

October 1996

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Soup Kitchen Honors Atheists

On last Saturday afternoon, September 28th, AOF members were recognized for providing a series of charity dinners in North Sacramento during the past two years. The neighborhood association called TLC Soup Kitchen, Inc. honored AOF members and scores of dedicated volunteers from other organizations at a luncheon held at the Sierra Health Center on the Garden Highway.

Notice of the luncheon arrived too late to include mention of it at AOF's September general membership meeting or to put it in the last newsletter. This event marked the first and only public recognition of AOF since its members began serving the dinners on a quarterly basis in February 1994. Each dinner provides meals for men, women, and children of all ages with attendance ranging from 50 - 150.

Never mind that the luncheon began with a prayer, proceeded with live music from a gospel group, and ended with "god bless you all." We were invited, we attended, and we accepted our certificate of appreciation from TLC Soup Kitchen. The Church of Scientology and other groups were named as well, and no one batted an eye when the awards coordinator, Mary Watts, named

"Atheists & Freethinkers" as volunteers. She said it so quickly that barely anyone heard who we were!

Mary Watts had glowing things to say about most of the groups and individuals recognized, but mostly she thanked god for bringing everyone into her life so she could continue to do this good work for the community. She praised god, thanked god, and said she couldn't do this without god, and god bless you. It was interesting.

As background, TLC Soup Kitchen, Inc. works with the City of Sacramento to provide meals, groceries, and other community services. There is no official church sponsorship of their work. The dinners provided are conducted in a secular community facility.

Early on in our dinner projects, we were specifically told by City of Sacramento staff that we were to have no flyers or advertising promoting our group. We were told that this policy was uniformly applied to all groups helping out, and church groups were not allowed to require people to hear sermons in order to receive dinners. Apparently (unofficially) Sacramento churches have adopted TLC Soup Kitchen. It is important that we let people know that believers are not the only people who do good deeds.

The most recent charity dinner provided by AOF on September 20th was coordinated by Kay Stinson. Volunteers cooked up spaghetti dinners, salad, rolls, and cookies. Kay Stinson led the project in her well organized way, and was assisted by Ken Nahigian, Ed McConnell, Pete Studelska, Roland Roberge, Erik Brichta, Judy Brichta, Don Massy, Janet Borchers, Jason Borchers, Kevin Borchers, Karen Abbe, and Dave Flanders.

The dinners provide a way for AOF members to help people who are in need, as well as enjoy the company of fellow freethinkers while doing community projects. For those wishing to keep this important project alive, donations for the AOF charity dinners are accepted at any time. Many thanks go out to all those who have contributed time and money to this cause during the past two years.

President's Desk

by Karen Abbe

It is becoming clear to me that people need to know who we are, not just who we are not. The word atheism ("a" meaning without and "theism" meaning a belief in a supernatural power), says something about us. But it doesn't scratch the surface of what each of us is all about.

After we conducted our debate in August, I got a phone call from a believer who wanted to know if we would be holding any "god" debates in Roseville. He said it was his understanding that arguing against the existence of god was what we were all about. He was surprised we could talk about anything else! I responded by saying we would be happy to consider an event that he might set up, but our primary purpose was to provide a forum for atheists and freethinkers to

share their thoughts on a variety of important topics. Our debate was a wonderful intellectual exercise, and atheists have many things to offer in addition to addressing "god" issues.

My impression is that many believers don't see atheists as real people with real lives. They hold the misguided view that we're hostile, angry people upset with the church for no good reason. The truth is we're everyday ordinary people with jobs and families, and contribute to society like the rest of the world's population. We just conduct our daily lives without a belief in a supernatural power. So to chisel away at the negative stereotype believers still have of us, we can:

1. show who we're not by coming out of the closet as atheists and distancing ourselves from every ridiculous religious ritual known to man, and
2. show who we are by enjoying happy lives with varied interests, making contributions to society, and supporting organizations that promote critical thinking and real solutions to the real problems on this planet.

Thank you for letting me stand on the AOF soapbox to deliver this important message.

Correction

The September News & Views contained an error in the lead article on page one. In the second column, third paragraph, "...Barker stated that god had to cleanse his people by killing those who did not obey him."

During the debate on August 13th, it was John Morehead who stated that god had to cleanse his people by killing those who did not obey him.

We apologize for any confusion this error caused.

August Highway Clean-up

by Hank Kocol

AOF had another highway clean-up on Sunday morning, August 18th. We again had a beautiful day without the excessive heat we have had recently. Eleven AOFers worked on the project: Marv Blackman, Janet Borchers, Steve Borchers, Jason Borchers, Cleo Kocol, Ed McConnell, Roland Roberge, Betty Simonsma, Kay Stinson, Pete Studelska, and I. Because the highway was rather clean, the work again went rapidly. Since some of our members can help more easily on one weekend day than another, we will continue to switch weekend days.

Thus, THE NEXT CLEAN-UP DAY WILL BE ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26. A consensus at the August clean-up was that an early start was preferred so as not to cut deeply into an entire weekend day. Also, some of the crew suggested that we join together at lunch at a local restaurant after the clean-up. Thus, to accommodate both requests, we will begin at 8:30 a.m.

If you are interested in more information, or to volunteer, please contact me at (916) 327-6214 (weekdays) or (916) 771-5231 (evenings and weekends).

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

With regard to Betty Simonsma's experiences on the Bob Dunning Show, (AOF News & Views September 1996), she is to be commended for trying to speak out on atheism. We should all follow her example.

However, I would like to caution her and others who might try this on "talk shows." Those talk show hosts will never let people like Betty Simonsma get their points across. They are in complete control and are only interested in promoting themselves, humiliating guests like Betty Simonsma, and selling the wares of their advertisers. Many (maybe all) of the major talk shows are prerecorded, and then "edited" -- translation "censored" -- so that they finally emerge exactly the way the host wants it, which is usually totally distorted from what was said. Don't trust them one inch. I have actually "tangled" with Bob Dunning, and he's just one more well brainwashed little Catholic boy, who thinks his religion has an answer for everything. His local priest and the pope must be proud of him. Atheists beware of talk show hosts!

Dr. Eric T. Pengelley Davis

Dear Editor:

I was mulling over the definition of "Atheism" (disbelief in or denial of the existence of God) and decided that it is really too passive a term for what I believe. I wonder if we should perhaps coin a new term for those of us who not only deny the existence of "god" but who also resent and actively campaign against organized religion's prevalence (and priority) in both our culture and our government. Perhaps we should call ourselves "Antitheist." I haven't seen this term used, and I believe it better describes those of us who have real opposition to organized religion

Mary Jo Brooks Sacramento

The 18th Century Context

by Ed McConnell

I've never been very interested in those arguments about what the American founding fathers intended in the way of religion and government. It always seemed to me that both sides would list their out-of-context quotes to show what Jefferson, Paine, Washington, Adams, or Madison

may have believed, but the bottom line was that there was no established religion for the US government.

Then I read a column by William C. Sierichs, Jr. in the August 1996 Shreveport Humanist Bulletin, and he made some relevant points about the context of those 18th century religious ideas. One was that it was against the law in Christian dominated nations even to publicly criticize Christianity. Some societies were more liberal in allowing skeptical expressions than others, but under English law even rejection of the idea of the Trinity could lead to fines, imprisonment, or even execution. This naturally led to a certain caution and ambiguity for skeptics in speech on religious topics. It will never be possible to distinguish their meaning with certainty.

In addition, the pervasive nature of Christianity kept only one viewpoint prominent. It is surprising, considering that people were fed the Christian line virtually from birth, that there was any development of skeptical thought at all.

As a final point, the Bible scholarship of the 19th century was not available to the founders. It was during this century that scholars could examine the Bible critically, that libraries from older civilizations were recovered and demonstrated that the Bible incorporated older material and was clearly the product of human -- not divine -- efforts.

We now live in a very different world than the 18th century founders did, but old habits die hard. Did anyone else notice that recently, when evidence was announced suggesting the possible discovery of microbial life having existed on Mars, that the first thing many news services did was get quotes from eminent theologians? Was this consistent with Scripture? Oh, well.

Long Distance AOF Supporters

Did you know that we have AOF members scattered about the countryside? They live all the way from the state of Washington to Kentucky. We'd like to make special note of two such members who regularly contribute their time and effort to help the cause of freethought.

Mike Crutchfield, who lives in Redding, gets out on Highway 299 to pick up garbage in the adopt-a-highway program. He was responsible for putting up a sign showing that "Atheist & Freethinkers" (name is slightly different than our sign in Sacramento) is responsible for that section. Mike usually cleans the 2-mile stretch of highway by himself. He could be called a lone trooper of freethought! He also sports a Darwin fish and a "recovered from religion for good" bumper sticker on his car.

Larry Judkins, who lives in Orland, writes a weekly column for the Sacramento Valley Mirror. Larry provides a voice of reason to that paper's religion section. His commentaries range all the way from famous freethinkers in history to coverage of our recent debate. Larry has been one of AOF's most fervent supporters, going all the way back to the beginning of the group's inception.

We thank these two AOF members, plus the many more, who regularly contribute toward the cause of rational thinking and the separation of church and state.

September Meeting

Kay Dickey

Elaine Coleman Dr. Floyd Cothran

The September meeting featured two speakers: **Elaine Coleman**, an AOF member who has first hand experience in the battle against cancer, and **Dr. Floyd Cothran**, a retired Sacramento physician.

Elaine began by stating that when we talk about breast cancer, we talk about remission, not about cure. One out of four women with breast cancer dies. If one survives five years, she is not necessarily out of the woods. If she survives ten years, she can be optimistic. It takes 7-8 years for a mammogram to detect a breast cancer, and 8-9 years before it can be felt. She learned through her experiences that you have more time than you think to make your decisions. In most slow growing types of breast cancer, it takes 100 days for a cell to double. Breast cancer is mainly a disease of age. More post-menopausal women contract the disease, and most of the post-menopausal cancers are slow-growing.

There are three main types of breast cancers. 70% of them are slow-growing ductal cancers, 10% are globular (in the glands), and 20% are other types, a few of which are very lethal. Cancers are classified in four stages. She discussed the sizes of cancers in these stages, the extent to which they have spread, and the expected survival rates of each stage.

Elaine then discussed the types of treatments and the statistical differences of the types of treatment. The chance of recurrence with a lumpectomy is 60-70%, with a lumpectomy and radiation 10%, and with mastectomy 8%.

She stressed that a woman's survival may depend on her oncologist. The follow-up treatment is very important. A woman should fight to get the best doctor she can. There is no known way to prevent breast cancer. The only way is to have a prophylactic, bilateral mastectomy.

Dr. Floyd Cothran asked us to consider why we should care about HIV and AIDS. This disease is not restricted to gays and drug users. The fastest growing populations contracting this disease are heterosexual women, teenagers, and babies of infected mothers.

The religious right is known for rallying against gay issues. For example, the group Focus on the Family has voiced the opinion that gays choose their lifestyle and can modify their sexual

orientation. Studies have shown that sexual orientation is biologically determined and gays are following their biological natures.

The religious right has consistently opposed sex education, as has the Catholic church. They have offered the position that sex education programs cause kids to become sexually active. They have also opposed condom distribution programs and needle exchange programs. These could reduce the spread of the virus, and people participating in needle exchange programs are more likely to enter treatment programs.

In November 1994, the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors approved a needle exchange program, which was subsequently blocked by a court injunction.

There is significant progress being reported in AIDS drug therapy. Recent studies have shown a combination of drugs on a strict regimen produce very positive results. We need to oppose the view of the radical right, and support sex education and clean needle exchange programs. We need all the weapons available to fight the disease. And we need to remember that the disease is the enemy, not the people who have the disease.

AOF Board

- President: Karen Abbe
- Vice-President: Cleo Kocol
- Secretary: Kay Dickey
- Treasurer: Ed McConnell
- Directors-at-Large:
 - Don Massy, Edgar Brichta, Roland Roberge,
 - Kay Stinson, and Betty Simonsma

AOF Committees

- [Atheist Alliance](#) liaison: Cleo Kocol
- Dinners-for-the-needy: Kay Stinson
- Highway cleanup project: Hank Kocol
- Internet website: Pat Kelley
- Meeting facility: Betty Simonsma
- Speaker scheduling: Karen Abbe
- Newsletter editor: (opening available)
- Newsletter publishing: Karen Abbe
- Voicemail system: Karen Abbe

- Membership database: Betty Simonsma

October Meeting Speaker

AOF's October 13th general membership meeting will feature a presentation from Sacramento's Libertarian Party President Joe Farina. Mr. Farina is an attorney in private practice in Sacramento. Come speak your mind about the current political climate by joining AOFers in a lively discussion. After all, we'll be going to the polls on November 5th.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

Just as a reminder, we'll send free monthly newsletters to anyone who requests same but that's only for your first three months. After that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$8 per year. Or become a member and get your newsletter free as part of your membership.

AOF ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION/MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s) _____ Phone () _____
 Street _____ Apt. _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Join as a member of Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF) and help promote greater understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. Please indicate the AOF category you prefer:

_____ Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$8.00) _____ Family membership (\$30.00)
 _____ Low-income Member (\$10.00) _____ Patron (\$50.00)
 _____ Single Membership (\$20.00) _____ Donation (Tax Deductible) \$_____

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

Mail form to: Atheists and Other Freethinkers P.O. Box 15182 - Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

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

See you at the next exciting AOF event!

Calendar of Events

Sunday October 13, noon to 2:00 pm. - General Meeting (topic: current political climate)
 Sunday, October 20th - Newsletter committee meeting

Tuesday, October 22nd, 6:30 to 8:00 pm. - AOF Board Meeting Saturday
October 26th, 8:30 to 10:30 am. - Highway Cleanup project
Sunday, November 10th, noon to 2:00 pm. - General Meeting (topic: Critical thinking skills)