!

Note: Darwin Day replaces AOF's regularly held second Sunday meeting in February.

Dr. Andrew Marshall, UC Davis ecologist and evolutionary anthropologist, will be the guest speaker at Sacramento's 13th Annual Darwin Day Gala at the La Sierra Community Center in Carmichael on Sunday, February 7, 2010.

Dr. Marshall's presentation will explain the importance of evolutionary biology in successful conservation efforts, using his studies in the rainforests of Borneo as examples. Harvard-educated, Dr. Marshall has worked with National Geographic and the Nature Conservancy, and he was recently awarded the Hellman Grant for research on Bornean rainforest plants.

This year's celebration of science and humanity is expected to build on the success of 2009's Darwin bicentennial birthday event, which



Darwin in his early 30's.

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March 14, 2010, 2:00-5:00 p.m. In March: Perspectives on Druidism: April Hollon & Jennifer Jaffe

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In arranging to have April Hollon appear as a speaker for AOF's March 2010 program meeting, an interesting fact emerged. April describes herself as an atheist Druid. April and Jennifer Jaffe who will be appearing with her, are both directors of The Sacramento Grove of the Oak.

The Sacramento Grove of the Oak, according to their website, was founded in 1998 and "is an eclectic group of Druids, Wiccans, and other Pagans who gather...[for] Celtic seasonal festivals, to share community, perform ritual, create magic, and support each other in [their] chosen earth-honoring pagan paths."

Although the exact topic of this presentation is not yet finalized, April and Jennifer will likely be talking about what Druidism is, and sharing what they feel are perspectives and values shared between atheists and Druids, especially as it relates to living in a predominantly Christian society. Watch for the full title of their presentation in the March issue of the AOF newsletter.

AOF Line

Dec 29 Davis Community Meals Recap

By Don Knutson

AOF members volunteer four times annually at the Davis Community Meals program in Davis, CA. Newcomers are encouraged to attend and assist with setup, serving, or cleanup. The next Davis Community Meals event will be **Tuesday, March 30!**



AOF Board member Mario Sandri was dedicated in everything he did that evening.

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



Jerry Bachman and Ken Nahigian demonstrating cutting up desserts is serious business!

AOF Board (2010)

President: Beverly Church

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large: David Flanders, Paul Geisert, Brian Jones, Ken Nahigian, Mario Sandri

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, Brian Jones)

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 2010: Date to be announced

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

Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel, Kevin Schultz
(Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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Professor Natasha Fratello Breitenbach January Meeting Recap By Debora Smith

What do you do when an organized group of intolerant and outspoken students create a toxic and hostile environment on the campus at which you teach? Prof. Natasha Breitenbach, a psychology instructor at American River College, faced this dilemma back in 2007, when a group of Slavic Christian students formed the Christian Civilization Club (CCC) which set up tables on campus that, during their Islam Awareness Week, featured signs and other material of an intensely anti-Islamic nature. When the CCC faculty advisor resigned, forcing the club to disband, several of these conservative Christians formed a coalition which was elected to the student government by a minimal number of student voters. They and other like-minded students harassed and intimidated GLBT and Muslim students as well as Jews and non-fundamentalist Christians. Later, in the days before the 2008 election, they passed a resolution claiming that the ARC student body supported Prop. 8, angering many



Professor Natasha Fratello Breitenbach presented in January.

of the students and faculty. During Islam Awareness Week, the campus appeared to be in a crisis situation. Students wearing hijabs were yelled at and told, "You're going to hell!" Another student was bullied until she accepted literature (titled Why Islam is *Not* a Religion of Peace) being thrust at her. Even the teachers not affected by the propaganda were worried about being targeted if they spoke out against the activist students. Prof. Breitenbach determined that a plan was needed that would support the targeted students and model for all the students a positive way to address the badgering and threats. She put together a panel of religious leaders from the community, including Hank Kocol as a representative of the non-theistic viewpoint. Their primary goal was to model responsible discourse for the students, with a Q and A format following the presentations by each of the invited speakers. The students were thankful for the forum; one

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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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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

The Original Bluebeard

By Ken Nahigian

Consider Gilles de Rais, young Baron of Pays de Retz. He had it all—brave and handsome, rich and talented, courtly, clever, a devout Christian, fashion plate, scholar, strong in war, patron of arts and music, and comrade in arms to Joan d'Arc. In 1429 he became Marshal of France. King Charles VII favored him. What else could he desire? Alas, he had a secret, dark as winter's sleep.

Born in late 1404 to Guy de Laval and Marie de Craon, two nobles of France, Gilles grew up after their demise under the wing of his respected maternal grandfather. In 1420 he wed into wealth, and later received further largess for successful military campaigns. Retired from martial life in 1434, he kept a lavish household and staged extravagant spectacles of art for friends. In time this drained his estate. So he turned to alchemy.

At least it began that way. Like many before, Gilles sought the legendary Philosopher's Stone, which turns base metal to gold. When his alchemists failed, according to later claims, he looked to demonology in the hope of calling up a helpful demon. He retained a Florentine sorcerer by name Francesco Prelati, who convinced Gilles to try human sacrifice. Such is the official tale. It is a bit pat. It may well be a construct. Evidence is muddled, and none are sure.

What seems sure is this: one by one, children began to vanish, the first in 1432 or 1433, and up to 200 by the decade's end. Local peasant households were in panic, but none dared accuse the respected *Seigneur* and *Baron de Retz*. Then in 1440 Gilles fell out with a priest. The dispute grew violent and led to a kidnap-

ping. The Bishop of Nantes investigated and took depositions. He found horrific evidence, so said, not just of the occult experiments, but mass murder.

Gilles's former protector, the Duke of Brittany, turned against him. Secular authorities arrested Gilles and his servants for murder, sodomy and heresy. Parents came forward to describe how their children went to Castle de Rais for food or alms and never returned. Finally Gilles and his servants confessed under threat of torture—the testimony said to be so perverse, the confessions so impassioned and shocking, the judges grew sick, and struck the worst from the record.

But was it *true*? Was Gilles, in fact, the most prolific mass murderer, child rapist and satanist of the Renaissance, or did enemies frame him to get his land? Here is the mystery. British occultist Aleister Crowley and some historians have argued that the trial was a farce even for the Inquisition. Most evidence arose from the threat of torture or from avarice or spite, and France of the day was a bed of intrigue. Gilles had wit, but also a naivety clouded by pride, and was ill-suited to defend himself.

Most researchers disagree. Gilles had built chapels and a cathedral, and had strong friends in the Church. And the Church never had much chance to acquire his estate anyway. Ultimately the Duke of Brittany took title and gave it to his nobles. Also, the testimonies included multiple corroborated, detailed accounts from confederates and the victims' parents.

If true, how many victims? Best estimates are from 80 to 200; some guess upwards to 6000, which seems extravagant. Ages ranged from six to eighteen. Look elsewhere for the lurid

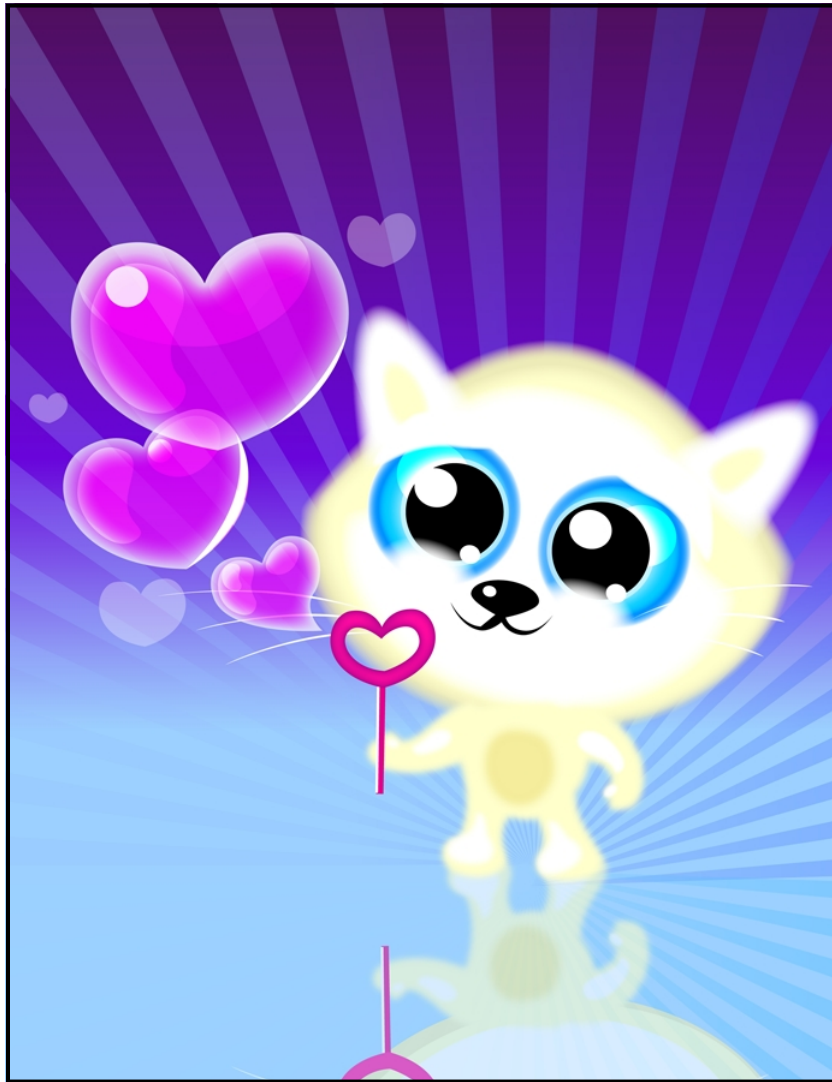
details.

The court finally sentenced Gilles and two accomplices to be hanged and burnt. On the *Ile de Biesse*, on the morning of October 26, 1440, after a final plea, Gilles was hanged and then thrown ceremonially onto a pyre (though his family was allowed to remove the body before it was lit).

Could anyone, even a nobleman, have committed such crimes for so long? For now, the truth of it is lost. Gilles de Rais might have been a psychopath, killer and pedophile, or simply a pawn in a greater game. But history has little middle ground, small room for ambiguity. A great simplifier, it distills its players into heroes or villains, sinners or saints. They stride through its pages, mythologized, majestic or horrific, their most trivial deeds colored with the gestures of gods.

German essayist Thomas Mann was caught up in the romanticism when he wrote that Gilles had "the religious greatness of the damned; genius as disease, disease as genius, the type of the afflicted and possessed, where saint and criminal become one."

Whatever the truth, Gilles de Rais was a source for [Charles Perrault's](#) fairy tale of [Bluebeard](#) (1697), and is a subject of several modern novels, fantasy/horror stories, surrealist art and "Black Metal" songs, as well as a key character in occult lore and theosophy. Comics writer Alan Moore even once took the pen-name of "Jill de Ray." Gilles might have been amused. Or maybe not.



***Lots of hugs and love to all AOFers out there.
Thanks for your continuing support in 2010!***

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Muslim student was very touched – she said she felt that it showed that ARC cared.

After the Prop. 8 resolution, students gathered signatures in favor of a recall election, which (amid rumors of voting irregularities) was ultimately unsuccessful. After Prop. 8 was passed by California voters, ARC held an eight-minute silent rally in support of those affected. A pro-Prop. 8 contingent showed up and blew kazoos and made eight minutes of noise to counter the silent rally. Despite this, the students felt supported by the school's efforts.

Ultimately, at the next regular election, the conservative Christians were voted out (with the ballot boxes well-monitored by members of the ARC faculty). There is now an openly gay student in student government, and the current president wants to repeal the Prop. 8 resolution. The ARC campus now has a Community and Diversity Center, and many other proactive measures have been put in place. Many of the Slavic Christians have moved on to Sac. City College, but have not managed to make much headway there. These students challenged ARC; they inadvertently ended up making it better.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

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E-mail address (please print!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

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

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Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

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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).

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drew over 400 people. “Our event draws a varied audience,” says Bronda Silva, who co-chairs the event along with Mynga Futrell. “They come not only to learn from the presentation, but also to enjoy the festive atmosphere, which includes science music and birthday cake.”

Organizers of the Darwin Day celebration are shocked that, despite the overwhelming evidence that evolutionary processes led to the development of life on our planet, recent polls show that only 40% of Americans accept the fact of evolution. As Dr. Futrell notes, “There’s so much public confusion. Our ‘educational gala’ offers Sacramento area citizens a chance to become better informed about the matter. There will be plenty of supplemental educational literature available. Tables are staffed by the several educational and community organizations that sponsor the main presentation.”

Doors open at 2:00 p.m. and the program will begin at 2:30. The Community Center is located at 5325 Engle Road, Carmichael. Tickets are \$10.00 general/\$5.00 student with ID. Refreshments will be served after the presentation.

More information is available online at: SacDarwinDay.info

Quick
Quote

“

I believe in God, only I spell it Nature.
—Frank Lloyd Wright

”

Leaving "Lumping" Behind No Such Thing As 'Religion'—Only Religions

By Paul Geisert

"Social lumping" is a dangerous game. Remember the days when "blacks" were considered lazy? When all Germans were deemed evil? And, remember what you felt like when some religious person lumped all atheists as being, at minimum, sinful?

I think we ourselves must learn not to engage in lumping. But, the rhetoric I hear from atheists continuously lumps, treating religion and religious individuals as monolithic. When we conquer that behavior, then we can ask religious people not to lump. We can ask that individuals who have a naturalistic worldview not be viewed as "atheists" (just another form of lumping us).

The following is evidence why it is wrong to lump all religious individuals into one group. The evidence is clear that in an area we all declare as very important (teaching science in the public schools), there are many religions that support youngsters learning good solid science in school, just as we (most of us) do. In some cases, they do so even more than we do (because AOF does not seem to do much in this area).

It is a fact that many religions support the teaching of sound science to youngsters. You can find information on the website of the National Center for Science Education: "Statements from Religious Organizations" (supporting teaching about evolution). For information about religious perspectives on evolution,

please see the Science and Religion section of the NCSE website. <http://ncse.com/media/voices/religion>

Here is a listing of religions that support the teaching of good science, including evolution, in the public schools.

188 Wisconsin Clergy, African-Americans for Humanism, American Humanist Association, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, American Scientific Affiliation, Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism, Episcopal Bishop of Atlanta, Pastoral Letter, Episcopal Church, General Convention, General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Humanist Association of Canada, Lexington Alliance of Religious Leaders, Lutheran World Federation, National Council of Jewish Women, Rabbinical Council of America, Roman Catholic Church, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, United Methodist Church, United Presbyterian Church in the USA

I hope I have made the point that it is wise to embrace this concept: "There Is No Such Thing as 'Religion'; There Are Only Religions." Incidentally, many do not realize how much diversity there is within any given name brand religion. That is another story.

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.

Secular Aid For Haiti

By Ken Nahigian

Both the CFI Skeptics and Humanists Aid and Relief Effort (SHARE) and the AHA Humanist Charities have set up special funds to helping survivors of the recent devastating earthquake in Haiti. AOF friends & members who wish to contribute can go to either (or both) of the following organizations:

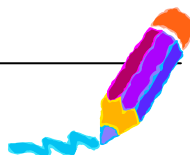
SHARE:
<http://bit.ly/8n6gY2>

Humanist Charities:
<http://bit.ly/8xB7Nv8xB7Nv>

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.

Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail newsletter@aofonline.org!





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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

February/March Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social @ Fox and Goose Pub & Restaurant, 1001 "R" Street at 10th Street. Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net

Thursday, February 4, 6:30 p.m.

13th Annual Sacramento Darwin Day Birthday Gala

Sunday, February 7, 2:00-5:00 p.m.

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Event

Saturday, February 27, 8:00-10:00 a.m.

AOF March General Meeting

Sunday, March 14, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

AOF Davis Community Meals Event

Tuesday, March 30, 4:00-7:00 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 2010), 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.

