

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

August 2005

Sunday, August 14

## Annual Summer Sizzler

### Special Points of Interest

- Just Picture It - Christ Entering Washington in 2008 (page 1)
- Last of Series: AOF Director Self-Intro (page 2)
- Movie Review: "The God Who Wasn't There" (page 4)
- Volunteering Opportunities for Freethought Day (page 5)
- Interpreting a Prayer Study (page 7)



It's a potluck and a cool one, too (salads, beverages, and desserts). The program at AOF's August general meeting does not promise coolness, though. Expect a bit of fired-up commentary as we will continue our annual tradition of hearing prepared orations by members who would like to

edify all those in attendance. All speeches are short ones. A presenter can opt for a couple of minutes to have a brief say or, at most, a five-minute slot to hold forth on something more substantial. Presenters who stick to their topic and do not overrun their time are eligible for a drawing for the oratory prizes (one for each category). Topics submitted in advance have priority for available time. (Last-minute volunteers may sign onto the presentation agenda on arrival if time is available.) All in all, the meeting promises full stomachs and neural stimulation. Don't miss it! (Bring an item for the salads/desserts table!)

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## "American Fundamentalists"

### Los Angeles Artist to Participate in Freethought Day 2005!

The Freethought Day Committee is pleased to announce that musician and multimedia artist Joel Pelletier will be coming to Sacramento for our Freethought Day festivities on October 9. Joel will display a full-sized copy of the acrylic painting for which he is becoming known (the item itself will be in a gallery at the time). Since completion last year, he has been displaying his work in varied locations around the nation. The painting was inspired by James Ensor's classic 1889 masterpiece, *Christ's Entry into Brus-*

*sels*. Joel's update, entitled *American Fundamentalists: Christ's Entry into Washington in 2008*, is a depiction of current American religious, corporate and political fundamentalists and their lackeys whooping it up in a big parade celebrating the return of Jesus as Washington burns. The artist has been hosting forums and seminars across the country on the American fundamentalism and its threat to democracy. Find information on the artist and the painting at <http://www.americanfundamentalists.com>

## Meet a New AOF Board Member Phil Lazier

*Editor's Note:* This is the final of three articles introducing readers of AOF News & Views to the directors-at-large who joined the AOF board in June.

Here's some objective information on me:

### *Education:*

Montclair Academy (NJ); The Hill School (PA); Williams college, B.A./ Psychology (MA); Chapman College, M.A./ Counseling Psychology; licensed Counselor/Psychotherapist (CA)

*"Careers":* USAF, 24 years, Navigator Bombardier, Fighter Pilot (F4); Vietnam Tour. Counselor/ Psychotherapist, Hospital Mental Health Clinic; part-time private practice. Elementary teacher. Now retired, I volunteer as fourth grade science teacher and chess coach.

I am past president of Sacramento valley Chapter of the California Marriage and Family Therapists and Sacramento veterans Employment Committee. I was Racing chairman, Camellia Cup Regatta for several years. I'm a member of HAGSA, the Folsom Lake Yacht club, the Sacramento Valley Astronomical Society, and others. I'm also a Counselor and Celebrant of the



American Humanist Association. I love doing weddings!

Speaking of "love"... I love sailing (racing and cruising, especially Caribbean), astronomy, skiing, chess, photography, (mountain hiking when younger), camping, flying, etc.

You can quote me:

People are good. As a counselor, I see people struggling to be good, to be responsible, to give and receive love. I've had thousands of clients/patients and respected and cared for each one.

I am a determinist, which to me follows logically from thinking rationally.

I would like to see a stronger link between AOF and HAGSA, such as a single program committee, and joint programs at times.

I am very concerned about the continuously devaluing dollar, and also the lack of involvement by the government and media in a future with greatly diminishing oil supply. I recommend the book, "Crossing the Rubicon" by Mike Ruppert to every thinking citizen. Lastly, I highly recommend grandparenthood as a wonderful way to share love and joy.

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

*See the insert in this issue of News & Views for co-sponsorship opportunities. We depend on our members to enable AOF to co-produce this outdoor event. We gladly accept donations in any amount. Give what you can. Thank you!*

*Please support Freethought Day! This is our best opportunity all year to bring concepts to the attention of the public, shedding light on how freethinking has contributed to human progress.*

## AOF Board (2005-6)

President: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Kevin Schultz

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Carla Corbett, Beverly Church

Dave Flanders, Phil Lazier

Vincent Wales

## AOF Committees

Newsletter: Mynga Futrell (Editor)

Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor)

Jerry Sloan (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 9, 2005:

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla

Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom

Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

Darwin Day, Feb. 12, 2006:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell,

Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell,

Kay Dickey, Ken Nahigian,

Ad Hoc Committees:

Web Portal (Kevin Schultz, Richard

Langley); Alternate Meeting Place/

Time (Jerry Sloan, Ken Nahigian,

Kevin Schultz); Youth Outreach

(Jerry Sloan, Tina Burgess, Mynga

Futrell); Connections (Kevin

Schultz, Betty Simonsma); Growing

AOF Membership (Jerry Sloan,

Kevin Schultz)

Archive: Jody Craig, Kay Dickey,

Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian,

Betty Simonsma

## AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI),

Hank Kocol (CSH),

Ed McConnell (AA),

Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website: Pat Kelley

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian

Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database:

Ken Nahigian

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail at 447-3589 if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at aofboard@aofonline.org

## Panel Presentation by Local NOW Representatives Meeting Recap By Kevin Schultz

In July AOF hosted a panel presentation from the Sacramento chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), featuring Mary Bradsberry (chair, reproductive rights committee), Chelsea del Rio (Vice-president), and Amber Valdez (chair, Lesbian Rights committee).

Chelsea discussed the history of NOW, as well Sacramento NOW's current core issues -- ensuring pharmacy access to prescription contraceptives, abortion clinic defense, and opposition to the California parental notification initiative. NOW has also recently concluded a national convention focusing on inter-generational feminism.

Amber discussed the actions that members of NOW have taken to support lesbian rights, from the very early days of the organization to the present day float-building efforts at the San Francisco Pride Parade.

Mary provided a positive update on the status of protests at the Alta-Arden women's clinic. After years of violent protests in front of the clinic, the four men mainly responsible (members of the local anti-abortion extremist group, "Sanctity of Human Life Network") have departed in search of more vulnerable targets. The reason? Long-suffering clinic staff patiently accumulated

material over the years which has led to the creation of a legal "buffer" zone around the entrance to the clinic. When the protestors realized they could no longer physically and emotionally abuse the women entering the clinic, they departed for targets in Roseville and on B Street.

Mary also pointed out that a recent survey by Sacramento NOW reported that while all pharmacies dispense Viagra (all but one in their survey), many do not stock emergency morning-after pills (only 65 pharmacies surveyed, or 56%). Sacramento NOW is working to educate women that over 20 local organizations have these pills in stock and do not require prescriptions as the pharmacists have received special training to dispense them (spread the word!).

A lively question and answer period followed. One AOFer inquired whether members of NOW would feel comfortable working with atheists on topics of common interest. The member had had previous experiences with progressive groups that still exhibited "atheo-phobia"

*(Continued on page 4)*



Mary Bradsberry, Amber Valdez, and Chelsea del Rio edify AOFers on women's issues

### 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 and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.*

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*Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).*

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.

# The God Who Wasn't There

Movie Review by Ken Nahigian

*The God Who Wasn't There*  
Written and directed by Brian Flemming (DVD released June 6)  
Website: <http://thegodmovie.com/>

Brian Flemming is a bad boy. An outspoken atheist, maverick director, playwright and copyright issues activist, his first big splash was a way-off-Broadway musical cult hit, *Bat Boy* (2001), about a half-bat/half-boy from the tabloid *Weekly World News*. Following it was *Nothing So Strange* (2002), a faux documentary of the assassination of Bill Gates. Flemming also founded an alternative film festival in Park City, Utah, the annual Slumdance (think of Utah's Slamdance Festival, itself a parody of the annual Sundance). That was for warmers.

Friday evening, June 15, members of the Sacramento Community of Reason gathered at the home of Beverly Church to view his latest bad-boy production, *The God Who Wasn't There*. All about Jesus. The goal: to hold "modern Christianity up to a merciless spotlight," to ask

"questions few dare to ask. And when it finds out how crazy the answers are," to say it. Quotes from the website. And yes, indeed.

Despite its recent release, direct-to-DVD distribution, and rather low-key publicity program (private screenings + word of mouth), this film has already sparked remarkable controversy and anger. It reveals nothing new, but effectively brings together facts of New Testament origins and 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish culture and history, comparative religion and psychology, painting an uncomfortable picture for believers.

We see that the historical anchor for Jesus is conflicted and fragile, while Paul's early letters, our closest Christian sources, portray Jesus as a character "outside time," more an Aesop's fable than a person. Paul seemed to know nothing of the divine biography you learn in Sunday school (the Virgin Birth, Baptism, Triumphal Entry, healings and miracles, etc.) – these details came later, condensing around the central myth like water molecules around a

dust particle, apparently drawn from other savior and messiah myths of the day such as Osiris, Mithra and Dinoyosis. Flemming boisters his research with interviews of NT scholars such as Robert Price and Richard Carrier, anthropologist/folklorist Alan Dundes (who died six weeks later), urban myth experts, and even some true believers. To cap it, he marches into a personal Lion's Den, the Village Christian School in Sun Valley, California, his own childhood fundamentalist academy, to talk to the superintendent (who angrily cut short the interview).

Production values are high overall, with smooth scene segues, surreal visuals, and a tone sometimes bitter, sometimes reverent, at times regretful – with much of the regret focused on Flemming's own emotion-torn youth at the Christian school.

The music includes electronica mixes by Thievery Corporation, David Byrne, Zap Mama and Le

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Lots of friendly discussion occurred before and after the program.

## NOW Panel

*(Continued from page 3)*

when it came to interacting with atheists. Chelsea quickly replied that not only would atheists be welcome to interact with NOW, but many members of NOW are themselves atheistic.

Another member asked the NOW panelists how the separation of church and state (an issue of core concern to AOFers) affected the work that they do. Amber laughingly replied that it affected, "everything," that they work on.

NOW has grown from its inception in 1966 to over 500,000 members and chapters in each of the fifty states. Its goal is to bring about equality for women. You may learn more about Sacramento NOW by visiting their web site, at <http://www.sacnow.org>.

# A Protest Hard to Ignore

## Local Couple Reports on Reaction to Their Anti-Iraq War Symbol

June Meeting Recap by Dave Flanders

Steven and Virginia Percy were the guest speakers at June's AOF meeting. Both Steven and Virginia are attorneys and well versed regarding the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

As the couple was driving to their home in Sacramento from Berkley, they tired of seeing merely lame bumper stickers protesting the war in Iraq. In an era when flag-draped coffins are banned from the TV screen and embedded reporters no longer show the realities of war, their frustration grew. They proceeded to fashion an

American soldier uniform dangling from the rooftop of their house, a noose around its neck with a sign saying, "Your tax dollars at work."



Their neighbors got furious and attempted to put an immediate stop to it. One walked on the property and took the display down. A revised display--"Bush lied, I died" was also torn down.

Neighbors had informed the media of their outrage of the soldier display. To their dismay, the Percys' display achieved national coverage, Radio right-wing talk show hosts who resented the display stirred an organized group of protesters to do a protest rally in front of the Percy's house. People camped out in front of their house. People who supported the

Percys arrived there as well, and ended up easily outnumbering the protesters. In the Percys' view, Sacramento DA Jan Scully ignored

the law when she decided not to file charges against the vandals and trespassers who tore down the soldier displays.

The Percys refused to be intimidated by the threatening phone calls. Those who attempted to silence the Percys by means of city machinery failed. Despite the close scrutiny, there were no "code violations" to be found. Eventually the media moved on to other topics.

The Percys sense is that the right-wing people in America are actually a minority in America. They have a website named the "Corruption Exposer." You can log on to it at [corruptionexposer.blogspot.com](http://corruptionexposer.blogspot.com). Its purpose is to provide accurate, truthful and credible information.

AOFers were absorbed by the Percys' story throughout their presentation.

## Get in on the Action!

### AOF's Highway Cleanup

In October we will mark the *tenth anniversary* of our group's adoption of a 2-mile stretch of Highway 99. Only our members' generous investment of their time to do this noble task can enable us to continue in this tradition.

Since Sundays involve somewhat diminished traffic, we will return to the scene Sunday, August 7 @ 8 AM. Please come participate if you can! —DK

### Giving Blood? - Remember AOF!

BloodSource Sacramento's report showed 18 donations for our organization in the six months between January 1 and June 30, 2005. I think there's an error overstating our contribution. Nevertheless, despite the recording error, if you are a blood donor, don't forget that AOF is registered as a "donor club." Our club number is #4857. Just mention it when next you donate. It's a good feeling! —MF



"Table Chairs"  
Responsible  
Volunteers Needed  
For Expo  
On Freethought Day

The Freethought Day planning committee is seeking persons to *take charge of a single display in the exposition*. This involves a bit more responsibility than just minding a table for a shift. The volunteer "table chairperson" brings materials to the event, arranges their display there, acquires a volunteer assistant or two just for that table, and boxes up/returns the items. You can handle the task as you see fit. Taking on the assignment is a *superb contribution to Freethought Day*, as it frees the Committee (although we do arrange for key aspects for you).

We already have a volunteer who has offered to "chair" the Banned Books display. (*Thank you, Joy! - we will arrange for books for you.*) Now we are looking for persons to take on comparable responsibilities: A Freethinker's Bookshelf display, a Youth Education display, the Silent Auction, Voting and Activism, Children's Activities, and Freethought Day Merchandise.

Call the AOF voicemail at 447-3589 to indicate your interest and to learn of the specific tasks associated with each role.

# AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (print legibly!) \_\_\_\_\_

Check your preference:

Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12)     Family Membership (\$30)

Low-income Member (\$10)     Patron (\$50)

Single Membership (\$20)     Donation (\$ \_\_\_\_\_ )

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

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

Please check your preference. We can deliver your monthly newsletter via an attached pdf file to your e-mail address above.     E-mail newsletter     Postal mail



## Did You Know?

By Cleo Kocol

While growing up without religion, I was told that Jesus existed but was merely a good man, a position the Catholic Church called heresy.

Until the Nicene Creed was adopted in 787, the divinity of Jesus was not part of the Holy Roman religious doctrine.

Arianism said that if Jesus was born, then there was a time when he did not exist, thus he was lesser than the father, at best a mediator between people and god. This view of Jesus spread throughout Egypt, Libya, Upper Thebes, Palestine, and Asia Minor.

Afraid such beliefs would be detrimental to the church, the Council of Nicea decided that Jesus was divine

and all books of Arius, who postulated the original argument of Jesus as a human, were destroyed.

All this brings to mind *The Da Vinci Code*, a novel by Dan Brown.

Brown's novel, a religious speculation page-turner published in 2003, outraged the Catholic Church. But as Brown stated in his acknowledgements, and a fact page, all documents and secret rituals in the novel were accurate.

The Priory of Sion is a real organization whose secret membership came to light in 1975.

Opus Dei, a controversial ultra-conservative Catholic sect, is rumored to have brain-washing, coercion, and corporal mortification as part of its ritual. The sect has recently constructed a forty-seven million dollar headquarters in New York City.

The novel depicts both organizations and gives rise to the thought, did Jesus live?

If he lived, (no record of him exists outside the Bible) did he have a sexual relationship and a child as the novel asserts?

Fascinating speculation for everyone.

## HAGSA Invites

AOF members are welcome at the summer potlucks of the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area. The remaining dates are Sundays, August 7 and August 28. Time is 3 PM. Call the voicemail near the date for details. Potluck info is also at HAGSA's website: <http://hagsa.org/meetings/2004/index.html>

## AOF Board Meeting Summary

July 24, 2005

Home of Carla Corbett

Directors present: Don Knutson, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz, Carla Corbett, David Flanders, Beverly Church, Vincent Wales, Phil LaZier. Guests present: Betty Simonsma, Jerry Sloan.

Minutes for June approved by consensus with corrections

Treasury report for June approved by consensus.

Motion to approve loan of sound system equipment for August 7 presentation by Joseph Atwill. Passed by consensus.

\$70 received from the coalition-building group, "Bay Area Community of Reason," (BACOR) upon their disbanding.

Next meeting Sunday, August 24, 2005, at the home of Don Knutson, 2004 T Street.

## President's Thoughts By Don Knutson

I just returned from Israel, which probably has the best climate I have ever experienced. I like to think that the climate, along with being a cross-roads for trade and culture, provided plenty of leisure time for men to invent religions.

My first day there we stayed at a largely shuttered convent just a stone's throw from the Temple Mount. At breakfast, a gentleman from Melbourne, Australia, asked what I was there for. I said "to research the occupation and the settler problem." He replied to my return question, "to research the gospel of Mark." So I then knew that there were many divergent reasons for the crowds visiting there.

I learned from countless military check points from Israel proper to the

West Bank (and of discriminatory land use policies against Arab townships in Israel) that the primary purpose of the state of Israel is to preserve its Jewish character. That means bad news for Arabs and Bedouin residents alike. Also, that the settlers are hard at work gobbling up the rest of the so-called biblical "Judea & Samaria"(the West Bank) for Israel.

I recall that Tanya Rinehart, the respected Haaretz reporter, said when she was in town last year that the occupation would end within a month if the U.S. ended its annual military and economic aid to Israel. So, it is the policies of the U.S. Government operating in our name as American taxpayers which stands as a primary impediment to peace.

### Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor, Kay Dickey, at this e-mail address:

frethnkr@mindspring.com  
or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material submitted online 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.

## Interpreting Prayer Study Results *What Do You Say? — Let's Hear It!*

"A Prayer for the Heart Patient: Does It Help?" is the title of a summary in the "Science" section of last week's *New York Times*. Here's the gist (text of report in full below):

*Prayer from a distance—whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish or Buddhist—did not significantly improve the outcome for common elective cardiac procedures performed on a group of 737 patients, a new study reports.*

*The research, published July 16 in Lancet, also examined the effectiveness of bedside music, imagery and MIT therapy, a touching technique that was found effective by some measures.*

*Half of the study participants were randomly assigned to a group that was prayed for, and half to a group that was not prayed for. In addition, half were assigned to MIT therapy and half were given standard care.*

*Neither prayer nor MIT therapy nor the two together were effective in reducing the number of deaths in the hospital, cardiovascular problems that emerged or hospital re-admissions. But the group that*

*received MIT therapy did have less emotional distress before the procedure and a slightly lower mortality rate six months later.*

*Dr. Mitchell W. Krucoff, a professor of medicine at Duke and the lead author on the study, believes that reducing stress before a medical procedure may have significant clinical benefits.*

*Dr. Krucoff said the results did not mean that prayer had failed.*

***What!? Surely you can do better at interpreting data.***

*"The most important point may be that this is an exploration coming from the mainstream, not the fringes, of modern medicine," he said.*

*"What we're trying to do is figure out how important it may be to better integrate intangible human capacities into high-tech health care," he added. "We definitely think there are important reasons to believe that what a community does at a distance or what a loved one does at the bedside prior to a procedure may belong in the systematic armamentarium of high-tech medical care.*

### The God Who Wasn't There

*(Continued from page 4)*

Tigre. You can even purchase the sound tract separately from Amazon.com. The DVD is available only from Brian Flemming's website.

Three point five stars. Ken-bob says check it out. But don't share it with your saintly Christian mom – unless she's really cool. (Flemming's next production will be *The Beast*, about a girl who learns that Jesus never existed and as a result is attacked by Christian fundamentalists who say she is the Anti-Christ. Scheduled release date is June 6th, 2006 [6/6/6]. Mark your calendar, and stock up on black candles.)

### Newsletter Freebie Policy

*We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!*



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

Freethought Day  
Is Sunday, October 9

We're on the Web!  
[www.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm](http://www.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm)

## August Calendar of Events

AOF Highway Cleanup	Sunday, August 7, 8 AM
AOF General Meeting	Sunday August 14, 2:30 PM
Movie Social	(no word at press time)
Freethought Day 2005 Planning Committee	Saturday, August 20, 10:30 AM
AOF Board meeting	Sunday, August 21, 9:30 AM
AOF General Meeting	Sunday, September 11, 2:30 PM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 2:30 - 5 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 faire in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (10/9/05), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2/12/06). 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.

