

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

July 2006

Sunday, July 9 Follow the Money Trail

Special Points of Interest

- AOF Amicus Brief Update (page 1)
- Regional Atheist Meet (page 2)
- Book Review - The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Plague (page 4)
- Atheist Alliance International meets in Iceland (page 5)
- Women's Equality Day Parade (page 5)

Standard Fare

Next Meeting	1
AOF Line	2
Meeting Recap	3
Davis Meals Announcement	6
Highway Cleanup Report	6
Membership Form	6

Jerry Sloan, a charter member of AOF, will speak at our July meeting on the subject, *Following the Money Trail of the Radical Religious Right*. One of the many falsehoods which are often spewed out by the theomaniacs is how well funded and how well organized the "liberals" are when the truth is quite the opposite.



Jerry Sloan

For more than 50 years, some of the wealthiest people and foundations in the country have been financing and organizing fiscal and religious conservatives into a movement that now controls the White House, the Congress and the Supreme Court. They have gotten us into a costly war, in both human life and resources, from which it will likely take years for us to extract ourselves.

This movement is one that has created organized chaos among the poor, women, gays, church bodies, immigrants, education and public policy. It is important to know about these people and organizations are who are financing this movement.

Jerry Sloan, 68, has a graduate degree in theology from the Baptist Bible College, Springfield, MO, and has served as a minister with Independent Baptist churches and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. He is best known for his successful lawsuit against his Baptist Bible College schoolmate, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, in 1984.

Jerry has lived as an openly gay man for the last 45 years and is the co-founder of Sacramento's Lambda Community Center, the Lambda Freedom Fair and Project Tocsin. He is the co-author of *Without Justice for All: a look at the Christian Right in Sacramento and beyond*.

AOF to Update Its Amicus Brief “... under God” Pledge Suit Two By Mynga Futrell

Michael Newdow has asked if AOF would consider preparing another amicus curiae brief, this time for his renewed pledge case. At the June board meeting, AOF's board voted unanimously to do so!

Mike's "infamous" prior case sought removal of the words "under God" from the text of the official pledge. The Elk Grove School District appealed his previ-

ous Ninth District "win" and went all the way to the Supreme Court. There, the Supremes ducked the issue, determining that Mike did not have standing to bring suit in the first place. This time, however, there are no questions but that the current plaintiffs clearly qualify to bring the case. And, the new Pledge of Allegiance

(Continued on page 4)

Regional Atheist Meeting AOF Line By Don Knutson

San Francisco Atheists hosted the first West Coast Regional Atheist Meet on Saturday, June 24 at Crowne Plaza Hotel in Foster City. SFA is a principal member of American Atheists, Madalyn Murray-O'Hair's organization, founded in 1963 after O'Hair sued to remove the daily prayer from the public school classroom. AOF is an affiliate of AA. The Meet attracted 152 attendees creating complications for the organizers since they had anticipated only 100. But given the quality of speakers, the delay at the beginning could be forgiven.

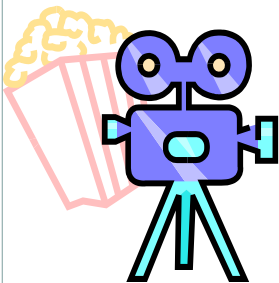
Ellen Johnson, AA President, opened the one-day convention by inviting everyone to visit their New Jersey headquarters where AA has assembled an atheist historic library. She also emphasized the need to "vote atheism regardless of party.

"Richard Carrier, David Eller and Eddie Tabash were among the speakers at the event. Tabash, a Hollywood constitutional lawyer, focused on "divine hidness," meaning that a shy deity does not do anybody any good. Eller, whose film we viewed at the June AOF meeting, brought language to the fore in his talk and demonstrated how it can be

used to make religion and the corresponding deity "seem real." He said that framing the language we use in communicating with evangelists can reclaim the context. Therefore, he suggested not using particular words and substituting them with others accordingly. Instead of "spirit," "emotion" or "feeling" could be used. "Belief" would be replaced by "unsupported claim", "religion" by "religions" or "system of unsupported claims", "church" by "churches" or "holders of unsupported claims" and "Bible" by "Judeo-Christian writing". Avoiding the pitfalls of common language can remove the evangelist from his comfort zone.

The program concluded with a panel including Carrier, which made fun of the various theories of the existence of Jesus given the social hysteria aroused by "The DaVinci Code". This aspect of the conference served to highlight the differences between AA and Atheists Alliance International. AA loves to savage religious beliefs for fun and mayhem while the latter chooses to address our differences with religions in a more respectful manner.

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



Movie Night Friday, July 14 at 7:00pm

Serving as inspiration for Women's Equality Day and Suffrage Parade (pg 5) This month's movie is

Iron-Jawed Angels

At the home of Beverly Church, 24 Adkinson Ct. For more information, Call Bev at 916-359-5423

This movie spans the Women's Suffrage movement from 1912 through the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. It is a gripping movie and worth seeing again and again.

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, Vincent Wales

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Beverly Church and Kevin Schultz (Interim Editors for June Issue); Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor) Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 8, 2006: Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

Darwin Day, Feb. 11, 2007: 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, Kevin Schultz); AOF Finances Evaluation (Carla Corbett, Beverly Church, Ken Nahigian)

Archive: Jody Craig, Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Betty Simonsma

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI)
Hank Kocol (CSH)
Kevin Schultz (AA)
Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website:

Kevin Schultz

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian
Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma, Carla Corbett

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

Meeting Recap

Natural Atheism

By Dave Flanders

At our June meeting, Larry Hicok, Coordinator of East Bay Atheists, presented a video about natural Atheism featuring David Eller, to AOFers. In the video, David spoke about his book "Natural Atheism."

According to Eller, the brain uses vast amounts of memory to create a model of the world. Small children imitate the models they observe in their childhood. In David's case, his parents did not compel him to follow a particular religion, thus he grew up a natural atheist. He considers atheism more than a non-religion; it is an affirmative stance, a condition of intellectual, personal and moral freedom. In the same way, health is not just the absence of disease nor peace just the absence of war, but health and peace are positive conditions of strength, or well being, of ability to do things and to live and enjoy your life. So atheism is a psychological and existential condition of strength and well-being and ability to live and enjoy life, use your mind and trust yourself.

The book includes a 12-step program for atheist. The first step states that the party (the theist in this case) who makes a claim has

the burden of proof, not the party who questions the claim. The other steps provide arguments that, when followed, help one-step into a world without gods - the only world there is.

Many anthropologists understand that culture is like a pair of glasses in that it shapes how we see the world and therefore how we interact with it. Even what we think or expect is actually present in it. As with glasses, people do not ordinarily see their cultures, but rather they see through, via, or by means of them, seeing the world as the culture so distorts it. Anthropology, in this analogy, becomes the means to not only see the cultural glasses of other people and societies but attempt to try those glasses on and 'see' or think or understand as those others do. Ultimately, it forces us to realize that we, too, wear cultural glasses that can with great effort, be removed and replaced with other glasses.

One of the main obstacles to freethought is the certainty in one's own truth and goodness, the kind of 'one possibility thinking' that is characteristic of all traditional and most modern societies. Both anthropology

and the movements for freethought that preceded it sprang from the same sources, namely, the acceptance of Otherness and the awareness that differences in value, morality, and 'truth' are real and are not going away. Both freethought and anthropology are symptoms of the same underlying condition--the relative condition, the condition of difference. Societies that do not acknowledge or appreciate the possibility of difference, although they may be surrounded by it, will not develop anthropology, and they will not develop freethought. Both anthropology and freethought are products of living with one foot outside of one's own social reality.

Eller prefers the phrase "separation of churches and state" to "separation of church and state," stating there is no such thing as a singular church in the real world. Instead, there are churches, gods, religions, etc.. Moreover, if a theocracy was established, which church would be established and which not tolerated? Other topics were covered. Questions and snacks followed the video.

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of the 50 member societies of the **Atheist Alliance International** ("a positive voice for atheism").

AOF is also affiliated with the American Humanist Association, American Atheists, and the Council for Secular Humanism.

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.

Book Review: The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Plague

By John Kelley, Harper Perennial, 2006, 400 pages.

What was the worst disaster ever to befall humankind – World War II, Maoism, Stalinism, the fall of the Roman Empire, the Dark Ages, the Church? Not close. In terms of economic loss, cultural chaos and raw body count, it was the Black Death, which raged across Europe from 1347 to 1352, killing up to 60% of the population. In *The Great Mortality*, John Kelly chronicles its grim surge and ebb, how it began, the scars it left, and what it must have been like to live while the world was ending.

The Plague took three forms: Bubonic, Pneumonic and Septicemic – the last was worst, often killing within hours. It began in Mongolia, or perhaps northern China. A climate shift encouraged a population boom of marmots, and new trade routes invited the bacteria (*Y. pestis*) to make a leap to people. A tendril drifted to Crimea, leapt to Constantinople, then to Sicily, Italy and Spain; from there it metastasized

madly across Europe, raging as far as Iceland and Norway, everywhere killing, killing, killing, then fading back a bit, rising and killing again, before sauntering off at last, sated, into the Russian steppes (but revisiting well into the 1600's).

Here in our soft chairs, armed with some knowledge of sanitation, antibiotics and vaccines, the horror of it is hard to imagine. But think of villages and cities depopulated, carts piled with stinking bodies, mass graves, “death ships” manned by corpses crashing into ports (and imagine black waves of diseased rats boiling off those ships, drooling bloody froth, a death warrant for the city). Think of panics, purges and pogroms, anti-Semitic riots kindled by rumors of poisoned wells. And the worst aspect was fear of helping the sick – even touching a victim's clothing could be fatal. So families deserted their own fathers, mothers, children. Those who

stayed with loved ones were often sealed within their houses, healthy and sick alike, a communal death sentence.

The story sprawls larger than life, full of petty gestures and heroism, cowardice and courage, and horror in lapidary detail. For freethinkers, a fascinating aspect is the hairline cracks left in religious devotion, as people realized, eventually, that prayers and supplications were useless, and the clergy seemed even more susceptible than laymen. So the Plague may have planted a seed of the Renaissance, a century later.

The Great Mortality is a great read. Recommended – if you are feeling well.

—Ken Nahigian

Editor's note: So, this is what I get when I ask Ken for something “witty.” - BC



Pledge Case Two...

(cont'd from page 1)

complaint will benefit from “lessons learned” in the previous experience. Readers of AOF News & Views may recall that AOF's prior brief was written in a whirlwind. It probably holds the world's record of time from first keystroke to application of the postage stamps. Paul Geisert and I wrote it in an almost round the clock endeavor, starting immediately after Mike told us that it would be a good thing to have. (He had been relying on another source that fell through.)

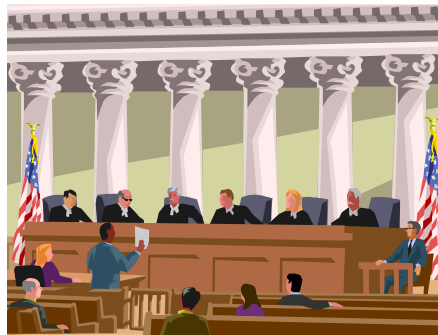
Trouble was, it was the last week before all materials were due. Thus, the project began on a Monday and culminated that same Friday! We had on hand as raw material a pile of supportive letters from parents and children and citizens that had been received by us. These we culled for

quotes that could best “bring home” to the justices the classroom situations that harm children. All continue to hold true and can be used for the current case, which Beverly Church has volunteered to “shepherd to completion” since we are in Europe at the moment.

We have provided Bev with the formatted text of the original amicus, so she can update it to match the current case, and perhaps to incorporate some additional material that has been received in the interim. The gist of AOF's new brief will be the same, though.

Two years have passed and more children across the nation have experienced in their classrooms the so-called “unifying” ritual that requires acknowledgement of God in order to express patriotism. Some of these youngsters immersed in

pledge exercises have undergone far more than the stresses of thinking differently. There are sometimes cruel consequences of “opting out.” These make all too clear how the “nation, under God, indivisible” divides by religion.



Editor's note: The First Amendmist Church of True Science (FACTS), Mike Newdow's church, meets monthly on the day of each new moon. See announcement in this newsletter or call Bev at 916-359-5423 for more information.

AAI Earns Its “I” for “International” “Top of the World” Atheist Alliance Conference

By Mynga Futrell

I want to report my personal delight in having had the marvelous opportunity to set foot in the “Land of Fire and Ice” and attend the very first international conference to take place under the imprimatur of the Atheist Alliance. (Every prior formal AAI gathering has been in the United States.

It was not only the presence in Reykjavik of AAI board representatives from several countries (Canada, Denmark, Germany) in addition those from the United States and host nation Iceland that showed that AAI was beginning to be deserving of the “international” in its name. There was the additional fact that attendees had come from so many different places to hear the speakers and taste the warm hospitality of the Icelanders. As might be expected, most who traveled here were Americans, but several came from nearby spots in

the U.K. and Scandinavia. Persons from far across the planet (e.g., “down under” Australia) sent greetings and messages.

The conference was titled “A Positive Voice for Atheism in Iceland,” and Paul Geisert and I saw ourselves as highly fortunate to share the program with many speakers of note (Dan Barker, Richard Dawkins, Margaret Downey, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Hemant Mehta, and the delightful Julia Sweeney). Though we were clearly invited there due to our work with the network of Brights, our presentation was broader. We focused on activism, and in keeping with the conference theme, we titled it “Seizing the Elusive Positives.”

AOF played a prominent role in our presentation, which outlined some of what we learned from our activism experiences that led up to the particular proposals for activism we

were recommending. AOF was the centerpiece of Part 1 (the notion of a “positive atheist” group) in a three-part segment.

Besides the conference itself, the most exciting highlight has been traveling out of Reykjavik to view the volcano-produced Icelandic landscape and having had an opportunity to “step to both sides” of the fault that is the dividing line between Europe and North America. The landscape along the fault-line is simply stunning and (on a day when Sacramento reported above 100 degrees) the breeze more brisk than biting.

As I am traveling at the moment, readers of AOF News & Views can expect a fuller report of conference events at a later date, but right now I’m just “flying high” from having been to what Iceland’s tourist bureau touts as the “Top of the World.”

Everyone Loves A Parade Women’s Equality Day

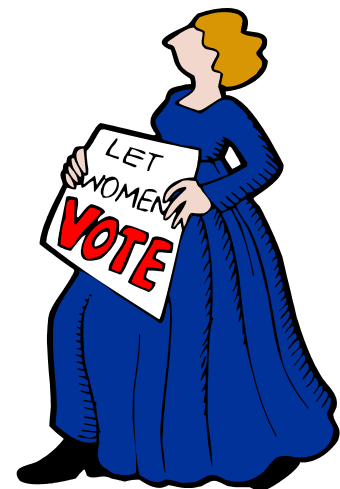
Come join the National Women’s History Project’s contingent in the Woman Suffrage Parade in Sacramento, CA, **on Saturday, August 26, 2006.**

Dress up as your favorite woman or man in history, or come dressed in white, or just come as yourself. Would you like to design a float? Would you like to ride on a float? What do you think of the idea of singing using kazoos as accompaniment? Whatever we do will be lots of fun for the all who participate.

The Parade will **assemble at 9:30 am at Southside Park (8th & T Sts.) in Sacramento**, and will march to the Capitol steps.

Women’s Rights activists, advocates, and dignitaries will speak to the general theme-- a comparison between the challenges that women faced then and that they face today. The purpose of the parade and program is to celebrate Women’s Equality Day in the spectacular way it deserves to be celebrated and to inspire non-voting women to vote.

The parade will recreate as nearly as possible the 1913 Woman’s Suffrage Parade featured in *Iron-Jawed Angels*. Leading the parade will be a herald mounted on a white horse. Marchers will be dressed in period costumes, some will represent historical women, others in marching units or floats representing the



whole stratum of female society still striving for equality and interspersed with musical groups.

If you are interested in participating, please email the NWHP at ednasmolly@aol.com or Carol D. Norberg at cnorberg@2xtreme.net

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.

We can arrange to deliver your monthly newsletter electronically via the e-mail address you print above. Please check the mode you prefer. E-mail Postal mail

Davis Dinner

Tuesday, Aug 29th is the date for the next Davis Dinner. AOF is responsible for set-up, serve, and clean-up.

AOF has been involved in this activity for six years. It is an opportunity for us to give something back and put a positive public face on atheists and freethinkers.

AOF President, Don Knutson, is captaining this event. Volunteers are welcomed, needed, and appreciated. Please contact him at 916-447-3589 to volunteer.



Well done is better than well said.

-Benjamin Franklin

Highway Cleanup

Bagging the Trash on a Lovely Summer Day

By Mynga Futrell

The June highway cleanup was part of International Environment Day and a bit more interesting than usual in another way, too. When our crew arrived, we discovered that CalTrans had mowed the east side of the highway but not the west. Consequently, there was a much easier and better job done on the former.

Our crew this time was quite small,

but all factors combined to make the day successful for Dave Flanders, Paul Geisert, Ken Nahigian, Tom Nicolette, and yours truly, and for the local wildlife.

Please consider taking part in this AOF responsibility with its next highway cleanup. If you are willing and able, meet at the Park and Ride lot at Elkhorn Blvd & Hwy 99, **Sunday, July 30th**, at 8:00am. For more information call Don at 916-447-3589.



AOF Board Meeting Highlight

Monday

June 19, 2006

Home of Beverly Church

The AOF Board of Directors decided to submit an amicus curiae for the latest "under God" lawsuit. Details noted in article beginning on page 1.



Other Meetings & Events

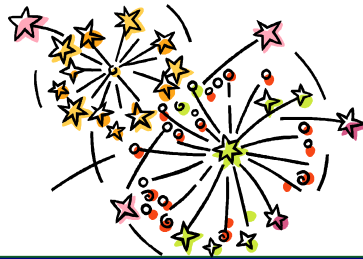
FACTS

**First Amendmist Church of True Science
Tuesday, July 25 at 7:00pm**

We meet every new moon. A "church in evolution," we need your help to become the most worthwhile, fun and edifying church in town. Come to the next meeting, partake in the Freething Drink, and find out what an imbegor is!!!



For information, call Beverly Church at 916-359-5423.



FREETHOUGHT DAY!
2006 PLANNING CONTINUES
JULY 15
Want to volunteer?
Contact Bev at 359-5423

HAGSA

**Humanist Association
of the Greater Sacramento Area**



**Sunday, July 16
15:00 (3:00 pm)**

At the home of Beverly Church
24 Adkinson Ct., Sacramento 95835
916 359-5423

Clark Adams, President, Internet Infidels, will regale us with his multi-media presentation highlighting Atheists in the Media. Atheists in the Media.



Did You Know? By Cleo Kocol

The Humanists of Sun City, led by Hank and Cleo Kocol, invite you to join them and HAGSA **Sunday, August 6th, 12:30 to 3:30**. In addition to food and companionship, we will start with a program.

At this time it includes a serious reading, two satirical skits, one called "The Solstice Sisters," and one called "Applying for a Job at Mart Wall," and the Sun City cloggers or tap dancers. Anyone wanting to add to the program with music, recitation, reading, whatever, let Kevin



or Beverly know, including how much time you will need (five minutes or less) and they'll let us know.

This event will be held at the Sierra Pines Recreation Lodge, so there will be room for all. Because we will have to know how many will attend, let Kevin or Beverly know if you can attend, and they can inform us of the total by August 1. We hope to see you all there for a fun freethought time.

This will be a potluck, so bring your favorite food for the buffet table. If you wish more than soft drinks or coffee, bring your own wine or beer.

Directions will be sent to Kevin and Beverly to give out to interested parties. Depending on traffic, it takes about a half hour to get here from downtown Sacramento.



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.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We will be very pleased to send ONE free AOF newsletter to anyone upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to News & Views for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become an AOF member? That way, you'll then get the newsletter FREE with your membership!



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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

July Calendar of Events

Highway Cleanup Sunday, July 30, 8 - 10 AM

Movie Night Social Friday, July 14, 7 - 9 PM

AOF General Meeting Sunday, July 9, 2:30 - 5 PM

AOF Board meeting Monday, July 16, 6:30 PM

AOF General Meeting Sunday, August 6, 2:30 - 5 PM

Davis Community Meal Tuesday, August 29,

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 fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (10-8-06), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2-11-07). Watch the newsletter for details.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

