

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

June 2010

Special Points of Interest

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Sunday, June 13, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Rants & Raves: Books or Other Media

For our June meeting, AOF will try something new: An open-mike, round-robin membership media review. Please bring at least one example of a most-admired or most-deplored book, novel, poem, article, movie, piece of music, piece of art, television program or other media. Naturally we hope it will relate to freethought somehow, be of interest to freethinkers, or at least be something cerebral; but imagination is your limit. Be playful, creative. Just be ready to talk about it, review it or deconstruct it, give good reason why you admired or deplored it, how it enhanced your life or utterly wasted your time. Should the rest of us read/see it immediately, or avoid it like the pox, and why? You may review more than one item, of course, but for fairness just one at a time. After the first review round, everyone with a second media-item will get a chance at the lectern, and so on. Thus, if you have several, plan to do the most interesting one first. AOF "open mike" sessions have always been a success, so expect a fun and educational afternoon. You might even want to take notes.



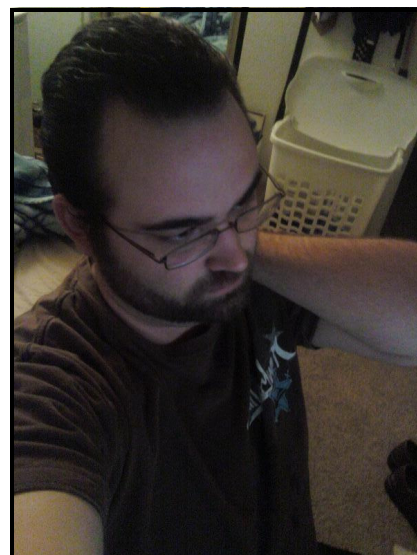
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AOF July 11 General Meeting, 1:30-4:30 p.m. Coming In July: Scientology Revealed!

Speaker Gary Alexander began to study the Church of Scientology in January of 2008, following the church in the news and listening to hours of testimony of former members. In February of 2008 he became active in the protest community known as "Anonymous," who picket the church and spread word of its abuses. He designed flyers and signs for the following year and a half. Since then he has been devising new ways to get the message out, which brought him to creating this presentation.

His presentation will include a brief history of L. Ron Hubbard, the theories and claims of Dianetics and the formation of the Church of Scientology.

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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.

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Furthermore we hope to make this more of a party- and social-event, so edible/potable goodies for the snack table will be welcome – finger foods only, nothing heavy (canapés yes, roast turkey no) (unless your book is a turkey). As usual, AOF will provide a beverage.

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After that he will delve into the practices, goals, and organization of the Church of Scientology. He will conclude with a report on abuses and scandals, and why people need to be aware of this.

Please be warned: L. Ron Hubbard said that if the mind is not prepared for the information (through rigorous Scientology training), you could catch pneumonia, and die.

Please see Gary's page on the Atheist Nexus website, <http://www.atheistnexus.org/profile/GaryAlexander>

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lowed...something one would rarely encounter in churches around the world. Which might imply that most people don't like questions and don't like free-thinking. Old atheism that has been known for hundreds of years has been repackaged by the "New Atheist" and they became rich and successful. Sometimes at Barnes and Noble and at Borders, one can see that an employee has rearranged atheist books with a prominent atheist sign above them to increase book sales.

Does AOF need to be "re-packaged"? Using free thought to advance the message of AOF may to some seem quixotic, but one would think it is better to try than give up.

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

Building / Reason House Committee

Beverly Church, Chair
Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell, Mario Sandri

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 2011: Date to be announced

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

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell, Atheists Alliance International (AAI), <http://atheistalliance.org/>
Kevin Schultz, American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org/>
Beverly Church, American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org/>
Hank Kocol, Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), <http://secularhumanism.org/>

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz
Postmaster: Jerry Sloan
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(Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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Richard Kowaleski Speaks On How To Win Friends and Influence People

May AOF Speaker Recap

By David Flanders

Richard Kowaleski was May's AOF speaker. He mentioned techniques that he felt AOF could use to win friends and influence people.¹

Richard Kowaleski said successful movements have three things: (1) a charismatic leader; (2) a written manifesto; and (3) an outward focus. He proceeded to provide examples of success. He mentioned his delight in an organization that promotes the unification of science and religion.²

Another example he provided was Glen Cole of the capitol Christian center in Sacramento.³

Richard asked the audience of freethinkers at AOF if Albert Einstein believed in God. Those who suggested that Einstein was an atheist were promptly given an "Is Your Mind Open or Closed?" questionnaire.⁴

Richard proceeded to read a quote of Einstein in which Einstein says he believes in God. Then came the question and answer period.⁵

After the meeting, a handful of AOFers continued to debate Richard as they ate lunch.

Listed below are my attempts to provide increased clarity to the proceeding sentences.

¹ The people to be influenced are the people in middle America. The culture they live in has been described by some to be the most religion soaked of all the industrialized countries. Studies indicate that countries that experience high levels of economic insecurity tend to be associated with high levels of religiosity. Middle-class Americans feel anxious and fearful enough to seek the assistance of a friendly creator.

² That would be the Templeton foundation. John Templeton, the founder, became a rich billionaire pioneering the use of globally diversified mutual funds. He declined citizenship to the United States of America and now lives in the Bahamas so that he doesn't have to pay any US taxes. He successfully gives a \$1.5 million dollar prize each year to someone who provides

further evidence that science and religion are unified

³ Glen Cole, the founder of the Capitol Christian Center in Sacramento. On the church property is an elementary school that transforms many a child there from a natural question-poser to a socialized question rejecter. Glen is very wealthy and successful. He encourages new church members to conform to the American Christian culture they were born into, and donate 10% of their income to his church.

⁴ It seemed to some in the audience that Einstein used an atheistic methodology (science) to be successful and famous and to increase his ability to be a freethinker.

⁵ Einstein's actions—he put gas in his car with the realization that no sky god was going to assist him...actions such as that seem to suggest Einstein was an atheist.

One could sense freethinkers at AOF felt gratitude at the way AOF meetings are structured—a solid half hour of questions al-

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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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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 Figures Series

The First Christian Spiritualist

By Ken Nahigian

Emanuel Swedenborg, that wild old sage, couldn't sit still. He was a philosopher, a theologian, a chemist, an inventor, an anatomist, an engineer and a mystic. He was fluent in eleven languages. He wrote over 50 books. He talked to God, to angels, even to demons. And all that was OK. But they talked back—and *now* we have a story.

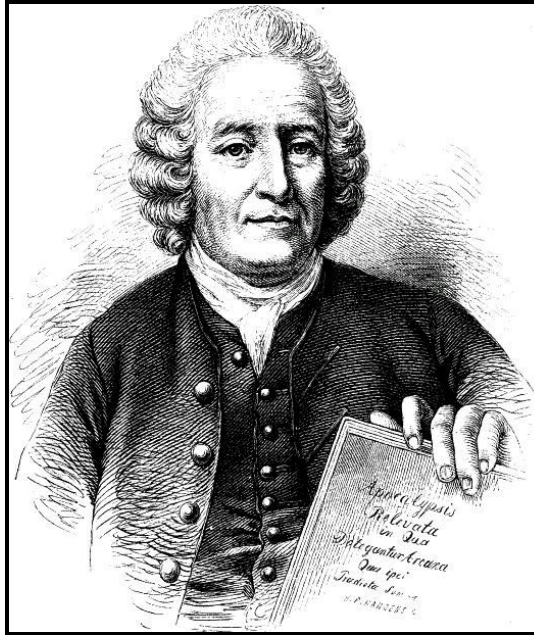
Swedenborg was the second son of a Lutheran bishop in a wealthy Stockholm family. He was born January 19, 1688. His father was a "pietist," church reformer, which had got him in some slight trouble. Young Swedenborg lived with his sister's family through most of his youth, then attended the University of Uppsala to study mathematics and physical science. Graduating in 1709, he went on a world tour, to England, the Netherlands and France, indulging his fascination with science, math, philosophy, and the practical arts.

Home again, Swedenborg began Sweden's first scientific journal, which became a showcase for much of his own work. An Impressed King Charles XII apprenticed him to a famed engineer of the day. During a happy five years of training, Swedenborg produced several treatises. He was even betrothed to the engineer's daughter, though she soon jilted him for another man.

Back on the road, he eventually found public work as a mining assessor. In 1734 he published his masterwork, the *Opera Philosophica et Mineralia*, "Philosophical and Mineral Work," three huge volumes. Ostensibly a study of minerals and mining, it outlined a florid cosmology with a rough version of the nebular hypothesis, the idea that the solar system condensed from a stellar cloud. Thereafter Swedenborg's writings drifted more and more into metaphysics—in particular, to the mystery of how the soul interacts with the body, and where it dwells (in the brain, he was sure).

One pet project was a universal symbolic ("hieroglyphic") language to convey his metaphysics, which resembled Plato's theory of Ideals: the idea that the natural world is a *hypostasis*, physical representa-

tion, of the more real spirit realm. As Swedenborg saw it, the world about us, so solid seeming, is but a reflection, or shadows on a wall. But then, around 1744, he had a crisis of the spiritual kind. Swedenborg began to dream dreams and see visions. He had vivid visits from Christ. He heard voices. He fell into ecstatic trances, involving trips around the solar system, or visits to heaven or hell. Haunted, Swedenborg abandoned his practical and scientific writings, and quit his public job, to focus entirely on the new theology and metaphysics he was slowly learning.



Emanuel Swedenborg, 75, holding the manuscript of *Apocalypsis Revelata* (1766)

The custom of the day was to read the Bible fairly literally. But now he saw something else, a meaning internal, spiritual, hidden ... occult. He released an anonymous theological work, the *Arcana Coelestia*, which retold the Pentateuch in symbolic terms. It stirred interest in the laity but rankled the clergy. Other anonymous works followed. By bits, word leaked out that Swedenborg was the author of these outrageous expositions. In 1768, he openly signed his name to one. His political connections protected him, though some of his friends suffered grievously.

Why? What was radical about his ideas? Not the basics, surely. God, he said, was the font of love and wisdom, which reflect through

nested levels of reality, multiplied like images in mirrors held face to face, obscuring their origin. This was a bit mystical but not outrageous. He stressed the primacy of free will, which somewhat clashed with Calvinist predestination. That was bold, but not unheard-of. But Christ was a kind of shadow or reflection of God, not a distinct entity—and this denied the traditional Trinity. The "second coming" was the return of Christ's true teaching, which occurred through Swedenborg's own writing. Worse, hell has no Satan; in heaven and hell, the dead carry on their lives and habits much as on earth. In short, we make our own heaven, our own hell. The Judgment had already occurred, in 1757.

In one strange tract, Swedenborg reported that the moon is peopled by beings who speak through their stomachs, with a sound like belching.

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Building A Better Future for Sacramento Takes All of Us!

Reason House: A Little History (Part 2)

By Mynga Futrell

Encouraged by the response to our “new millennium vision” presentation at a HAGSA meeting, Paul Geisert and I decided that we should perhaps get serious about the possibility of transforming the audience enthusiasm for the “Reason House – A 75th Year Celebration” [pseudo]retrospective into some sort of follow-up action.

We were thinking: “Who knows? Maybe the Sacramento freethought and humanist community just might be ready to purchase a building and turn it into a local hub of freethought and humanistic activity.”

Year after year, since 1994 when AOF first began meeting in Room 10 at the Sierra 2 Community Center, we had seen other small groups start out on such a path. We had witnessed a pattern with these Christian congregations. First, a brand new congregation would gather in a nearby room rented for the purpose of holding services.

Then, it wouldn't be long (less than a year, most of the time) before the group would move along to a leased building

These Christian gatherings were certainly no larger than our own, so we thought the potential was definitely there to find a place of our own. And we might even buy a building - especially if HAGSA and AOF would decide to join forces. After all, around that time (2001), we had read in the Sacramento Bee of one Oak Park congregation of even smaller size than AOF had scrimped and saved and bought a church building of considerable worth! So, why couldn't we?

We set about to produce a pamphlet that would more formally lay out the Reason House vision. We also sought (and gained) approval of both boards of directors (HAGSA and AOF) to hold a joint meeting to hear a presentation and ponder the possibilities.

I don't recall the date, but soon afterwards we arranged for both boards to meet together for dinner in the spare room at the Sichuan Garden to hear a more purposeful presentation and review the pamphlet material. That meeting concluded with a mutual vote in favor of conducting a “joint exploration” of the Reason House vision. The boards wanted at least to gauge member support



and see if enough pledges of funds (gifts or loans) could be garnered to finance the purchase of a building.

To provide greater access to information, Paul and I put the pamphlet content up on “Reason House” web pages on a website we already managed. With help from others, we designed a survey to send to members of both organizations, and an information flyer was mailed along with the survey to all members of both organizations.

From that survey, we learned that while there was a small handful of folks who felt a building was not a good idea (it would change the character of the organizations), most members of both groups were supportive, and some were very enthusiastic. The latter folks promised in writing to lend or give to the effort, and so we set up a bank account (“Reason House”) at US Bank for those who wanted to start donating some small amounts right away. Then we started looking around for viable properties.

With promises sufficient to acquire a \$300K building, we engaged a realtor who was amenable to informing us of available properties in that range, and as I recall, Jerry Sloan and Don Knutson were among those folks most helpful in doing reconnaissance and investigating properties.

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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: \$ _____

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).

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).

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His views spread in literary circles, influencing the poet William Blake, paving the way for the Romantic movement. Even Immanuel Kant took note. Kant wanted Swedenborg put in a madhouse.

He spent his last years in England, an old bachelor (apparently he never got over that jilting). He died in London of a stroke in 1772. Supposedly he had foretold his death exactly. Someone stole his skull, but the rest of him was moved to the Uppsala Cathedral in 1908.

Though he never meant to start a new church or denomination, “Swedenborgian” societies soon popped up like mushrooms, mainly in England. Followers founded the New Jerusalem Church in England in 1778 and in the United States in 1792. They were an energetic lot, supporting social causes like anti-slavery. Swedenborgian societies still exist, in fact—America has at least three.

Swedenborgianism influenced important authors such as Balzac, Baudelaire, Goethe, Emerson, Yeats, Henry James Sr., and Dostoevsky. It even had some influence on modern psychology, mostly through William James, who was raised a Swedenborgian.

But most inspired was John Chapman, the American folk hero. Yes, Emmanuel Swedenborg gave us Johnny Appleseed. How cool is that?

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Unfortunately, the market back then just would not get us what we needed in the way of meeting space and amenities for such a sum, and so after a while, exhausted by the effort, we abandoned the endeavor, took down the website, and handed all of the survey material over to Bev Church. The small amount of collected funds is now being held by AOF in a “Reason House” account, along with a much larger amount donated by a benefactor and earmarked for a building.

With the change in the commercial market and the increased “coming out” in the freethought and humanist communities, might it be time for new leaders to roll up their sleeves and give the idea another try?

A Short Story

Did Religion and Science Get Divorced?

By Dave Flanders

Once upon a time—2,500 years ago—two people got married.

The groom was a man named Thales. He lived in a cosmopolitan coastal city near Greece. Many called him a freethinker—he had no loyalty to tradition, authority, prejudice, or personal preference. He tended to think that knowledge is not knowledge until sufficiently justified by evidence and logic.

He enjoyed traveling, and traveled on a ship that sailed on a round planet named earth. The ship dropped anchor near Turkey. He and fellow sailors were intending to explore mount Ararat. They decided to walk up the mountain without stopping until they reached the top. With extreme sleep deprivation, Thales found himself falling into a deep sleep.

In his dream he encountered a man: Noah and his wife. Thales noted Noah never did name his wife—he would just say—hey you, come over here! And she was always submissive and obedient. Anyway, after 666 years Noah died. Noah's scribe neglected to say when Noah's wife died so she continued on living. Thales noted that she was quite attractive so yea—yea they decided to get married.

Over time Thales got tired of using pronouns on her and decided to give her a name: Smug. Smug loved her sacred book that described how she and her previous husband got baby dinosaurs on their ark. Over time Thales noted that Smug had a con-

dition known as undisciplined narcissism. One day Smug looked lovingly in Thales eyes and said to him, "Let's smooch—you can be my sacred lover!"

Thales paused. Smug, feeling euphoric, continued her seduction: "Come on, lets smooch! It's beyond any question! We're in love! You know I can be a great brain soother!"

Thales, ever the skeptic, stammered, "You and your sacred book are a myth."



Smug replied, "Well I feel certain that I exist, and my sacred book says I exist so therefore I exist."

Thales responded, "Sorry Smug, but my brain scanner indicates you are a hallucination in my memory circuits....facts and mythology are not compatible."

Smug became distraught and replied, "Can't there be some middle ground? We could blur definitions and try many sexual positions—err I mean the missionary position only."

Thales replied, "Nah—this is not a matter of negotiation or bar-

gaining, it is a matter of facts versus mythology, and I sort of prefer the real thing...I kind of sense making love to a real physical woman may be a tad better than mental masturbation. Therefore, we are divorced."

Later, Smug's scribe asked her if she is in a lousy marriage with Thales. Smug's response: "No—we are still compatible; my sacred-scientific book told me. Sometimes I feel so suave and smug when we smooch!"

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.

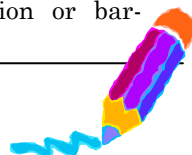
Preference is given to material in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Notepad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

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.

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

June/July Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social; location Tamaya Sushi Bar & Grill,
2131 J Street (22nd and J) (<http://tamayasushi.com>). Thursday, June 3, 6:30 p.m.
Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net

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

AOF Davis Community Meals Volunteerism Saturday, June 29, 4:00-7:00 p.m.

AOF July General Meeting Sunday, July 11, 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 2010), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (Feb 2011). 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.

