

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

January 2009

Sunday, January 11, 1:30—4:00 PM Bill Potts on “Whither Bush?”

Special Points of Interest

Dr. Michael Shermer
Headlines Sacramento
Darwin Day! (page 1)

AOF's Strategic Plan-
ning Session Summary
(page 2)

Meet AOF Board Direc-
tor Tom Nicolette (page
3)

The Urantia Book, By
Ken Nahigian (page 4)

Sacramento Hosts Free-
thought Billboard (page
5)

Michael Newdow Re-
leases New Video (page
5)

AOF Movie Group Re-
started (page 7)

Science for the Greater
Good (page 7)

Join us this January 11 for a retrospective on the most proactive religion-in-government administration in recent memory. Local free-thought leader and author Bill Potts will speak on “Whither Bush? Where are Bush and his fellow travelers now, and where will they be after January 2009?”



Mr. Potts has the background to speak authoritatively on the Bush administration. After spending three years researching and writing, he published the book **Bushopedia** in June of 2006.

Bushopedia had great endorsements prior to publication and from readers. It even won a 2007 award (books published in 2006) from Northern California Publishers & Authors—Best Political Commentary. However, sales were disappointing, owing to lack of publicity and knowledge of the book marketing process. As Bill puts it, "I fucked up the marketing."

The book deals with many things, including a number of unsavory characters and equally unsavory groups, many of which are apparently dedicated to the destruction of the US Constitution.

(Continued on page 3)

Standard Fare

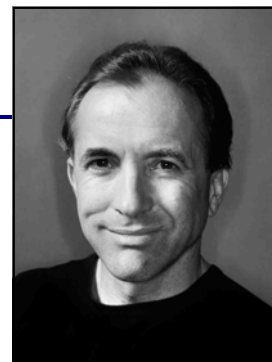
AOF Line 2

Membership Form 6

AOF Upcoming Events 8

Sunday, February 8 A 200th Birthday Bash for Sacramento's Darwin Day 2009

Two hundred years ago, Charles Darwin was born (on the same day as Abraham Lincoln). Sacramento will be celebrating on **Sunday afternoon, February 8**, at the same location as last year (La Sierra Community Center in Carmichael). This will also be Sacramento's 12th annual birthday celebration, an event that commemorates not only Darwin's contributions to science and humanity, but celebrates the broader concepts themselves.



(Continued on page 6)

AOF Strategic Planning Session Summary

AOF Line

By Beverly Church

The AOF Board of Directors and other interested individuals met in October and November to develop a strategic plan for our organization. We wanted to see what we were doing right and brainstorm about how to fix some things we were doing, well, not so great. So, we started with the basics – our mission and values – and with those in mind, continued to develop a plan that we feel will be useful in guiding us over the next several years.

We slightly modified our **Mission Statement** to be:

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

The purpose of the organization, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community.

And, we selected a set of **Values**:

- **Positive...**
 - Force in community
 - Representation of views
 - Civility
- **Education that supports...**
 - Critical thinking
 - Open inquiry
 - Scientific method

- **A naturalistic worldview, defined as free of supernatural and mystical elements**
- **Civic pluralism...**
 - Equal rights under the law
 - Secular government
- **Right of conscience...**
 - Respect rights of others to hold different views

Looking back on our Mission and Values, I can easily see how this seems like developing these concepts to define our organization was a very simple task. It was not.

In an effort to produce a meaningful and useful tool, many worthwhile ideas were cut. Folks had to kinda let go of some ideas they were wedded to and we all had to embrace change. It was a somewhat painful process, but we persevered.

Therefore, with our Mission & Values in mind, we developed a strategic plan (more about that next month) for AOF. The work doesn't end there. To the contrary, we can now begin the even harder work of implementing our plan. And, we need you to help with committee work. I encourage you to get involved in this process. A strong, vibrant organization will take the effort and talent of us all.

My sincere and heartfelt thanks go

(Continued on page 6)

AOF Board (2009)

President: Beverly Church
Board Chair: Don Knutson
Vice President: Mynga Futrell
Secretary: Open
Treasurer: Ken Nahigian
Directors at large:

Steve Campbell, Rena Lowry,
 Tom Nicolette, Debora Smith,
 Jillian Stanley

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (Editor)
 Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct 2009

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Debora Smith, Ken Nahigian, Robert Poeschel

Darwin Day, Feb. 8, 2009:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell,
 Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell,
 Ken Nahigian,

Ad Hoc Committees:

Under Review

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell (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

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

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Meet Your Board Members Series

Tom Nicolette

Hi Folks!

The Board asked me to write a short piece introducing myself. Although I have been a member for about 5 years now, I haven't been in general circulation. Now that I am retired I will be able to get out and meet many of you hopefully.

I recently retired January of 2008. I am exploring many options on what to do with this new found spare time especially since the Presidential Elections are out of the way.



Not to worry though. I plan on fully completing my term on the AOF board as I promised. (Unless they get wise to me and kick me out of course?).

General background? I dunno they wanted me to keep this at 700 words or

less. How do you fit 63 years of life into 700 words or less? I don't know maybe they will forgive me if I go over. Or Maybe Kevin will be able to trim it down for me.

I was born In NYC (The Bronx) as was my mother. Mom was exposed very early to just about every religious denomination imaginable in the 1920s,30s and 40s while growing up. Her father was an extremely strict Irish protestant I understand. Her mother was Jewish and my mother's first husband was Jewish (he died in an accident while working in the RR yards during WW2). Anyhow she came out of all this in the 1940s as an atheist and we moved to San Francisco where I was raised. While she was an atheist she would have described herself as simply "non-religious" and left it at that. The board had suggested that I tell how I became an atheist. This is the reason I am giving you all this background information. I was born and raised in a Secular household. I grew up with one older half brother who is now a retired San Francisco police officer. Although we were not taught religion, the respect for the Law was emphasized very very strongly. We were expected to be extremely honest.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 1)

Bill will look at some of the people and organizations, and at the changes brought about by the recent election.

Bill will also attempt to predict where some of them will be after January 5 (when the new Congress convenes) and January 20, when the Obama Administration takes over.

For those who happen to be partisan, watch out—rascals who happen to be Democrats won't be spared!

Meetings are free to the public. Light refreshments will be served. Traditionally, a post-meeting get-together is held as well for those wishing further social interaction. Hope to see you there!

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



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

also maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF's Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Historical Figure Series

The Urantia Book

By Ken Nahigian

Does your breakfast cereal remind you of cosmic spiritual teachers? It will. Read and wonder.

On Jan 2, 1955, a group of 36 people quietly convened in Chicago to form the Urantia Brotherhood (UB), a fraternity inspired by the *Urantia* book. This book had circulated since 1924, passed by hand or printed privately, claiming itself as the compiled wisdom of celestial spirits (Revelators) acting through a human agent (the Contact). Its origin is much a mystery.

Urantia is a huge book: 2097 pages, four parts, 181 “papers.” It describes the structure of the cosmos. It amends the Bible, adding over 700 pages to the life of Jesus. It reveals that the “Universe is literally teeming with inhabited planets, evolving life, civilizations in various states of development, celestial spheres, and spirit personalities.” And by the way, “Urantia” is the true name of Earth, the 606th planet in Satania which is in Norlatiadek which is in Nebadon which is in Orvonton which revolves around Havona, all orbiting the center of infinity wherein God dwells.

It does not name the Contact. Clues point to two respected Chicago physicians, William S. Sadler and his wife Lena, circa 1911. A practical man and debunker of mediums and paranormal claims, Sadler had a neighbor who fell into deep trances, then awoke with reports of elaborate messages from “visitor” spirit-beings. Soon a “voluminous” manuscript of teachings appeared, the first of many. Sadler was intrigued. In 1929, when he published a book about the fraudulent methods of mediums, he presented this as one of the few cases he could not explain away. “Eighteen years of study and careful investigation have failed to reveal the psychic origin of these messages,” he wrote. “I find myself at the present time just where I was when I started.”

Did Sadler compose the manuscripts? No one knows. Who was the neighbor? We’ll get to it.

In 1924, several colleagues and friends reportedly grew interested in the case. They formed a study group, the Forum, and devised questions for the Contact. Answers came back: more writings. “Impressed by the quality of the answers,” so the story goes, they continued their questions. By 1935 the Forum had accumulated a huge sheaf of papers. Sadler and his son then began to study, compile and organize the material, meanwhile receiving “clarifications” which resulted in revisions. By 1955, with donated funds, they published it all—as

Urantia.

Only an inner group of five, the Contact Commission, ever saw the sleeping Contact. Sadler and others would claim that the papers simply appeared, mysteriously, after the trance-sessions. Statistical analyses show scant similarity to Dr. Sadler’s own writing. In fact, some passages clearly derive from other (human) works; you might suspect plagiarism, though *Urantia* admits to using words from human sources to convey its revelation. Its “science,” astronomy in particular, was clearly a reflection of its day, hinting at no post-1955 findings.

But the Sleeping Neighbor, the true author—these are secrets in the shadows. The great Martin Gardener thought they were both Wilfred Custer Kellogg, half-cousin to Lena Kellogg, Sadler’s wife. Wilfred was also a nephew of Drs. John Harvey Kellogg (of Battle Creek Sanitarium fame) and William Keith Kellogg (the breakfast cereal maven), the same Kellogg brothers lampooned in “The Road to Wellville,” a 1994 movie. The Kellogg family was prolific, somewhat inbred, and thick into the Seventh Day Adventist Church, with a mild penchant for cultism. And *Urantia* does seem to spin on some Adventist ideas. But friends of Wilfred Kellogg have disputed Gardner, citing Wilfred’s high moral character, humility and a rather pedestrian personality. Logistic and timing problems also exist—supposedly Wilfred was in Battle Creek, not Chicago, the year Dr. Sadler met his subject.

We may never know. William Sadler died in 1969 (age 94). Steadily and slowly, *Urantia* has drawn followers; its believers are less evangelical than many. Two main groups now exist, the Urantia Foundation and the Urantia Fellowship. Numbers are vague, but belief seems to bridge denominational lines, reaching Jews, Muslims and Hindus. Associations and Fellowships exist all over the world, spawning formal conferences and study sessions, and many web pages. The Urantia emblem is the “Banner of Michael”: three blue concentric circles on white.

Originally formed to disseminate the book, the Urantia Foundation has translated it into a dozen languages, producing an elaborate topical index and audio versions. But in 2001 it lost the copyright. Free copies are now available at sites such as <http://www.theuniversalfather.com/>.

Enjoy it. Once again we see the skein or web of odd connections, the Dickensian story that knots, entangles and contains us, folds back and unfolds, and will unfold forever like an infinite fractal flower. You can meditate on this as you munch your cornflakes.

Freedom From Religion Foundation Advertises Locally Local Support For Freethought Billboard



Local freethinkers (from left) **Phil LaZier**, **Ken Nahigian**, **Suzanne Donachie**, **Tom Nicolette**, and **Hank Kocol** stand in front of a billboard purchased by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, based out of Madison, Wisconsin (online at <http://ffrf.org>). FFRF has leased the sign for six months, and can be seen driving northbound at 5996 Elvas Avenue, Sacramento. While not an official AOF activity, AOF members took it upon themselves to express their appreciation for FFRF.

Photo credit: **Paul Storey**

Local Freethinkers Assist With Production New Michael Newdow “Yes We Can” Video

By Paul Storey

Mike Newdow has created a music video on the theme of Obama's "Yes We Can" to serve as a statement of equality for atheists. The timing will coincide with the Presidential Inauguration.

The link is http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Y_SbmC3inI, or search on Youtube for “Yes We Can - Inaugural version.” It is also available on Mike Newdow's website, at <http://www.restorethepledge.com/live/video>. It is well worth your time to find and watch this important and timely message. Superbly done, Mike! And thanks to **Beverly Church**, **Dave Flanders**, **Tom Ikelman**, **Robert Poeschel** and **Paul Storey** for their participation.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP + 4 _____

E-mail address (please print!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

Patron (\$50) Family (\$30) Individual (\$20) Low-income (\$10)

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

___ Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

___ Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductible as

permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

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

Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

(Continued from page 1)

For this very special birthday gala, Sacramento's Darwin Day Committee has arranged a superb educational program with a nationally known presenter! Skeptic and science writer Michael Shermer will speak on "Why Darwin Matters: Evolution, Intelligent Design, and the Battle for Science and Religion." Dr. Shermer is author of numerous books and a regular columnist for *Scientific American* magazine.

If ever there was a year for freethinkers to invite family and friends to the Darwin Birthday Gala, this is it. AOF and HAGSA will soon be sending a special mailing to permit all members to reserve tickets at the special price of \$10 each. (Tickets at the door will be \$15. Students with ID will still be \$5.) More information on the event and links to the process for others to purchase tickets at the advance purchase price is available at <http://sacdarwinday.blogspot.com/>. — Mynga Futrell

(Continued from page 2)

to Carla Corbett who unflinchingly facilitated our "retreat." The one-day event she committed to turned in to two days and one additional meeting. As you all know, we atheists & freethinkers are not so easily led! However, Carla kept us on task. I am grateful for her skill and dedication. Again, we need folks to get involved. To volunteer or get more information, call 916-447-2589.

(Continued from page 3)

My Father is first generation American born Italian and presents himself to the world as a Catholic. However at best he is an Agnostic in reality.

Myself I am a humble guy and I probably have very good reason to be humble. The high points of my checkered blue collar work experience include: a stint in the Army as a radio tech, a telephone tech then a non-degreed engineer for Hawaiian Telephone Company, copying machine tech, various warehouse jobs when I was raising my family and untold number of 2nd jobs. Then I got into refrigeration and air conditioning and eventually into industrial Ammonia refrigeration, worked for the Japanese for a time in Oregon and got deeply involved with the high tech production controls and machinery. I also worked in many hotels both in Oregon and here in Sacramento until I retired. The last thing I got involved with is industrial laundry equipment. I guess you can call me a TECHY. I have read so many manuals over the years I could probably write one myself.

I had three kids, two boys and a girl. All of them are in their mid to late thirties now. (My oldest son will be 40 next year. WOW!). Also lots of grand kids. Oh P.S. I forgot to include that I worked for GE in San Jose in the 70s building and wiring control panels for nuclear reactors. Yep we might have done the control panels for "Three Mile Island".

Event Held Dec 10; Future Events Planned AOF Movie Group Restarted By Nancy Gilbert

Five of us met at Tower Theatre for our first movie, MILK, on Dec 10th. Thereafter, we all relocated to the Tower Café next door. Don D. came all the way from Lincoln, Pat R. of Yuba City, drove from Woodland, joining Suzanne, Nancy G. and Nancy L. Outdoors, under the heaters, we all enjoyed a great evening with great food, excellent movie, and very interesting conversation. Send an email if you want to be on mailing list to gilbertn@surewest.net.

UC-Berkeley Greater Good Science Center Science For the Greater Good By Nancy Gilbert

Here is one of the starting points for non-theist parents who wonder if they have to join a church to help their children's education, their development into ethical and happy people.

Greater Good Science Center was created in 2001 when then UC Berkeley Dean of Social Science George Breslauer connected Berkeley alumnae Thomas and Ruth Ann Hornaday with several members of the university's psychology faculty. Believing that "you can't have peaceful institutions without peaceful people," the Hornadays wanted to create an interdisciplinary research center that would promote the science of interpersonal peace and well-being. They found tremendous synergy between their personal interests and the research of psychologists Dacher Keltner (Yes, the son of Jeanne Keltner), Phil and Carolyn Cowan, and Steve Hinshaw.

It has a great website for parents or professionals with blogs on various issues, relevant research news, and reference resources

It publishes the magazine "Greater Good" which you can check out on the website <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/greatergood/index.php>

"Greater Good" highlights ground-breaking scientific research into the roots of compassion and altruism. It fuses this science with inspiring stories of compassion in action, providing a bridge between social scientists and parents, educators, community leaders, and policy makers.

Organizational Building Series Growing AOF—How You Can Help

HELP AOF! NEEDED- Membership & Meeting Team;

Sign up now to Facilitate, to make this happen.

Perhaps, you would be good as a Steward of Supplies, a Greeter, a Meeting Coordinator, or as Meeting Logistics, Member recruitment, Idea Person, or Backup Fill-in Staff.

Donate your name and contact, either to the 24 hour phone or gilbertn@surewest.net. **SERVE THE CAUSE!**

Newsletter Submissions

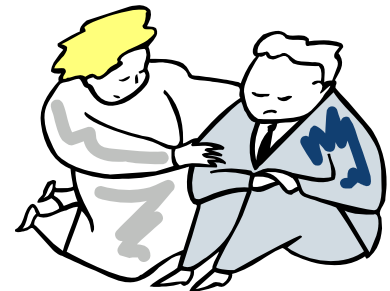
Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor at this e-mail address:

newsletter@aofonline.org

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

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

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.



Do you have any info that you'd like to share with the AOF membership?

Please submit items to:

newsletter@aofonline.org and specify in the e-mail that you'd like to announce the information in the Family News section. **Thanks!**

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!

Want the latest AOF board minutes?

E-mail aofboard@aofonline.org





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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

January Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social, Elephant Bar, 1500 Arden Way;
RSVP to shastaseer@sbcglobal.net or 419-2105

Thursday, Jan 1, 6:30 p.m.

January General Meeting Sunday, Jan 11, 1:30 - 4:00 p.m.

January Board Meeting Sunday, Jan 18, 9:30 - 12:00 p.m.

Darwin Day Sacramento with Dr. Michael Shermer! Sunday, Feb 8, 2:00 - 5:00 p.m.

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (Oct 2009), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2009-02-08). 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.

