

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

December 2010

## Sunday, December 12, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Dr. Terry Sandbek: Religion vs. Science, a Millennia-old War

### Special Points of Interest

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**Note: Due to renovations at Sierra 2, please attend AOF's December general meeting in the Sierra 2 "Garden Room", not the normal Community Room.**

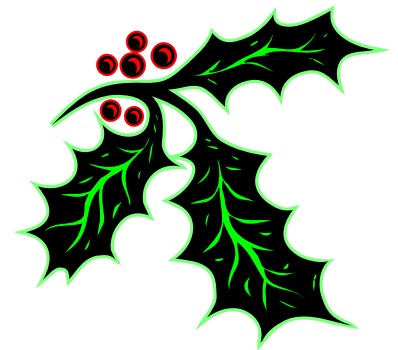
Dr. Terry Sandbek, skeptical activist and co-founder of the Sacramento Skeptics, will speak on the millennia-old war between religion and science, with accents on modern accommodationism (come to the meeting to see just what that means). Dr. Sandbek is a Sacramento-area clinical psychologist with a focus on Cognitive Behavior Therapy, and has participated in the local organized community of reason since its earliest days.



Please note the location change for this meeting. For the December general meeting

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## Sunday, December 19, 12:00-4:00 p.m.: Solstice / HumanLight Party! By Ken Nahigian



Once again AOF joins hands with the [Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area](#) to mark the turn of another year. This is our annual combined celebration of the [Winter Solstice](#), the [HumanLight](#) secular holiday, and the year's end. The marvelous festivities will include music, camaraderie, the usual potluck goodies, and the auction of *one incredibly valuable prize* (more of that in a bit).

As usual, the party is free and open to all -- friends welcome. Just bring something edible to share, attractively presented, with your own favorite beverage. More importantly, bring your talents, your wit, your sparks of intellect. Do you have a favorite poem, a reading, a skit, a monologue, music to share? Can you juggle, play an instrument, sing, perform, do tricks? Let the coordinators know via the Contact number below. Then bring it, be ready to awe us.

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### Standard Fare

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## “Lucky” 13 bags of trash collected! Adopt-A-Highway Recap By Don Knutson

A gorgeous November morning greeted the AOF Highway Cleanup crew which collected **thirteen bags** of shredded refuse from the CalTrans mowing of the area. AOF cleanup veterans **Jerry Bachman, Joe Fiffick, Don Knutson and Ken Nahigian** were joined by newcomers **Robert & Norma Howe**. We greet the new year, 2011, with another cleanup on **Saturday, January 8 @ 9:00 a.m.** Wet conditions cancel. More info: **(916) 447-2169**



*Real American heroes! Thank you!!!*

## AOF 2011 Directors Election Results By Ken Nahigian

AOF members in attendance at the November annual business meeting elected the 2011 board of directors:

1. Kristi Craven
2. Mynga Futrell
3. Peggy Lucas
4. Mario Sandri
5. Jerry Sloan
6. Jillian Stanley
7. Vincent Wales

The AOF board of directors will elect officer positions at the January 2011 board meeting.

Congratulations to our new board members!

### AOF Board (2010)

**President:** Beverly Church

**Vice President:** Mynga Futrell

**Secretary:** Jillian Stanley

**Treasurer:** Ken Nahigian

**Directors at large:** David Flanders, Paul Geisert, Ken Nahigian, Mario Sandri

### AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail [aofboard@aofonline.org](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org) for direct contact to relevant personnel.

#### Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, *Open*)

Meeting Matters / Logistics (Team Coordinator, *Open*)

Social Activities (Team Coordinator, *Open*)

#### Membership Committee

Members Tracking (Team Coordinator, Ken Nahigian)

“Freethought Friends” (Team Coordinator, Jillian Stanley)

Outreach / Recruiting (Team Coordinator, Steve Campbell)

#### Communications Committee

Beverly Church, Chair

AOF News Team (newsletter editor, events editor, public editor, postmaster, webmaster)

#### Education, Activism and Service Committee

Service Projects Coordinator: Don Knutson

Education/Action Coordinator: Mynga Futrell

#### Building / Reason House Committee

Beverly Church, Chair

Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell, Mario Sandri

#### Freethought Day 2011: Date to-be-announced

Beverly Church, Chair. (Save the date! – It’s a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

#### Darwin Day 2011: Date to be announced

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs

(Save the date! – It’s a celebration of science and humanity)

### AOF Voluntariat

#### Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell, Atheists Alliance International (AAI), <http://atheistalliance.org/>

Kevin Schultz, American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org/>

Beverly Church, American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org/>

Hank Kocol, Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), <http://secularhumanism.org/>

#### AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz

Postmaster: Jerry Sloan

Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel (Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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## Cleo Kocol and Jerry Sloan November Meeting Recap By David Flanders

Cleo Kocol and Jerry Sloan were AOF's November speakers. Cleo began speaking about how in the past homosexuality was suppressed in the media. In other instances, homosexuality was omitted or it was presented in a negative way. Things have changed in modern times—the lesbian Ellen DeGeneres has a daily television talk show that is mostly accepted. Jerry spoke about the history of gays. He included how Christians used the bible to justify their intolerance toward gays. Over the years, gays protested and eventually laws were changed in their favor. Still today, there are wealthy Christian fundamentalists trying to legislate laws against gays. Jerry said younger people in America are more tolerant towards gays than the older generation and thus eventually gays will eventually be granted the right to get married. A lively question and answer period followed their talk.

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only, AOF will convene in the Garden Room of the Sierra 2 center. The Garden Room is at the north end of the long hall -- just follow the mural -- really, you can't miss it!

Location : **Sierra II Community Center** - Garden Room, 2791 24th Street, Sacramento  
Contact : 916-447-3589

Help make it a fun meeting! Bring something edible or potable for the snack table if you can: finger foods (canapés, brownies, round quichey things, chips & dip, etc.), fruit juice or soda pop. Nothing needing utensils, please

## Kel Munger September Meeting Recap By David Flanders

Kel Munger was AOF's September speaker. She is putting the final touches on a book about the second coming of Jesus—the absurdity of it. Kel said she grew up in a Jehovah Witness culture that said the end of the world was near. As a youngster, she witnessed for Jesus—a person in the bible (supposing he existed) who lived in a very superstitious time in human history. Many in her community preferred a predictable future in which their God is victorious over the non-believers. In the bible, Jesus says he will return to earth before the death of his 12 apostles. Possibly no later than the year 100 C.E.? The bible further states that Jesus, the prince of peace will kill non-believers using a sword in his mouth. Also, he will engage in battle against Satan, an entity with seven heads. Furthermore, Christians will get to witness atheist and other freethinkers getting tortured in the lake of fire. So far none of this has happened yet. For the past 2,000 years many non-believers think Jesus is another failed prophet in the bible. To counteract that, some Christian book authors have decided to gerrymander various obscure symbolic bible verses and thus show that Jesus will soon come back to planet earth. "Left Behind" books that promote the second coming of Jesus perhaps intend to provide readers with a sense of security in a risk society we live in today. But history seems to indicate, for those who are willing to embrace reality (the future is unpredictable) and look at life from several different angles, the odds increase in having a greater amount of security--they have done their homework. In this case freethinking appears to be superior to myopic thinking.

### 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

# A Divine Father

By Ken Nahigian

Cults are chimerical, formless as fog or water. Their messages and meaning are contrary, mercurial, paradoxical, ambiguous. They are archipelagos connected by weird isthmuses and bridges, isolated yet related, each isle blessed and cursed. What makes or inspires them, and why some mature into full religions when others dwindle or die, are deep questions, unanswered. What is cultism? We know it when we see it. But try to define it, and it will slide from you like a mirage.

To many cult-watchers, the first great American cultist was a Baltimore gardener and likely son of emancipated slaves, who claimed to be God.

Born as George Baker or perhaps Frederick Edwards, no one is sure, he led an African-American revivalist movement from 1907 until his death, and took the public name of Reverend Major Jealous Divine (because God's name is "Jealous," Ex 34:14, get it?). To critics he was a naked charlatan; and he did live well off his followers. Yet "Father Divine" helped the poorest of them at great personal cost, and worked hard for racial equality. Like cultism itself, he was ambivalent, self-conflicting, and formless.

In 1906, during a visit to California, he encountered the ideas of the Unity Church. Founded by Charles Fillmore in 1889, Unity was an outgrowth of "New Thought," a spiritual rework of Positive Thinking; it teaches that God is spiritual energy within all of us, and negative thoughts harm our bodies as much as our souls. He took to this avidly. At his local Baptist church, where he often preached himself, he fell under the sway of an itinerate preacher who claimed personal divinity. He began to call himself "the Messenger," seeing himself as a Christ-figure in relation to his teacher, "Father Jehovia." In 1912 the new ministry collapsed, when he realized that he himself was the only true expression of God's spirit.

He moved south to Georgia, where conflicts led to a brief stint on a chain gang. After his release he began to draw followers, mostly pretty young black women.irate husbands and preachers had him re-arrested for lunacy, but the trial, acquittal and publicity only helped to grow his ministry. With a small congregation in tow he migrated to Brooklyn, New York, to set up a commune in an apartment building. Rechristened as Father Divine,



he set forth his teachings: no sex, no alcohol, no gambling or tobacco. He married a parishioner, a much older woman, which helped defuse rumors of impropriety with his female followers. Both Mother Divine and the Father insisted they never carnally consummated their wedlock.

In 1919 he purchased a home in an all-white area of Long Island, expanding his ministry with charismatic outreach, weekly free banquets and a work-placement program. He attracted white believers as well as black. Annoyed neighbors accused him of scandalous sexual adventuring, but could present no proof of it. In 1931 the Father was arrested twice for peace disturbances, but easily posted bail and continued the often-raucous dinners and revivals. The Press fawned on him. After the trial and conviction, when the judge died of a heart attack, reporters ignored the judge's long history of heart trouble, making it seem like a sudden stroke of divine wrath. A sorrowful Father Divine commented, "I hated to do it."

The media frenzy pulled in disciples and speaking offers—at one point he addressed a crowd of 10,000 at Harlem's Rockland Palace. His commune branched out, soon with followers in Switzerland, France and Australia; the Father dubbed it the International Peace Mission Movement. He remained apolitical until the 1935 Harlem Riot, after which he organized the first-ever "Divine Righteous Government Convention," to promote a platform of positive thought, free-market capitalism, religious patriotism, chastity, anti-segregation and anti-welfare. (To the Father, Franklin Roosevelt's social programs were "handouts," designed to keep minorities in their place.) Then, late in the 1930's, several scandals and lawsuits rocked the empire. One follower abducted a teenage girl, convincing her they would conceive the "New Redeemer." Another defected and seized control of a church commune. A man was stabbed while trying to serve a summons to Father Divine. When Mother Divine fell ill, the Father reportedly refused to visit her; after she died, he married a young beautiful Canadian woman, claiming this was her reincarnation—an idea alien to his theology, but a "special case" (and another Platonic marriage, of course).

And so on. The fickle media had fun, then forgot the Father by inches. He was an aged relic of a gullible day. In 1953, a believer donated an estate near Philadelphia, with

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GOVERNOR ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

October 10, 2010

### ***Freethought Day 2010***

Greetings to everyone celebrating Sacramento's ninth Annual Freethought Day Fair.

Freethought Day celebrates liberty of conscience, freethought, naturalistic ethics, secular government, and civic values. It brings the Sacramento community together to commemorate the landmark decision made during the peak of the Salem Witch Trials in Massachusetts over 300 years ago. This decision declared that only real world evidence would be considered in court. It represents an important milestone in our judicial system and the beginning of secular thought and reason.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the organizers, sponsors and participants of this event for their lasting dedication to preserving and encouraging the liberty of thought in your community. I further commend you for educating the public by showcasing independent thinkers who have advanced the human condition.

Please accept my best wishes for a joyous event and success in all your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arnold Schwarzenegger".

Arnold Schwarzenegger







Same tired gifts, same tired tree?

Give the Gift of Free Thought!



### Celebrate Solstice with an AOF Gift Membership

With one AOF Membership purchase or renewal, additional gift memberships are just \$10 apiece.  
(Offer expires January 31, 2011)

Hello AOF! I would like to purchase **one AOF Membership** at the standard rate for myself or a friend:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP + 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address (print clearly please!) \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Level (circle one):** Patron (\$50), Family (\$30), Individual (\$20), Low-income (\$10)

**Include a Newsletter:** \_\_\_\_\_ Send printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Send newsletter by email (*Free!*) – see email address above

**Total for this membership:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

...with **additional AOF Gift Memberships** (new members only) at a mere \$10 apiece, plus newsletter fee:

First Gift Membership:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP + 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address (print clearly please!) \_\_\_\_\_

**Gift Membership fee: \$10**

**Include a Newsletter:** \_\_\_\_\_ Send printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Send newsletter by email (*Free!*) – see email address above

**Total for this gift membership:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Second Gift Membership:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP + 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address (print clearly please!) \_\_\_\_\_

**Gift Membership fee: \$10**

**Include a Newsletter:** \_\_\_\_\_ Send printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Send newsletter by email (*Free!*) – see email address above

**Total for this gift membership:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Third Gift Membership:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP + 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address (print clearly please!) \_\_\_\_\_

**Gift Membership fee: \$10**

**Include a Newsletter:** \_\_\_\_\_ Send printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Send newsletter by email (*Free!*) – see email address above

**Total for this gift membership:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Donation:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Grand total Enclosed:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_



*AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association, Tax ID# 68-0325762. Dues, donations & gift memberships are tax-deductable as allowed by law. Mail to: AOF, PO Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership).*

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a French Gothic manor, to be the Father's retirement home. Through the next decade he continued to work for civil rights, but shunned the nascent civil rights movement. He disliked labels, and did not regard himself as "black," just God.

He died in 1965. His wife took over the fading Peace Mission. In 1972 she opposed another cult leader, Jim Jones, who tried to absorb it. Jones had partially based his own ideas on the movement, claiming to be a reincarnation of Father Divine.

The Mission lives on today, diminished, as the Palace Mission Church in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. For all the fuss, it left one lasting mark. Songwriter Johnny Mercer sat at a Father Divine sermon in 1944. "You got to accentuate the positive," the Father preached, "and eliminate the negative." Thought Mercer, "Wow." Rushing back to Hollywood, he co-wrote "Accentuate the Positive," recorded the next year by the Pied Pipers, and Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters. As cults go, it might have done worse.

## AOF in January

# Sunday, Jan 9: Secular Round Table

For our first meeting of 2011, AOF hopes to work with the **Sacramento Coalition of Reason (SCOR)** to host a panel of Valley-area secularist groups. The focus will be a frank discussion of our diversity of goals, the local landscape of secularism and freethought, and how the groups might work together in the coming year.

Organizations invited so far include **Americans United Sacramento**, the **Sacramento Area Skeptics**, the **Stockton Area Freethinkers**, **HAGSA**, Michael Newdow of the **First Atheist Church of True Science (FACTS)**, **Sacramento Freethinkers**, **Atheists and Nonbelievers (SacFAN)**, and others.

Plans are still forming, so check back frequently, but mark your calendars now for what should be an energetic discussion!

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(Continued from page 1)

Your event coordinators this year are Vincent M. Wales, Dave Flanders and Kristi Craven.

Now for the auction item: it is a voucher for two (2) tickets to the [Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon](#), 2011 season. Market value: \$100. OSF Ashland has kindly donated this to AOF for fund-raising. We will use proceeds to help pay the room rental for this party. If you like Shakespeare, please be prepared to bid, minimum bid \$20.

Note, doors will open at 11 a.m. -- that's for preparation and set up. Come early if you need to get things ready. Otherwise, noon is best. For a map to the site: <http://bit.ly/e1Z9ja> or call the AOF voice-mail (page two).



### 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 word processing format. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF 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 to send a letter to the Editor?  
E-mail [newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto:newsletter@aofonline.org)!





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

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

## December/January Calendar of Events

<b>AOF General Meeting in December</b>	<b>Sun, Dec 12, 1:30 p.m.</b>
<b>Joint AOF-HAGSA Solstice / HumanLight Potluck</b>	<b>Sun, Dec 19, 12:00-4:00 p.m.</b>
<b>AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Event</b>	<b>Sat, Jan 8, 9:00-11:00 a.m.</b>
<b>AOF General Meeting in January</b>	<b>Sun, Jan 9, 1:30 p.m.</b>
<b>AOF Dinner Social: To-Be-Announced; Contact: 419-2105 or <a href="mailto:shastaseer@sbcglobal.net">shastaseer@sbcglobal.net</a></b>	<b>Thu, Jan 6, 6:30 p.m.</b>

*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 2011), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (Feb 2011). 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.

