

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

May 2009

## Special Points of Interest

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## Sunday, May 10, 1:30-4:00PM Rob Power on “My Same-Sex Massachusetts Marriage in California”

Is the issue of same-sex marriage best handled at the state level? What happens when a gay couple married in Massachusetts moves to California? Rob Power, Chairperson of Outright Libertarians, an association of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other self-identified "queer" (LGBTQ) Libertarian Party activists and supporters, will talk about his personal experience and how it illustrates the problems arising from varied same-sex marriage laws throughout the country.



Rob Power holds an MBA in Manufacturing Management and an MS in Industrial Engineering from the University of Tennessee and is currently Director of Engineering at Vintara, a provider of Web-based enterprise process management solutions and services and has worked on projects for Saturn Corporation and Lockheed Martin.

## AOF Education Project The Way It Should Be—Neutral By Mynga Futrell

In the United States, we are fortunate. This nation has issued a civic promise to all its citizens. As Americans, we are to be free from governmental coercion to hold a certain worldview. This is the promise that the U.S. Constitution provides, the promise of religious freedom.

We citizens can look to a variety of sources of moral authority when deciding right from wrong. We can reach our personal conclusions on matters of ultimate concern and have hugely dissimilar opinions about matters of individual conscience.

The ideal of *neutrality* operates throughout our nation’s governance systems, helping to ensure citizens’ liberty of conscience. Neutrality is an ideal. In some places, it is not yet reality. But, the ideal carries great weight across our institutions, and on the whole, our society and law grant us considerable personal freedom to think and to believe as we

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## Events Editor

# AOF Volunteer Opportunity

By Mynga Futrell

We hope someone will volunteer to be our "Events Editor". We need someone to do "calendarizing" to help ensure that AOF members won't miss upcoming "happenings" (fun events and business events) within Sacramento's freethought community. With input from the rest of us, this volunteer editor "pulls it all together" into one events summary, making sure to show all the AOF-specific meetings, board meetings, socials like bowling or dinners or parties, and the like.

Your specific tasks? -- 1) receive event information, 2) type the text of a short monthly calendar summary, and 3) email it along to the appropriate people. [You would send it to AOF's webmaster, to our newsletter editor, and to the AOF e-list for subscribers.] That's it!

Interested? Got questions? Call the voice mail at 916-447-3589 to discuss. We need you!

## Bowl Your Cares Away! :)

# AOF Bowling Continues...

By Tom Nicolette

Hi fellow carbon based life forms!

Just a short note this time to remind you that we are bowling every other Wednesday at 11:30. We bowl at Country Club lanes 2600 watt avenue (<http://www.countryclublanes.com>). Telephone is 916-483-5105. We will be bowling on the 6th and the 20th in the Month of May. Just drop on by and bring your friends and family with you. Hope to see you there.

## Texas Filmmaker Seeks People for Documentary Ex-Christian Stories Wanted

<http://exchristian.net/letters/2009/04/dallas-filmmaker-seeking-former.html>

In his "Untitled Short Doc," filmmaker Randal W Scott will peer into the hearts, minds, and souls of many valiant men and women who awakened from their dogmatic slumber and reject the religious indigination of Christianity and its teachings.

## AOF Board (2009)

**President:** Beverly Church

**Board Chair:** Don Knutson

**Vice President:** Mynga Futrell

**Secretary:** Jillian Stanley

**Treasurer:** Ken Nahigian

**Directors at large:**

Steve Campbell, Tom Nicolette,

Debora Smith, Jillian Stanley

## AOF Committees

Want to serve AOF? Volunteer to a team! You can contact the chair of any of these at [aofboard@aofonline.org](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org) or phone AOF's voice-mail at 916-447-3589 and ask for a return call to discuss your interests.

**Program Planning** (Debora Smith, Chair)

**Meeting Matters/Logistics** (Tom Nicolette, Chair)

**Social Activities (Vacancy-We Need You!)**

**Members** (Ken Nahigian, Chair)

**Freethought Friends** (Jillian Stanley, Chair)

**Outreach and Recruiting** (Steve Campbell, Chair)

**Communications** (Bev Church, Chair)

**Education, Activism, and Service** (Mynga Futrell & Don Knutson, Co-Chairs)

## AOF's Voluntary

**Newsletter:** Kevin Schultz (Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

**Affiliation Liaisons:**

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

**Community Service Projects:**

Don Knutson

**Internet Website:** Kevin Schultz, 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](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org)

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## *A Heaping Plate of Fun Was Had By All* **Flying Spaghetti Monster Party Recap**

On April 12<sup>th</sup> AOF co-sponsored the second annual Flying Spaghetti Monster Party, also known as Pastover as Bobby Henderson calls it in *The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*. While Brian Jones managed getting the food prepared and served, pirate songs played thanks to Tom Ikelman who brought the pirate music and a boom box. Although we decided not to do karaoke, Kristi Craven's karaoke machine came in handy as a P.A. System. Approximately 60 people ate salad, garlic bread, and among other items, the main course, spaghetti.

Among the highlights were the pirate costume contests – one for the adults and one for the children. The winners received gift baskets both of which contained, among other things, copies of *The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* mentioned above. This year, we also added a door prize – a set of hand blown wine glasses which was won by our very own President, Beverly Church. Tom Nicolette mingled with the crowd, picking people's brains for presentation ideas for our more traditional meetings and culled some great ideas. Like last year, we saw a few new faces at this event.

Next year, the process of cooking the pasta should be finally perfected and all the food will be vegan except for the optional meatballs. We would like to thank Don Knutson for making the Southside Park Cohousing Common House available again this year and Brian Jones for organizing the event and cooking, not to mention the numerous others without whom the project would not have been the success it was.



### **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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*Print subscription \$12 per year, e-mail subscription free to all on request.*

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 Figures Series

# Three Secrets: The Visions at Fátima

By Ken Nahigian

The Great War was near its third year, the toll already topping ten millions. But in Portugal, in the region of Leiria, it was a perfect peace. Three children tended sheep in the field of *Cova da Iris*. Francisco and Jacinta Marto, and little Lúcia Santos, ages 7 to 10, idled and played under a cloud-scudded sky. They were ready for magic. Or better, a miracle.

What occurred that day (May 13, 1917) is a puzzle. Told and retold, filtered and interpreted, spun and woven and colored by passionate faith, the tale is half-buried in its own mythology. The popular report tells of two eerie lightning flashes, then a lady, "all in white, more brilliant than the sun ... indescribably beautiful," floating above a shrub. Oddly, this vision did not frighten the children. She directed them to pray, and to "come here for six months in succession, then I will tell you who I am and what I want."

Unsure, they vowed to tell no one; but Jacinta let it slip to her parents. Soon it was news through the little village of Fátima. Next month, on June 17, about 60 villagers went with them to the Cova. The vision recurred, visible only to the children. Begging them to pray, the Lady predicted the pending deaths of Jacinta and Francisco. Reportedly, villagers saw a rising cloud and a motion of the branches of a tree.

Civil authorities pressured the children to declare it a hoax. Undeterred, they returned on July 13 with an escort of several hundreds from the area. This time Lucia requested a sign. In response, the invisible Lady revealed three secrets (later called Letters). The first was a vision of hell, "like a sea of fire." The second foretold the Catholic conversion of the Russian people. The third, another prophecy, was a terrible secret repressed for many years. More on that later.

The Lady also promised to reveal her identity in October. Local authorities

reportedly detained, sequestered and even threatened the children, causing them to miss the August visitation. But in October they were back with 70,000 from all parts of Europe, and newspaper journalists. The day was dour and rainy. The Lady returned (again, visible only to the children) to announce that she was in fact Mary, mother of Christ. Asking for the building of a new church and prayers for the war's end, she vanished. Lucia cried out, "Look at the sun!" Many then reportedly saw the sun prised, sparkling with colors, whirling through the sky; others felt something like an earthquake. Then the rain ceased—the crowd found its clothing miraculously dry.

As foretold, Francisco and Jacinta died soon after (in 1919 and 1920 respectively). The Cova became a holy spot, an object of pilgrimage. Devoted believers raised a shrine, then a chapel, then a basilica. Religious tourism grew central to the local economy. In 1926, Lucia became a nun, and in 1948 entered a Carmelite monastery in Spain.

The Fátima story, by repute the best authenticated of modern miracles, still stirs dispute. The claimed witness count is impressive, but reports differ. Some skeptics saw odd colors, some believers saw nothing. Supposed reports of strange solar activity came from up to 18 miles away, but no astronomers noted it, nor did the many soldiers, sailors and airmen engaged in war activity in the vicinity. Critics advance arguments about sundogs, perihelions, stratospheric dust clouds, hypnagogia, and perceptions excited by faith, rumor, exhaustion and hysteria.

After canonical enquiry, in October 1930 the Bishop of Leiria-Fátima declared the visions "worthy of belief." But the Church remains formally neutral on this and all "private revelations." Within the ranks, skepticism is rife. In a *Sunday-Times* UK article

(June 29, 2000), a friar who knew Sister Lucia dos Santos described her as a person living in a "delirious world of infantile fantasies" who suffers "religious hallucinations." Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), far from a liberal, opined that Lucia might have conjured her vision from devotional books.

If so, it says something about the plasticity of human thought and memory, and the contagious power of conformity. As when the Greek satirist Lucian watched the immolation of Peregrinus, a charlatan-prophet, in the 2nd century, then as a joke told someone that he saw a vulture ascend from the pyre crying that Peregrinus had been exalted to heaven—the next day he was shocked to hear an old man testify solemnly that he himself had seen the same miracle! And within days the village was full of witnesses swearing they had seen Peregrinus dressed in white, risen from the dead, walking about.

We may never know. But the third secret, so-called the Third Letter, what of it? At the Bishop's command, the reticent Lucia finally put it in a letter, which found its way to Rome. There it stayed for decades, sealed, an object of fear and rumor. In one story, Pope John XXIII opened it in 1960, read it, fainted, and had it resealed.

Some said it was a vision of doomsday, of the corruption and fall of the Church, or of automobiles with longer fins (Woody Allen). Finally in June 2000, the Church released it, to the disappointment of many. It was a fevered dream-vision of martyrdom of priests and bishops, *perhaps* an omen of doomsday, or anything. A new raft of rumors now claims the released text is a forgery, the true Letter still sealed in a catacomb of the Vatican.

You can read the released text at <http://www.marianland.com/thirdsec.html>, and elsewhere. But you will not be wiser.

## Counselors, Nurse Needed, Peoples! :)

# Camp Quest West Opportunities to Help

### By Chris Lindstrom

Camp Quest West is an overnight camp located in the Sierra foothills of California for children ages 8 to 17. Camp runs from Sunday, July 12, 2009, through Saturday, July 18. There will be a staff party the night of July 18, so plan to stay on until July 19.

Camp Quest West's goals are 1) to promote a sense of belonging in the freethought community, 2) to encourage critical thinking, 3) to promote respect for others with differing viewpoints, and 4) to provide a safe and fun environment for personal development.

Camp Quest West is seeking applicants to become counselors. Although there is no pay, you will have the opportunity to work with and learn from other freethinkers, to have a unique camping experience in one of the most beautiful areas of the country, and to help develop critical thinking in young people, all while having fun.

California law requires that we have an RN or LVN on site, so we are especially seeking a nurse. Although we can't pay a salary, in addition to all the wonderful opportunities this camp offers volunteers, the nurse's child can attend camp for free. Now there's an offer you can't refuse.

If you are interested in becoming a counselor or camp nurse for Camp Quest West, go to <http://www.campquestwest.org>. You can learn more about your duties by emailing [west@camp-quest.org](mailto:west@camp-quest.org) or by downloading the application. Positions will be filled by qualified people according to when the application is received, so we urge you to apply as soon as possible.




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(Continued from page 1)  
wish.

Public schools fall under the Constitutional guarantees. They must by law stay *neutral* with respect to America's striking religious diversity.

This stricture holds, even though religions themselves will vary considerably in terms of their general cultural legitimacy. Some religions are prevalent; others quite peculiar. No matter.

Educators largely know that they may not privilege one religion over others, and they generally act accordingly. Most teachers do value fairness; they are able to be evenhanded, whatever religious traditions they encounter in their students' families.

In a similar fashion, schools are not to privilege religion generally over nonreligion. That neutrality pairing, though, is different in kind and scale. In it, educators are not as likely to value neutrality. (*The religion/nonreligion pairing will be the subject of Part 2 in this mini-series.*)

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“The Way It Should Be—Neutral” is the first in a series of mini-commentaries on society and education by Mynga Futrell, Ph.D., director of OABITAR (*Objectivity, Accuracy, and Balance In Teaching About Religion*). They are adapted from an article published in the quarterly of the California 3Rs (*Rights, Respect, Responsibility*) Religious Liberty Project in May 2008.



# 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-deductable 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).

## Talk to Us, Peoples! :)

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Atheists and Freethinkers,

My name is Derrick Claville, a bright young man who has been searching diligently for the "Truth" at least 75% of my life. Unfortunately I have been searching for the "Truth" in all the wrong places (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, etc., etc.). But as of today, I can honestly say that I've been totally liberated from the clutches of religion with the helpful reading of one book that changed my life forever. Now I want to know more and share my ideas with those who wouldn't look down on me for thinking a certain way. And that's the reason why I have chosen to write to you today.

I am currently incarcerated for a crime I'm 100% innocent of (for real), and to make matters worse my funds are in a nonexistent state right now. So if possible, could you please send me all and any old or out-dated magazines and newsletters, used or damaged books and any other material that may be available. I also re-

quest to be placed on your mailing list, a catalog from which I may order your material if ever I am financially capable, and information on how I may be able to support you all, whether financial donations or otherwise.

I truly hope that you take this letter under serious consideration because I need your help like Jesus needs God <smile-face>. I will be waiting patiently for your response.

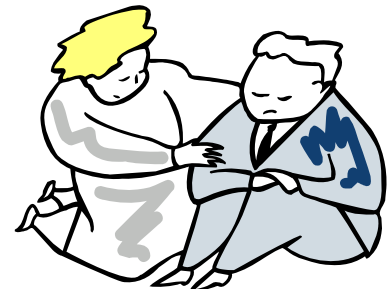
Respectfully yours,  
Derrick Claville

*A note from Joe A. Robertson #91990-080, Federal Correctional Complex, PO Box 3000, Forrest City, AR 72336, dt. Feb 25, 2009:*

Dear AOF, Thank you dearly for your time and assistance in behalf of my quest ... I received the two books without any problem, and any other information, i.e., the AOF newsletter,

is welcomed with appreciation.

*In his prior letter, Joe Robertson had requested any "literary works pertaining to non-believers." Don Knutson kindly responded with a few books. AOF members who have spare reading material can send same to him at the above address. If the return address says "AOF" (important), he can receive books or magazines with no problem.*



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

**Please submit items to:**  
[newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto:newsletter@aofonline.org) and specify in the e-mail that you'd like to announce the information in the Family News section. **Thanks!**

## Star To Be Eclipsed for First Time in 27 Years! Mysterious Epsilon Aurigae

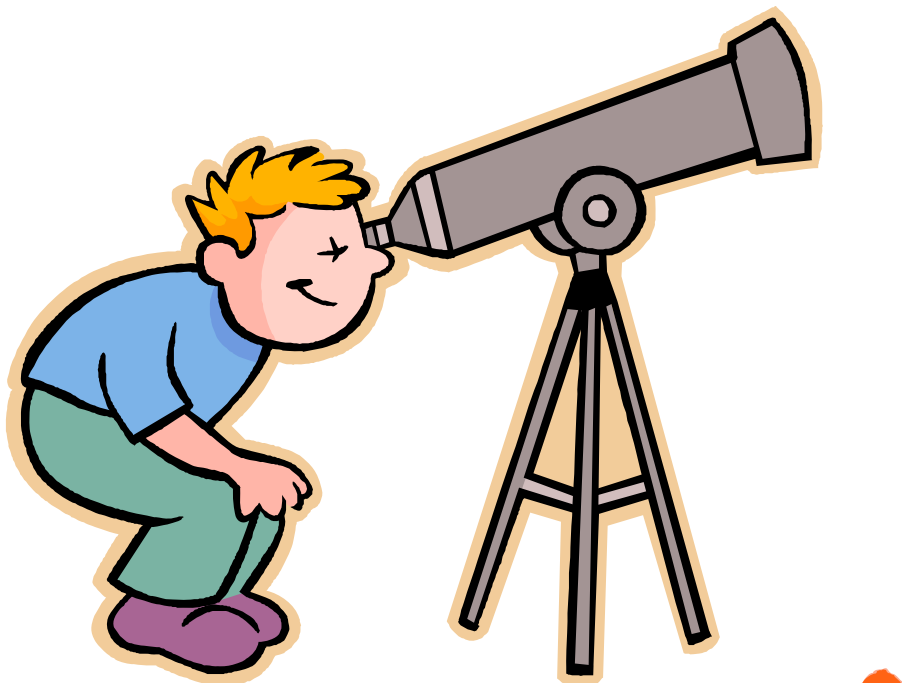
By Liam McDaid

Stars often come in sets and are called binaries. It may make no sense that star systems with three or more stars being called "binary", but it would get confusing if we referred to trinaries, quadrinaries, quintinaries, etc. for each star system. Occasionally, from random chance, a binary system will line up so that we see the stars eclipse each other. Algol in Perseus is one of the more famous of these types of stars, as is Sheliak in Lyra. Of all eclipsing binaries, however, none is more mysterious than Epsilon Aurigae (e Aur).

e Aur is a binary system that **eclipses every twenty seven years** (27.1 yrs) and then stays eclipsed for two years! This is odd, to say the least. So whatever is causing these eclipses must be very large. The object we can see in the system is an F0 supergiant star. The eclipsing object is not so visible. In fact, the eclipsing object can't be seen with the naked eye.

Even stranger is the fact that in the middle of the eclipse, the star(s?) brighten slightly. If e Aur is being eclipsed by something big and faint, it may be an object that has a thick disk around it. A recent idea has been proposed that at the center of this eclipsing disk may be a B5 star. At this point, we just don't know enough to state clearly what is eclipsing e Aur. That's ok, because science has and always must have unknowns. For more information about this binary system, see: <http://www.hposoft.com/Campaign09.html>.

This August will be the beginning of the latest eclipse. Astronomers, astrophiles, and many others are already planning campaigns of photometry and spectroscopy on e Aur. Although the eclipse hasn't started yet, e Aur is easy to find as it is the brightest star of "The Kids" in Auriga, and in the pentagon that makes up Auriga, it's the star right next to Capella. By August, Auriga will be near the Sun in the morning sky and by the time it's easily visible again in October, the eclipse will be well underway. So the next time you're out looking up, take a look at this intriguing mysterious star.



### Newsletter Submissions

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

[newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto: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.

### Newsletter Freebie Policy

*This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.*

Want the latest AOF board minutes?  
E-mail [aofboard@aofonline.org](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org)





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

*We're on the Web!*  
**aofonline.org**

## May Calendar of Events

**AOF May General Meeting** Sunday, May 10, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

May AOF Board Meeting Sunday, May 17, 9:30-12:00 p.m.

**AOF June General Meeting** Sunday, June 10, 1:30-4:00 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" (2010-02-07). 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.

