



**Orange County Chapter**

**Americans United for Separation of Church and State**

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On the web at [www.au-oc.org](http://www.au-oc.org) Email us at [orangecountyau@yahoo.com](mailto:orangecountyau@yahoo.com)

**A Dream In Doubt**

**Introduced by Dr. Gurpeet Singh Ahuja**

**Saturday, January 17<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 pm**

**Irvine Ranch Water District  
15600 Sand Canyon Ave, Irvine**

**Jan-Mar 2009**

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Dr. Ahuja, who was a panelist when we discussed hate crimes last year, will introduce the film and facilitate our discussion.

Dr. Ahuja is an active community leader and volunteer and serves on the Board of Directors of the Orange County Human Relations Council and is also the President of the California Sikh Council (CSC) which was established after the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

The film "A Dream in Doubt" goes to the heart of hate crimes against the Sikh community.

Four days after the 9/11 attacks, Balbir Singh Sodhi was gunned down at his Phoenix gas station. The man who murdered him saw his beard and turban – both required by the Sikh faith – and decided that Sodhi was "just like" those responsible for the Twin Towers.

The film follows Rana Singh Sodhi, Balbir's brother, as he attempts to fight the hate threatening his family and community. The family had fled ethnic violence in India only to encounter it here. And less than a year after Balbir's murder, Sukhpal Sodhi, Rana's next-eldest brother, is killed while driving a cab in

San Francisco. Nine months later, Rana's friend Avtar Chiera is shot by three men who yell, "Go back to where you came from!" Three weeks after Avtar's shooting, another friend, Inderjit Singh, is physically assaulted and threatened with death while working at a convenience store.

While the attackers in these crimes view themselves as proud defenders of America, Rana insists that their actions contradict the core values of his adopted homeland. This film challenges us all to think about our values, individual responsibility in the face of bigotry, and patriotism.

Please join us for the film and for a discussion on the perils that continue to be faced by the Sikh community as well as other religious groups, based on a frightening xenophobia all around us.

The objective of the California Sikh Council is to educate the community about the culture and religious practices of Sikh Americans. CSC was created following the violent attacks on Sikh Americans who were targeted because of mistaken perceptions about their identity—which is the theme of this film.



**Save The Date  
April 4, 2009**

It's time to get ready for the annual **Great American Write In**. It will be at the Lakeview Senior Center, 20 Lake Road in Irvine (between Alton and Barranca.)

This is one of the best events of the year. As we have done every year we will be participating.

We are looking for people to volunteer to work at our table for an hour and pass out information and discuss our issues with the attendees. Call or email us if you would like to participate.



## March 21<sup>st</sup>—A Mini-Course on the Separation of Church and State by Chapter President, Steph Campbell

Come join us for an overview of church/state separation which covers the origin of the idea of separation of church and state, what it means in practice and what

have been its impacts upon America. We will also cover church/state inconsistencies during our first five presidents, and looks at two questions: Why Should We Link Church and State? And, Why Should We Separate Them? From these questions we will look at the arguments for and against our nation as a Christian nation. ❧❧❧

## Moral Relativism and Inalienable Rights—Bert Bigelow

Devout religious believers often deplore the “moral relativism” of liberal/progressive thought, claiming that absolute moral standards, as defined by their sacred scriptures, are necessary to establish a permanent, unchanging set of rules for society.

The Declaration of Independence supports the idea of unchanging rules in its opening paragraph: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

These rights, sometimes called “moral rights,” are distinguished from the legal rights defined in the Constitution. Nevertheless, they were deemed to be permanent and unchanging by our founders, in the same sense that believers in the Bible would quote their beliefs based on scripture. I think virtually all Americans would emphatically affirm their belief in these “unalienable rights.”

But something happened in California recently that suggests that the definition of “unalienable rights” in the Declaration is subject to revision when it comes to certain groups of people, in spite of the “all” in the above quotation. Proposition 8 was approved by 52% of California voters. It prohibits marriage between any California residents except couples consisting of one man and one woman. This Proposition was supported mainly by religious right voters based on their reading of certain Biblical passages which condemn homosexual love.

It is self-evident that denial of the right to marry is a denial of the explicit right to the “pursuit of Happiness.” Our society is based on the recognition of the bonding of individuals for life, and many of the legal and social institutions of our society...inheritance, property rights, child custody, financial obligations, and many other social traditions and rituals are based on the recognition of marriage. To deny this to a class of citizens is clearly to deny them “pursuit of Happiness.”

How can it be that the same people who preach about the

horrors of “moral relativism,” and the need for rigid, unchanging rules for society, are so eager to revise the “unalienable rights” of some individuals? For them, it seems that “moral relativism” is only a derogatory term when it applies to deviation from the Bible. But any revision of the rules of society that brings it into line with Biblical dogma is to be praised and supported. Do I detect a hypocritical double standard here?

Defenders of Proposition 8 could claim that the founders of our nation who wrote those words in the Declaration did not include women or slaves in their definition of “all men.” In those times, neither women nor slaves were allowed to vote, and their equality was constrained in many other ways. So they could argue that “revision” of civil rights is necessary as society changes. What they ignore is that those revisions have been in the direction of realizing the aims of the founders. Abolitionists, women’s suffragettes, and civil rights leaders have labored unceasingly to expand that equality, never to restrict it, as Proposition 8 does. There have been setbacks, when the forces of intolerance and racism reversed the wheels of human rights progress. This is one of those times, apparently. But I am confident that the march towards true equality for all citizens will resume.

Now that a legal attack has been mounted to invalidate Proposition 8, its supporters defend it by claiming that it is the “will of the majority” of the voters. But the framers of our Constitution were careful to set up a system of checks and balances to prevent just such a violation of civil rights. The courts can invalidate bad laws, whether they are passed by a legislative body, or by popular vote. As a legal scholar said recently, “Unpopular decisions (by the courts) are the price of constitutional rights.”

The battle in the courts will be fought over arcane legal issues, but the moral issue I have raised here is one that should give a stomach ache to those who swallowed the fraudulent and deliberate disinformation campaign waged by the supporters of Proposition 8. ❧❧❧

## **Congratulations to Shirley Lorenz—Volunteer of the Year!**



At our annual meeting we were proud to present Shirley Lorenz with our “volunteer of the year” award. Shirley has been a dedicated supporter of the Orange County chapter by tirelessly helping us on our program planning, staffing education tables and guiding the Steering Committee with fundraising. The chapter’s current strength is due in large part to the tireless work

that Shirley has put in to the chapter.

The annual meeting also covered some of the planned programs for 2009 and discussed some ideas for new

programs such as a mediated discussion on church/state separation between different religious groups.

The programs for our first three months are covered in this newsletter and information on other planned programs can be found on the web site.

Also discussed was the impact of the election results on church/state separation from President Obama, particularly focusing on judicial nominations and the faith based initiative to millions of dollars from churches spent on Proposition 8.

Thanks to everyone who brought food for the pot luck, it was a lot of fun and nice to have some social time with our members. Be sure to put this annual event on your calendar for next November. ~~~~

## **Stem Cell Research & Public Policy**

**Dr. Sidney Golub of the UCI Stem Cell Research Center**

**Saturday, February 21<sup>st</sup> at 2:00 pm**

**Irvine Ranch Water District**

**15600 Sand Canyon Ave, Irvine**



With the election of President Obama, the future of stem cell research is much brighter.

Our speaker in February is an expert on the public policy issues of stem cell research. He is affiliated with the UCI School of Medicine Microbiology

and Molecular Genetics Department. His major interests center around issues of science policy; he focuses on topics including ethical issues in research, the funding of medical research, conflicts between public expectations and research priorities, and publication policy for research information.

For the Stem Cell Research Center Dr. Golub combines his experience as a biomedical research scientist (he specialized in cancer immunology) with his experience in Washington, DC working on science policy issues.

Stem cells are an important challenge for the development of science policy in this country, and Dr. Golub

has focused on understanding the variations of policy among the states, between the states and the federal government, and between the USA and other technologically advanced countries. He works to keep the UCI Stem Cell Center leadership up to date on the political and policy aspects of stem cell science.

This meeting should be especially interesting. As of this writing, it is expected that President Obama will issue an executive order to reverse the Bush administration policies on stem cells. Whatever the new president does, it is expected to reignite an emotional national debate over the promise and the perils of medical research using cells taken from human embryos. Even before the inauguration, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is warning that permitting this research will alienate millions, and abortion opponents are bracing for a fight. Medical researchers, meanwhile, are rejoicing at the prospect of freedom from a government policy they say has stymied efforts to develop life-saving treatments.

No one knows more about this than our speaker; please join us for a fascinating discussion. ~~~~



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**The Steering Committee meets at 12:30 before the general meeting.**

All AU-OC events are at The Irvine Ranch Water District, 15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine. No charge for any of the events.

Apr 4— 9:00 am **The Great American Write In**, 20 Lake Road, Irvine. Volunteers needed to help staff the AU-OC table.

Jan 17— 2:00 pm **"A Dream in Doubt"** with discussion facilitated by Dr. Ahuja.

February 21— 2:00 pm **Dr. Sidney Golub of the Sue and Bill Gross Stem Cell Research Center at UCI** on the public policy of stem cell research.

March 21—2:00 pm **Mini-Course on Church/State Separation** by Steph Campbell

***Keep Up To Date with Americans United-Orange County***

Along with our newsletter, we keep people informed with what's going on in the fight to preserve separation of church and state as well as our events through the web site at [www.au-oc.org](http://www.au-oc.org) and also through our Yahoo! Group. If you're not on the Yahoo! Group, send an email to us at: [au-oc-subscribe@yahogroups.com](mailto:au-oc-subscribe@yahogroups.com). We meet monthly at the Irvine Ranch Water District, 15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine on the 3rd Saturday at 2:00 pm.

*Irvine Ranch Water District neither supports nor endorses the cause nor activities of organizations which use the District's meeting rooms that are made available as a public service.*

### **Membership Form**

**Basic membership is \$25** and includes an annual subscription to Church & State magazine. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and donations beyond the \$18.00 value of the subscription to Church & State magazine are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Email any questions to [orangecountyau@yahoo.com](mailto:orangecountyau@yahoo.com).

**3337 S. Bristol, #251, Santa Ana, California 92704**

**\$25 (new membership)**    **Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**Name**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Address**

\_\_\_\_\_

**City** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip** \_\_\_\_\_ **Home Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:**

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