

March 1997

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Charity Dinner

by Kay Stinson

The Charity Dinner on January 24th was a great success thanks to generous donations by Peggy Lucas, Bart Sutton, and other AOF members. Betty Simonsma kindly donated 18 pounds of home grown beef for the delicious meat loaf. We served about 75 people with second helpings for several, and as usual, many of those eating were children.

The preparation and serving went especially smoothly thanks to the help of Betty Simonsma, Randy Kelley, Jody Craig, Ed McConnell, Don Knutson, Karen Abbe, Lia Posey, Judy and Edgar Brichta, Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian, and Hank Kocol. And a special thanks to Don Massy for washing all those pots, pans, and dishes.

These dinners have been a great success because AOF members have so generously supported this much needed cause.

Be sure to watch the newsletter for the next scheduled dinner. And thanks again to all the contributors and volunteers who make things happen!

President's Desk

by Karen Abbe

My last two president's messages were so lengthy, so you all get a break this month. I do, however, want to report on the activity of our voice mail system. During the past few weeks, we've been getting more calls, and most people are not just calling and hanging up. They're actually leaving their names and addresses and are interested in our group. This is very encouraging that our public relations endeavors are starting to pay off. People keep seeing our name in the paper, or on public service announcements on Access Sacramento, and word of mouth has always helped too. For those who thought we might only last a few months and would eventually go away, well, we're not going away. We'll be starting our fifth year come June, and we're going to keep "not going away" to the irritation of some! Thanks go out to all of you who continue to promote AOF. We are here to stay.

Highway Clean-up by Hank Kocol

AOF fielded ten members at the February 23rd highway clean-up activity. Attending and working, were: Karen Abbe, The Borchert Family (Steve, Janet, Jason), Don Knutson, Jon Pederson, Lia Posey, John Reiger, Betty Simonsma, and me.

The wind was somewhat strong, but the resolve of the members was stronger. After the clean-up, six of us met at a restaurant for necessary liquids, well-deserved lunches, and AOF camaraderie.

The next highway clean-up is scheduled for April 19th, a Saturday, at 10:00 a.m. As we leave winter, we no longer need to be concerned about the early morning fog. So an earlier start time is possible, thus, allowing our volunteers time for other activities on a weekend day. The date and time will also be announced on the AOF voice mail and at AOF meetings.

March Speaker

AOF's March 9th general membership meeting will feature Dr. Ernie Dahl who is a retired professor of psychology and counseling. His topic will focus on the creative thinking process. Join AOFers on Sunday March 9th for this important presentation.

Questions About Wall of Separation

Ed Buckner of the Atlanta Freethought Society responded to Reverend Price, who had attacked the wall of separation of church and state as "bogus" in a column in an Atlanta area newspaper. Noting that Rev. Price had not explained what he wanted regarding church and state, though he apparently did not want religious neutrality from government, Buckner provided a short list of very good questions for the Reverend. It would be interesting to get answers to these questions from anyone who is challenging the separation. The questions are:

- * Does Rev. Price want agents of any government to make religious decisions for him?
- * Does he want any government to assist him, directly or indirectly, as he tries to persuade others of the truth of his religious beliefs?
- * Does he believe parents are always the proper source of religious instruction for young children, and if not, does he want government agents to decide which parents are wrong or inadequate regarding religion?
- * Does he want government agents to try to force a preference for religious beliefs on anyone?
- * Does he believe any government should tax citizens to pay for encouraging others to accept religious beliefs not shared by those being taxed?

He concludes: "Those of us who support a strict separation of church and state simply believe in religious liberty for all. Does Rev. Price want something else?"

AOF Thanks Donors and Patrons

AOF would like to thank the following people who have either made donations to AOF or who have joined as patrons in 1996 or 1997:

Martin Bard
Ed Coleman
Ernie Dahl
Denis DeLuchi
Kay Dickey
Mini Ferguson
Norman Ferrari
Lowell Galyan
Paul Geisert and Mynga Futrell
Richard Hewetson
Robert Holman
Pat Kelley
Jack Kennedy
Hank and Cleo Kocol

Jane Lack
Frank Leonard
Hubert Linegar
Allen Link
Peggy Lucas
Ed McConnell
Ken Nahigian
Pete and Joyce Studelska
Bart Sutton
Ted Toal
George Weber
Pat Zarriello

Atheist Programming For Your Viewing Pleasure

There are several freethought shows scheduled for Channel 74 on Sacramento Cable. The programs for the next few weeks are as follows:

Sunday March 2nd 7:00 pm Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists, NY) Panel discussion

Wednesday March 5th 11:00 pm [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) Cross training in San Diego

Sunday March 9th 7:00 pm Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists, NY) Panel discussion

Wednesday March 12th 11:00 pm [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) Death by faith healing

Sunday March 16th 7:00 pm Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists, NY) Panel discussion

Wednesday March 19th 11:00 pm [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) Carrying capacity

Sunday March 23rd 7:00 pm Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists, NY) Panel discussion

Wednesday March 26th 11:00 pm [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) Founding fathers

Sunday March 30th 7:00 pm Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists, NY) Panel discussion

Wednesday April 2nd 11:00 pm [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) Bibliocide by cataloging

Sunday April 6th 7:00 pm Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists, NY) Panel discussion

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor

(edited (by Atheists and Other Freethinkers Newsletter Committee) for space)

Editor, News and Views:

I am happy to respond to Ms. Eleanor Bernstein's chastisement of me for my support of assisted suicide (February News and Views).

Firstly, she leaves out the word "voluntary" and infers that those of us who support doctor assisted suicide want to "put people out of their misery" without their consent. We do not. All we want to do is give mentally competent adults the right to choose. We are not asking her to make the choice for herself or anyone else. We are asking her to let us have the right to make the choice for ourselves.

With regard to Ms. Bernstein's experiences in nursing homes, I agree with her that American doctors are all too often very indifferent, particularly with regard to pain control. European and Canadian doctors (with whom I have some familiarity) are much better at this. She believes that the reason some of these people want to die is because they are neglected. Make them feel needed and wanted, and all that will go away. This is not true.

Most of those who want to die have had enough of life's trials and their humiliations. I speak from some experience, for I personally nursed my late wife of 41 years through terminal cancer until she died in my arms at home (a bittersweet experience, I can assure you). She was not neglected ever. She had daily visitors besides my constant presence and care 24 hours a day, and she was very grateful for it. But she wanted to die; she had had enough, and I consider it my ultimate act of love for her that I was willing to let her go. Incidentally, if she had been permitted to chew an opium tablet each day for the last year of her life, it would have made all the difference to her peace of mind and body. But in this society with its paranoia on drugs she was not permitted to do that. One more sadistic cruelty of this Christian country.

Sincerely, Eric T. Pengelley

The following letter from member Kay Dickey appeared in the Placerville Mountain Democrat 1/29/97

Lousy Bumper Sticker Thief To the person who stole my Darwin sticker off my vehicle Saturday evening at Ben's Cheaper store: I have just a few questions for you.

Do you think that I would have stolen your large silver Jesus sticker off your car? (I certainly would not have done that.) Don't you think that my right to express my lack of beliefs is as valuable as your right to express your beliefs? (I certainly think that it is.)

Weren't you taught by your parents that you should not do unto others what you would not want them to do to you? (This is the Golden Rule. I certainly was.) Weren't you taught by your parents that stealing is wrong? (I certainly was.) Don't you think I will just buy another sticker? (I certainly plan to do that.) What are you afraid of? The truth? (I know that it probably is scary for you to see something that causes you to question your beliefs.)

Disappointed, Kay Dickey

The following letter from member Betty Simonsma appeared in the Sacramento Bee 1/13/97

Gwynne Dyer, in her Jan 12 editorial "Driven mad by the burden of history", has written clearly about the Middle East problems. Yes, the fanatics are killing a few at a time, but whole nations are driven by the same "burden". Fortunately, most areas in the world do not have people with a book that tells them that their particular land belongs to them into perpetuity. Therefore, most nations move forward trying to solve differences and difficulties with their eyes and minds on the present and future.

Reading about the squabbles between the Israelis and the Arab nations is like watching children grab for a toy and destroy it while failing to see that nobody wins and everyone loses. Only in this situation whole cities are destroyed while people can't get on with their real lives. All of this is being done by grown men and women.

It is past time that religious and political leaders stop fueling these fires of hate and possession. I am ashamed that our nation feeds money to them so they can fight rather than earning their own way.

Sincerely, Betty Simonsma

Try God

By John C. Reiger (edited by *Atheists and Other Freethinkers Newsletter Committee*) for space)

"Try God" said the little chrome plastic sign on the rear of the smoky, gray Honda. It wasn't a bumper sticker but one of those three dimensional plastic stick-on things that try to look like they are part of the chrome trim of the car. You know the kind - on Christian cars (have these cars been baptized?). They are usually shaped like a fish or a dove.

This one was different which is probably why it caught my attention. Maybe it was just that I was bored. We were in the middle of a two-hour drive through mind-numbing familiar territory and my eyes were desperate for anything new.

My first thought was "Another Christian proclaiming their belief." But then I remembered another meaning of the word "try". "Try God," why? What has he done that he should be brought to trial for? My mind blossomed with a cornucopia of deliciously ironic thoughts.

God did flood the earth, they say, drowning almost every living person along with almost all the flora and fauna. And he did it deliberately! That, to me, sounds like first degree murder at the very least. It probably even qualifies as genocide. These are very serious charges. They overshadow all the other crimes (like inciting murder, turning people to salt, destroying towns, etc., etc.) detailed in that lengthy indictment known as the Bible.

So I guess we really should "Try God." But this raises the question of who is "we?" I assume that the Pope would be in charge of the defense, but who will speak for the people?

Should we excuse Christians from jury duty because of a presumed bias? Should Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems, and all other religionists be excluded for the same reason? How about atheists? And where will this trial take place, under what legal jurisdiction?

Then there is the issue of sentencing should God be found guilty. What punishment should (could) be meted out? A fine is obviously too light a punishment for such heinous crimes, but if that were what the jury chose, what would the fine be? And where would God be incarcerated should that be the jury's decision?

Then there is the matter of capital punishment, surely a fit punishment for such an arch criminal, but how do we do it? After all, Nietzsche is dead so he cannot help. See what fun you can have on a boring trip? .

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll send one free newsletter to any individual upon request, but 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. (*Donations from you vicarious internet viewers is also appreciated! ;-)* Pat)

AOF Board

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Secretary	Kay Dickey
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Don Massy, Edgar Brichta, Roland Roberge, Kay Stinson, and Betty
Simonsma

AOF Committees & Projects

Atheist Alliance liaison:	Cleo Kocol
Speaker Scheduling:	Karen Abbe
Newsletter Publishing:	Karen Abbe
Highway Cleanup Project:	Hank Kocol
Newsletter Editor:	Opening Available
Meeting Facility:	Betty Simonsma
Membership Database:	Betty Simonsma
Voicemail System:	Karen Abbe
Charity Dinner Project:	Kay Stinson

Meeting Reviews

January Program Speakers by Kay Dickey

AOF's January 12th general membership meeting featured short presentations from three speakers: Betty Simonsma, Dr. Floyd Cothran, and Richard Langley. Each presented a different topic of interest.

Betty Simonsma, longtime AOF member, spoke about health and exercise. She mentioned some books she has read. We need to be concerned with our total fitness. All movement is exercise, and it can be combined into our daily routines. For example, she now takes things upstairs as needed, instead of piling them in one area. Betty feels the reason so many children have weight problems is due to their sedentary lifestyle, as in watching too much television. She mentioned that in Eastern cultures, work is considered to be an extension of life.

Dr. Floyd Cothran, a retired allergist, spoke about "What Next from the Religious Right?" He doesn't feel they have given up, just changed their tactics. He gave us the names of five men who have gigantic power that we need to keep an eye on: Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed, Gary Bauer, James Dobson, and Chuck Coulson. He mentioned some of the "condemned behaviors" that are dear to them, such as homosexuality, abortion, and divorce. He indicated we should follow these men very closely. They will offer programs that will be so sweet that we'll have to look very carefully to see what's beneath it all.

We also need to watch candidates carefully, as they often do not mention in their campaigning the issues they intend to pursue when they are elected. We need to talk about the religious right, and let people know what they are really about. We need to write more letters to newspapers and other publications. We need to confront them whenever we can with activism.

Richard Langley, an outspoken freethinker, spoke on the subject of Mithracism. Mithra was a Persian god, but was more than just a tribal god. Richard spoke about the strikingly similar parallels between Mithracism and Christianity. Both religions had virgin births. Mithra was born in a cave and had twelve companions. Mithra's birthday was also on December 25th. Both religions celebrate the resurrection at Easter. Much of what we know about Mithracism today came from the Christians. There are references about it in the Old and New Testaments.

Mithracism spread over several continents, and there are still some traditions in our culture which have originated with the religion such as the custom of shaking hands or the swinging of incense which is still done in the Catholic church today. There was nothing new or special about Christianity. Many of the Christian stories came from multiple sources which all presented the same ideas. It came down to which religions would Christianity accept, and which ones it would not accept. Several differences between Mithracism and Christianity are that Mithracism was against the collection of money and the building of churches. As an interesting note, the speaker stated that recently, an ancient Jewish temple was discovered in Israel which contained a floor carving of a symbol of Mithra surrounded by the zodiac, which was a pagan symbol.

Richard suggested several books for more information on Mithra and other Christ stories, Pagan Christs by James Robertson, 1903, and Jesus: God, Man, or Myth? by Herbert Cutner. Also, the internet has abundant information on Mithra.

February Program Speaker by Kay Dickey

Charles Hunsinger, an AOF member from Fresno, was featured at our February 9th meeting. Mr. Hunsinger promotes a philosophy called Sapien, which means reason, which is the essence of human life. Mr. Hunsinger stated that atheism has no particular value, it's simply a statement, no more no less. There is no philosophy in atheism. Atheists number approximately 11.3% of the population, and agnostics number 10.1%. We are a significant percentage of the population. We have power, but we don't use it. We are too independent and too strong as individuals to get together to use our power. Atheism needs a social and political identity, and Hunsinger proposed to give it an identity.

We must develop a political philosophy which embraces what this country is all about. Using the mind set of a theist, it is considered a sin to oppose the will of God. Therefore, the first amendment is in defiance of the gods and theism is an enemy of a free state. One could conclude that a theist is a treasonist. As freethinkers, we have more of an obligation to honor the Bill of Rights.

Hunsinger's philosophy of Sapien goes beyond Ayn Rand, who places reason as the essence of objectivity. He places reason as the essence of life. Nothing is greater than reason. This must be translated into a philosophy and a social and power base. We are an enormous force in numbers. Where do we want atheism to go? As atheists and freethinkers, what do we say as a group? There needs to be a unification of force and power.

As a Sapien being, we immediately go above all the hatred and bigotry in the world. When you identify yourself as anything (i.e. , male, white, atheist, etc.),there are lines drawn between yourself and others. There is no need to identify ourselves, unless we want to promote divisiveness. Many people make their living promoting divisiveness, such as the Pope, the NAACP, ministers, etc. No one makes money promoting reason.

Truth is religion for the sake of religion without prejudice. All people are capable of reason. We do not teach or demand reason. The government doesn't want it in the citizens. You can't lead around people who are reasonable. Reason carries demands, and asserts that mankind is not frail. The speaker doesn't care much for Humanism, as he feels it does not say much. He does not know what it means to be a Humanist.

Freedom is an inherent right of reasoning beings. The knowledge we have is cumulative. We are the knowledge and creativity which came before us. Everyone thinks, but unfortunately we don't teach our children to reason. We need to bring intelligence and reason back to the world. To promote Sapien means to redefine everything. We have been told many incorrect things about God, Jesus, and that our government was formed on theistic principles. The essence of the constitution is based on individual freedoms.

Atheism is simply a philosophical statement. Hunsinger thinks we may have a higher morality as atheists. In his career years ago as a police officer, he never once arrested an atheist. We need to be aware of the difference between emotion and reason. Hitler, for example, used emotion and not reason, in his control of his people. (Handouts were provided by Hunsinger.)

See you at all the March AOF events!