



AOF members cheerfully table at Sacramento Earth Day, amid streams of crepe paper (April 21, Roger Zabke's camera).

✧ ✧ This Month's Main Event ✧ ✧

➤ Marie Bain: Grin and Bear it: The Bible Tells Me So

Sunday, May 19, 2024, 2 pm – 4 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, see map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

Join the eclectic and vibrant Marie Bain at [Reason Center](#) as she presents *Grin & Bear It: The Bible Tells Me So*. With scripture, song and satire, she will share a free-wheeling deconstruction of beasties in the Bible, i.e., critters in literature, or crit-lit - lite! You'll laugh, you'll cry, your eyes will audibly pop. Yes, it's better than *Cats*!

Who's this Marie Bain person? She is a professional actor, singer, director, and member of SAG-AFTRA and AEA. She has taught at CSU Sacramento and The Art Institute of California-Sacramento.

Stage credits include Emilia in *Othello* and Morland/Allen in *Northanger Abbey*, STC, Sacto; Carey/Eve in *Emilia*, WTC, Sacto.; *Six Women With Brain Death*, Sacto.; *A...My Name Is Alice*, CitiArts/Theatre Concord; and Ovation winning *Animal Farm* as Squealer for Son Of Semele Ensemble, L.A. Film credits include *Gilmore Girls*, *Let's Make A Deal*, *Screech of the Decapitated*, and *Art School Confidential*.

Back off, Julie Andrews, we fear you no longer.



Contact: See <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.

As usual, we invite you to bring your own finger-foody snacks for the hospitality table. Share and munch. Yum.

✧ ✧ Other Upcoming AOF Events ✧ ✧

➤ Free Move and Discussion

Friday, May 10, 2024, 7 pm – 10 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, see map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

It's a free **in-person Movie Night** at Sacramento's [Reason Center](#), in a quiet room with cozy seating and a huge screen and refreshments right at hand. The movie name is a secret because of our [MPLC License](#) and the stodgy rule of law -- but we will slyly slip a hint. This one is a 1984 post-apocalyptic retro-dystopian alternate-history rock-&-roll fable with Studebakers and a pick-ax fight. It stars Michael Pare, Diane Lane and Rick Moranis (in a rare tough-guy role), and the director was Walter Hill. In it, a mercenary seeks to rescue his rockstar ex-girlfriend, kidnapped by a motorcycle gang. Lots of two-fisted manly action, and of course, explosions. Don't miss this cult hit.



AOF co-sponsors the Movie Night events. The movie team provides popcorn and other munchies - feel free to bring your own snacks as well. We also encourage a post-film discussion, which makes this educational if you stretch the word. No fee to attend. But Reason Center always appreciates donations. Just saying.

Contact: See <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.

Free Movie Nights are a joint venture of AOF and Reason Center. You can suggest your own fave film for next time!

➤ Board of Directors Meeting

Tuesday, May 14, 2024, 7 pm – 8 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, see map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

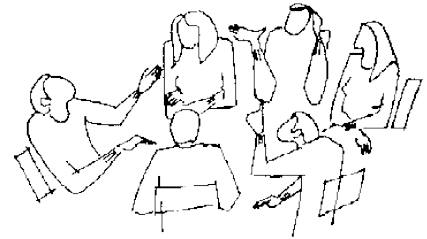
An AOF planning meeting, mainly for AOF directors & officers but open to all. These happen as required, and are a lot more fun than they sound.

Join us, meet the Board, keep an eye on the shenanigans. We love visitors. We often have snacks. And maybe you'll have some good ideas, hm?

Note, this Board meeting will be an actual in-person meeting, so be sure vaccinations are current, or wear a mask, or just don't cough on us.

Contact: See <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.

Bring your ideas for AOF, your strategies, your event and activity suggestions -- best of all, your volunteerism! Helping hands are the bomb.



➤ Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup

Saturday, May 18, 2024, 9 am – 11 am

Location: Near W. Elkhorn Blvd & Hwy 99, see map at <https://goo.gl/maps/zw3Rwct9yR52>.

Out on Highway 99, for two miles from Elkhorn Boulevard to Elverta Road, runs a lonely stretch -- *our* stretch! Sac-area freethinkers "adopted" it in July 1995. We have cared for it, nurtured it, lovingly rescued it from litter and debris, and received recognition for our work. One of our more successful civic efforts, it proves freethinkers can also serve the community.

So join us! Enjoy a morning commune with nature, and do a deed for the environment and local area wildlife. The refuse we collect would otherwise ultimately be swept by the rain into tributaries and into the ocean, degrading habitat, and leading to a slow death for many sea creatures. (Note, CalTrans is now paying a stipend for our work!)

As usual, the stalwart activity captain will provide safety equipment, including comfortable, natty hard-hats and gloves, stylish safety vests, collection bags, and handy trash pickers. The cleanup takes a scant two hours. Please dress for the season. It may be an idea to bring a pouch or fanny-pack to carry 3 or 4 trash bags.

To get there, travel north from Sacramento on I-5 past the Natomas area. Take the "Highway 99 - Yuba City, Marysville" exit. Exit at Elkhorn Boulevard less than a mile north. Turn left, cross the overpass. Park in the park-&-ride lot if possible, or somewhere near it.

This is a great event for older children, but please leave smalls safe at home. Also please review the CalTrans Highway Cleanup guidelines at <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/maintenance/adopt-a-highway/covid19>.



Contact: 916-805-9337 (Don Knutson), or see <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.

In case of rain, fog, excessive mud, rapture or locust plague, the Cleanup will be rescheduled. If unsure, call the Activity Captain (Don).

✧ ✧ Other Upcoming Events ✧ ✧

A list of local *non*-AOF events worthy of your attention. In calendar order, more or less. We try.

➤ Recovery from Religion (RfR) online meetings

Sunday, May 5, 4 pm – 6 pm. Providing ongoing and personal support to individuals as they let go of their religious beliefs. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7287067292>. For details see <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/298843216/>.

Saturday, May 11, 2024, 5 pm – 7 pm, for women & non-binary. Attendance link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87403436249>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/298843736/>.

Friday, May 17, 2024, 5 pm – 7 pm, for young people. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85471165177>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/299497891/>.

Saturday, May 18, 2024, 7 am – 9 am, Virtual Chapter Support. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7287067292>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/298843444/>.

Sunday, May 19, 2024, 12 noon – 2 pm, for LGBTQA+ folk. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7287067292>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/298845388/>.

Saturday, Jun 1, 2024, 8 am – 10 am, for men. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81672617364>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/298844418/>.

"RfR" provides ongoing and personal support to individuals letting go of religious beliefs. Please be sensitive and tolerant, and cut others some slack, so you will get it too.

➤ Sacramento Skeptics in the Pub

Sunday, May 5, 2024, 6 pm – 8 pm

Location: Duke's Pints & Plates, 510 La Sierra Dr, Sacramento; map at <https://goo.gl/maps/aNzV4j33cnizW9j77>.

A social meetup for the skeptical minds, a community of people, friends, and families that champion the methods of science and critical thinking. Visitors and new skeptics most welcome!

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacskeptics/events/300442823/>.

➤ A Musical Evening with Shelly Segal

Monday, May 6, 2024, 5 pm – 7 pm

Online concert. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/186729414>.

Presented by Recovery From Religion Sacramento: singer-songwriter [Shelley Segal](#) will talk about her own recovery from religion, as well as her fascinating musical career.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/300811903/>.

➤ Atheists Community video clips & discussion

Monday, May 6, 2024, 7:30 pm – 10:30 pm, see <https://www.meetup.com/reasoncenterevents/events/300464015/>.

Location: An online event. To attend, wait for the meeting time, then click

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81807086862?pwd=ZjUyamt1b2dlc1N5bEZ6Q0w1Um00QT09>.

A fun teleconference about Atheism, Logic, Reason, Thoughtfulness - accentuated by videos and of course, by you.

➤ Blasphemy Breakfasts and a Brunch

Saturday, May 11, 2024, 10 am – 11:30 am, at Mel's Diner, 13399 Folsom Blvd, Folsom, CA, map at

<https://goo.gl/maps/ri6JvaBoSZVHTdnU6>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/300555612/>.

Sunday, May 12, 2024, 9:30 am – 11:30 am, at Mel's Diner, 3000 J Street, Sacramento, CA, map at

<https://goo.gl/maps/toijMkseMWmTanVP7>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/300575993/>.

Sunday, May 19, 2024, 9:30 am – 11 am, at Mel's Diner, 6708 Lonetree Blvd, Rocklin, CA, map at

<https://goo.gl/maps/ZUY2gq72KkmkC4bU6>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/299855549/>.

Like to hang with like-minded people? Want to meet freethinkers in smaller groups? Or do you just get the morning munchies? Join us for our "Blasphemy Breakfast." We don't blaspheme all that much, but dark mutterings may emerge ... be warned. A great place to speak your mind, and a good starter if you are new to meetups. Please RSVP (see the links).

➤ Compassionate Humanists of Roseville (CHR) - Humanist Salon

Saturday, May 11, 2024, 10:30 am – 12 noon, details at [https://www.meetup.com/compassionate-](https://www.meetup.com/compassionate-humanists/events/300700583/)

[humanists/events/300700583/](https://www.meetup.com/compassionate-humanists/events/300700583/). Location available only to CHR members. Visit the link to join & learn more.

➤ Suicide Loss Survivors Discussion and Support

Tuesday, May 14, 2024, 5 pm – 7 pm

Online survivor support in a compassionate, secular way. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82683645189>.

Details: <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/298844977/>.

➤ Games at Reason Center

Friday, May 17, 2024, 6 pm – 9 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, Sacramento, map at

<https://goo.gl/maps/S5MR1e8ZodBzb4TG8>.

A fun evening of games and food. OK to bring some of your own games to share. Light snacks too. Reason Center has both board games and card games. (Here are a few: Ticket to Ride, Azul, Camel Up, Labyrinth, Rummikub, and more.) But no gambling allowed! No blood sports.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/300687691/>.



➤ Literacheer

Saturday, May 18, 2024, 2 pm – 4 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, Sacramento, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/S5MR1e8ZodBzb4TG8>.

The Literacheer meetup is back! This one will be in the Reason Center library. Come and enjoy the afternoon by discussing books with fellow thinkers. Everyone will get a chance to share their ideas about any book of their choice.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/300544926/>.

➤ Saturday Night Hangout

Saturday, May 18, 2024, 6 pm – 9 pm, details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/300253702/>.

Saturday, Jun 1, 2024, 6 pm – 9 pm, details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/hprbjtygcjbc/>.

Location: Meeting by teleconference; to attend, just click the attendance link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83092441353?pwd=Wmp6RVIUR1Q0dFZZMIFQUIVodTN0dz09>.

An online meetup on Saturdays, biweekly, at 6:00 PM Pacific Time. The first half hour is for greeting friends, catching up, welcoming newcomers and having fun. No politics please! Then games, trivia, movies. The list of options will grow.

➤ Sunday Assembly & Potluck

Sunday, May 19, 2024, 11 am – 1 pm (doors open 10:30am), presentation

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, Sacramento, map at

<https://goo.gl/maps/S5MR1e8ZodBzb4TG8>.

Sunday Assembly is a secular celebration of *you*, with music, readings, food and speakers, plus entertainment for children. Featured presenter is Zima Creason, Executive Director of the California EDGE Coalition and an elected member of the San Juan Unified Board of Education. Please bring a food dish to share – it's a potluck too.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/299668507/>.



➤ Black Humanists & Non-Believers Book Club

Saturday, May 25, 2024, 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

A book discussion via phone conference, open to all. RSVP to attend and the phone number will be revealed. The book this month is *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction* (chap. 20-28), by Dan Barker.

Details (and to RSVP): see <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/299137332/>.

➤ Coffee and Community

Sunday, May 26, 2024, 10 am – 11:30 am

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sacramento, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

Meet for open-topic conversation, great coffee and tea, and treats. Get to know new folk or visit with some old friends!

Hosted by Nancy Sneed, such a friendly person.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/298712800/>.

➤ Humanity Supper

Sunday, Mar 26, 2024, 4 pm – 6 pm

Location: TBD.

Join your BHNB friends for Humanity Dining. They alternate between dinners and breakfasts each month; this time it will be a supper. At least 3 RSVPs required, or event will be canceled. This is a bright, friendly group and they will love to see you.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/300403532/>.

➤ Porch Talk

Wednesday, May 29, 2024, 7 pm – 8:30 pm

Online attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88417809715?pwd=UGx1Q3hpU25iWkwrZjZaTWZFZMEMxZz09>.

A social gathering on the virtual front porch. Join online (via your personal computer) for a videochat on topics of the day; just click the link at meeting time and follow the instructions. Discussion suggestions are welcome. Host: Heather D.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/gwcqktygchbmc/>.

➤ Frank Zappa Tribute Concert

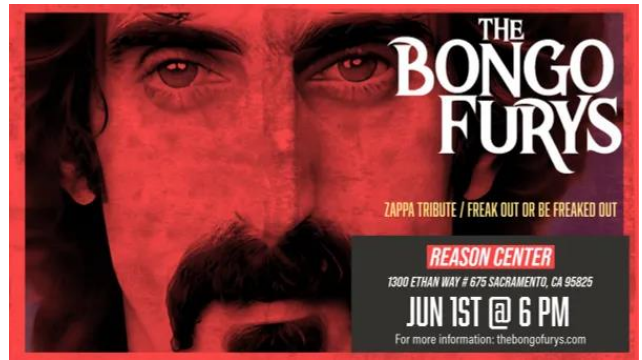
Saturday, June 1, 2024, 6 pm – 8 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sacramento, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

Get ready! The Bongo Furys, a Frank Zappa tribute band, will play all the lovely blasphemous Zappa tunes in one amazing set of music. Doors open at 6 PM. The show material may last for two hours. Please note that this music will have mature themes!

This is also a fundraiser for Reason Center. The **entrance fee is \$20** and all will go to Reason Center to help the cause of our amazing community. The band supports the cause of Reason Center and wants to help by celebrating a historical freethinker at our local community of freethinkers! Hosted by Will Schriff.

Details: See <https://www.meetup.com/reasoncenterevents/events/300729258/>.



➤ More Events – So many Calendars

There's more. Plans change, because we're human, so don't trust the static list above. To keep track of all those other events, bookmark & follow these links:

- Sacramento Freethinkers, Atheists and Nonbelievers, <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/calendar/>
- The Reason Center calendar, <https://www.meetup.com/ReasonCenterEvents/events/calendar/>
- Black Humanists of Sacramento events, <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/calendar/>
- Recovery from Religion Sacramento, <https://www.meetup.com/RfR-Sacramento-CA/events/calendar/>
- Sacramento Skeptics events, <https://www.meetup.com/sacskeptics/events/calendar/>
- Compassionate Humanists of Roseville, <https://www.meetup.com/compassionate-humanists/events/calendar/>
- Sunday Assembly Sacramento events, <https://www.meetup.com/sunday-assembly-sacramento/events/calendar/>
- Central Valley Alliance of Atheists & Skeptics, <https://www.meetup.com/fresno-cvaas/events/calendar/>

You can help. Here's how.

Support Reason Center

Since Reason Center opened in July 2014, it has hosted hundreds of events and accrued twelve partner organizations. Its mission: to support a social and intellectual community for freethinkers, contribute to society through education and community service, advance the civic understanding and acceptance of freethinkers, and uphold the separation of religion and government. All good work.

But to continue, "RC" relies on support from members and donors. Please stand up for Reason Center, because it stands up for you. To join or donate, visit ReasonCenter.org.

Suggest a Meeting

Know a compelling speaker, have a great meeting idea? Tell the AOF Program Committee! Go to <http://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>, or email "programs (at) aofonline.org". (Reasonable honorariums paid to speakers.)

Volunteer?

We suggest it meekly. See <http://www.aofonline.org/learn/committees.html> for opportunities.

✧ ✧ Secular Holidays ✧ ✧

➤ Towel Day

Saturday, May 25, 2024

[Towel Day](#) is the annual celebration of the life and writings of Douglas Adams (1952-2001), humorist, humanist, conservationist, science fiction writer, and social critic. On that day, fans around the universe proudly carry a towel in his honor. Why a towel? Don't panic, go to the website to see - or better yet, read [The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy](#). It's a great book.

➤ Opposite Day

Sunday, May 26, 2024

Some say the proper date is May 26, some say April 30, some say March 27th -- can you ever be sure? When someone says "Today is **Opposite Day**," he might be lying! Opposite Day is a day to say the reverse of what you mean, with a wink, with a nod; a day when "no" means "yes" and "shut up" means "keep talking;" a day to be nice to your boss, teacher or enemy, and a



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complete jerk to your best friend; a day to turn words on their head; a day to tie knots in logic. Celebrate with care. It might get you in trouble!

➤ Birthday of Science

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

The **Birthday of Science** marks the day Thales of Miletus (in 585 BCE) correctly predicted a solar eclipse. A better choice might be the discovery of fire or the wheel, but we don't know exactly when that happened, or who did it. We *do* know about Thales. His prediction was significant because the idea of cause and effect (causality) applies to all science. Given any phenomenon, with the exception of purely random quantum events, in principle we can trace its cause or causes, and the cause of those causes, back through time -- until all cause-tracks merge at the "Big Bang," beyond which, presumably, no tracks remain. The seeds of our life and future were sewn then. The [Large Hadron Collider](#) is an effort to re-create those first moments.

Science desires a beginning that applies to the big picture, and a sense of order and predictability. That is where causality leads us.



Not yet an AOF member? Please join us!

Atheists and Other Freethinkers is a 501(c)(3) non-profit association, FEIN 68-0325762, incorporated in 1993. Meetings are free and open to the public. AOF also hosts civic service projects, dinners, movies and parties! See what awaits you at www.aofonline.org.

AOF President: Redoubtable Roger Zabkie
Vice-president: Marvelous Mynga Futrell
Secretary: Rapid Ruth Rezos
Treasurer & Registrar: Kinetic Ken Nahigian
Advisor: Dependable David Herbert
Event Coordinator: Prolific Pamela Rivera
Webmistress: Palpable Pat Kelley
Program chair: Super Susan McLean
Facebook page: Keen Kaeleigh Pontif
Directors at large:
Fran Evanisko, Kaeleigh Pontif

How to Contact AOF:

- Call 916-304-3796 (voicemail)
 - Or write to PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182
- Or visit <http://www.aofonline.org/contact> to e-message us.

How to Join AOF:

Visit <http://www.aofonline.org/join>, or come to a meeting. We have forms.

AOF's Facebook pages (two):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1525411971087089/>
<https://www.facebook.com/Atheists-and-Other-Freethinkers-AOF-104763721971742>

AOF is affiliated with the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies (ASHS), Atheist Alliance of America (AAA), American Atheists (AA), American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Sacramento Coalition of Reason (SCoR).

AOF Mission Statement:

"The purpose of Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF) 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."

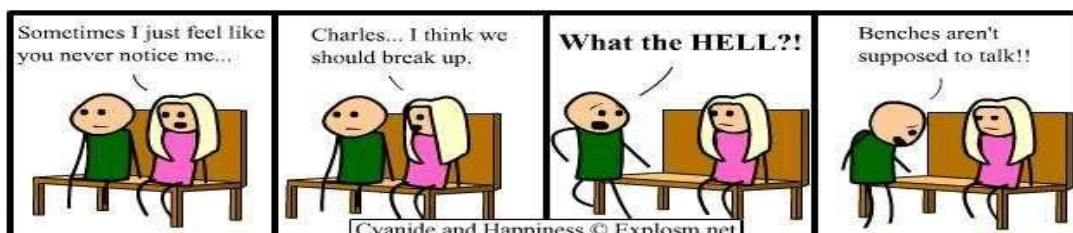
What is a Freethinker? One striving to form opinions of life, religion, politics and philosophy on the grounds of reason and experience, rather than tradition, authority or custom. He or she need not be an atheist, though in a religious society most atheists do tend to be freethinkers.

AOF supports a benign separation of Church and State as the best means to protect the liberty and intellectual commerce of citizens. "... to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries" (James Madison, 1803).

Our vision: to be a venue where secular and unchurched citizens can socialize, dialog, develop friendships and enjoy shared company. AOF does not discriminate on such grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, physical debility or (*cough*) religion. We welcome the fair-minded of all political persuasions and preferences. Any who will treat others with respect and dignity may join.

Donations to AOF are tax deductible, and the newsletter is free by email. Please share with sympathetic friends.

Letters, submissions? We love them! See: <http://www.aofonline.org/read/submission-guide.html>.



Thomas Paine Birthdate Event

Did you miss the live-streamed Thomas Paine Birthday Celebration in January? You're in luck, because the Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA) has provided a summary with photos. Please visit:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/p2gdtrx57lhdxcuxn55kq/TPMA-January-2024-Event-Report.pdf?rlkey=ckye5xkow8ob8wuyfraw38zcf&e=1&st=eof7vbuu&dl=0>

Even better, you can view a recording of the entire event at <https://youtu.be/AoERxdSkGm8?si=zPtvRtvRD2iGsN78\>.

For more about the TPMA, visit <https://thomaspainememorial.org>, or <https://www.facebook.com/ThomasPaineMA/>.

Crusades by Herb Silverman

The Crusades were eight military campaigns organized by Roman Catholic popes from the 11th to the 13th centuries. Catholics from Western Europe fought to take back Muslim land that the Crusaders considered holy to Christianity.

I once participated in a crusade, though a very different kind. It was a Billy Graham Crusade in Philadelphia in the early 1960s. When I heard that the Crusade was going to be held at the Convention Hall arena, where I sold refreshments hot dogs and Coca-Cola at sporting events, I asked the Crusade organizers if I could sell refreshments at their event. They said I couldn't, but they encouraged me to attend what they promised would be a "wonderful personal experience." I accepted their invitation.

I watched intently as Graham moved an audience in ways I had never seen before. At the end, he encouraged people to come forward and be "saved." I didn't know what that meant, but out of curiosity I went forward. After Graham mumbled a few words about being "saved," waiting pastors each chose one of us to indoctrinate further.

My "personal" pastor began by asking if I had accepted Jesus Christ into my life as Lord and Savior, to which I said "No." Additional attempts to close the deal (including warnings of fire and brimstone) were met with similar frustration for him.

When he learned that I was Jewish, he transferred me to a recently converted pastor with a Jewish background. I asked Pastor Two if his parents were alive. When he said they weren't, I asked, "Is it painful knowing that your devoted parents are suffering the torments of hell?" When he disagreed, I invited Pastor One back into our conversation. The highlight of my evening was watching Pastor One and Pastor Two argue about the afterlife of Pastor Two's Jewish parents.

Billy Graham was an extremely charismatic speaker, but logic for me was considerably more compelling than charisma. I know I'm in a distinct minority, but I decided that being evangelized could be a lot of fun.

What I learned from the Billy Graham Crusade (though I hadn't realized it at the time) was that I'm a counter-evangelist. I don't usually initiate discussions with theists, but I sometimes feel I'm as much on a counter-mission as they are on a mission. Because I'm now outspoken about my atheism, some theists call me an "Evangelical Atheist." By engaging impassioned theists in a conversation they never had before, I hope to create a spark that will start them thinking about different paths.

In one sense we are all evangelists for issues that matter to us. The question isn't whether to proselytize, but how and how often? Were I on the "soul-saving" team, a fellow theist who stood on a corner shouting epithets at sinning passersby would embarrass me, so I'd never be a screaming atheist or go door-to-door spreading the word of

God's nonexistence. I hope, though, that more atheists and humanists will feel comfortable engaging in thoughtful conversations when questioned about their worldview.

Whatever the outcome in talking to theists, thinking and discovering are good. Most of us in my era grew up hearing that it was rude to discuss sex, politics, and religion. (Actually, nobody told me not to discuss sex, because sex was not even mentioned in my house.) Politics and sex are no longer taboo, but criticizing a person's faith is still considered socially unacceptable. Atheists are often called insulting or hateful for critically discussing religion in a way that is commonly accepted in political opinion pieces or restaurant reviews.

Speaking of restaurants, a few years ago, several of us at an atheist convention went out to dinner. While we were eating dessert, a man at the next table came over to me and asked, "Are you an insurance adjuster?" I had no idea what he was talking about. He explained that his colleagues there were all insurance adjusters, and they liked the quote on my shirt from someone they hadn't heard of, humanist icon Carl Sagan: "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." I finally understood what accident reports and religious beliefs have in common. We had a good laugh and discussed our different worldviews. Theirs was definitely for profit, and ours was both non-profit and non-prophet.

I've welcomed Jehovah's Witnesses into my house, frequently to their surprise. More often than not, they've left before I was ready to end the discussion. None of them wanted to read the book I recommended, *Leaving the Witness*. The book is probably on their forbidden list.

I once went with my wife, Sharon Fratepietro, to a Scientology storefront. The Scientologist in charge invited us to take a personality test. Sharon passed and was asked to join, but the leader said my personality test (which I answered honestly) revealed that I would not be a suitable member. Later Sharon received increasingly urgent mail requests to join their cult, until they finally concluded that her case was as hopeless as mine.

I don't know of any Scientology rejects besides me. I thought they were as anxious for members as a caller from an Arthur Murray dance studio, who once told me I'd win a free dance lesson if I could answer, "Who is buried in Grant's tomb?" I responded, "Lincoln?" She said, "That's close enough. Congratulations, you are the winner of a free dance lesson." I've known many easy graders in my life, but none as lenient as she.

I also showed Sharon a side of Judaism she had never seen. I took her to a free dinner sponsored by Chabad-Lubavitch, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish sect. Sharon and I could not talk to each other at dinner because men and women had to be seated at separate tables. After dinner we watched a short film honoring their recently departed leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, whose

return as messiah many attendees were hoping to witness soon.

The film showed Schneerson telling his sect never to make territorial compromise in Israel. Afterward, I asked the host, "Would you be willing to cede a little territory for a 100 percent guarantee of peace?" He looked as if he couldn't believe a Jew would ask such a question and said, "How can we give away a gift God promised to us?" Ever since, I've been pessimistic about peace breaking out in the Middle East, with such uncompromising religious extremists on all sides.

When members of the Unification Church (otherwise known as Moonies) were proselytizing on my College of Charleston campus along with other religious groups, campus authorities told the Moonies they would have to leave because they didn't have a faculty sponsor. Lots of Christian groups had faculty sponsors, so I offered the Moonies my services as faculty sponsor. No religious test was required, and they gratefully accepted.

When the Moonies asked if I was a supporter, I told them I thought their beliefs were bizarre, but that all points of view should be allowed on campus. I didn't want Moonies to gain converts, but I did want to see students exposed to different beliefs. Most students were Christians who knew nothing of other religions, and I hoped questioning others might inspire some to question their own religion.

Many atheists don't understand why I "waste" time focusing on nonexistent deities. Since I was once an apathetic atheist, I can identify with such concerns. I used to see no more need to promote atheism than to promote a round Earth. Though a Flat-Earth Society still exists, its supporters don't have the political clout of the well-organized Religious Right. If they did, I'd probably join a round-Earth organization, especially if some school boards wanted "flat-Earth theory" taught in science courses.

Atheists as a class are well-educated, productive, and prosperous, but we're not as organized as many minorities that have fewer numbers. Atheists are not very influential because most remain in the closet, often out of apathy or fear. It's easy for atheists to stay in the closet. Blacks and women can't, while LGBTQ people can lead secret lives only with great sacrifice. They have changed public perception simply by having large numbers come out of their closets, and so it could be with atheists. When people tell me I'm the only atheist they know, I respond, "No, I'm not. You know hundreds. I'm the only one you know who has been public about it."

Attitudes will change rapidly when people learn that they have friends, neighbors, and even family members who are atheists. We should be active politically in promoting strict separation of religion and government. To gain more visibility and respect for our secular viewpoints, we need to put an end to many stereotypes that theists have about atheists, which ideally should lead to them treating us as individuals rather than as members of an undesirable class. This is happening throughout the country, though not as quickly as it should. We encourage all atheists to join groups that support our causes, and to be open about their religious beliefs. This is just one more civil right that our country should support.

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