

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

May 2011

Sunday, May 8, 1:30-4:00 p.m. **Raji Al Munir— Analysis of Islam**

Special Points of Interest

AOF in June: David Fitzgerald speaks on his book "Nailed: Ten Christian Myths" (pages 1, 7)

AOF Members Honored (pages 3)

AOF Partners With Davis Community Events Meal, by Don Knutson (page 3)

The Cottingley Fairies, by Ken Nahigian (page 4)

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Event, by Don Knutson (page 5)

AOF April Meeting Recap, by David Flanders (page 6)

A Night of Comedy—Ha Ha Heathens, Season 2, by Keith Lowell Jensen (page 7)

Standard Fare

- AOF Line 2
- Membership Form 6
- AOF Upcoming Events 8

Who is the mystery man who will bravely deconstruct Islam and its history at the AOF May general meeting? Raji Al Munir (not his real name) asked us not to display a photo, for obvious reasons. A native expatriate from an undisclosed Islamic country, a secular humanist, he is the author of the new book, *Islam, God, and the New Enlightenment*. Being a former Muslim who lost his faith in Islam, he is at risk, and cannot safely return to his home.

Raji will speak on the history of Islam, its roots, and the need to examine religion in general from a scientific perspective. Because of Islam's particular history, and the absence (as yet) of an Islamic Reformation, strongly Muslim cultures tend not to be open to freedom of inquiry or of scientific or social progress.

(Continued on page 3)

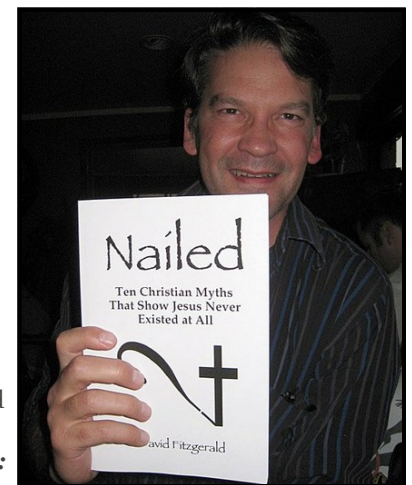


It is a mystery!

AOF in June **Speaker David Fitzgerald—Nailed: Ten Christian Myths**

Did Jesus really exist -- or maybe someone like him?

For over a decade, writer and historical researcher David Fitzgerald has actively investigated this question. He will regale us with findings from his new book, *NAILED: Ten Christian Myths That Show Jesus Never Existed At All* (The title is sort of a giveaway.) You may purchase a copy of Mr. Fitzgerald's book at Amazon.com, via: <http://j.mp/iUN3nS>.



Who is David Fitzgerald? He has a degree in History and was an associate member of CSER, the former Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion. He currently serves on the boards of San Francisco Atheists and Center For Inquiry in SF, and is

(Continued on page 7)

President's Message

By Jerry Sloan

Our last general meeting had about 60 in attendance thanks to many first time visitors from the FAN (Freethinker, Atheist and Nonbelievers) group. Our speaker Andrea Griffith, a real renaissance woman who has authored books about preparations of veggies, formed a nonbeliever's choir, The Mockingbirds, (any singers out there are welcome to join) and gives lectures such as "Social Intelligence and Atheism."

Andrea deliciously and delicately dealt with questions about how we as nonbelievers should deal with people of "faith" (whatever).

I hope we can have her again in the future and certainly look forward to hearing The Mockingbirds.

On April 23rd AOF along with others of the Community of Reason helped staff tables at the Earth Day Fair at Southside Park. We were able to talk to lots of people and hand out AOF newsletters and pamphlets. Many passers gave us a thumbs up.

Three instructors from the Los Rios Community College District stopped to talk to us about the many evangelical students who were steeped in creationism and refused to accept evolution.

Since I left Christianity I have often wondered how anyone could believe the two stories of creation as outlined in Genesis and if we were created in the image of a deity how come our ancestors were knuckle draggers?

Our next General Meeting should be very interesting. Most in the USA know very little about the religion of Islam. We certainly hear a lot of misinformation from the Radical Religious Right who tell us what a violent religion Islam is. Christians often forget the Israelites were instructed to destroy a city to the point they were supposed to kill everything even animals that lifted their leg to piss against a wall.

I look forward to hearing our speaker "Raji Al Munir," author of Islam, God, and the New Enlightenment.

And don't forget our June meeting with David Fitzgerald talking about his new book, NAILED: Ten Christian Myths That Show Jesus Never Existed At All. It will be a more than a rousing meeting!

Take Care . . . And see you at the General Meeting.

AOF Board (2011)

President: Jerry Sloan

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large: Kristi Craven, Mynga Futrell, Peggy Lucas, Mario Sandri, Jerry Sloan, Jillian Stanley, Vincent Wales

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 for direct contact to relevant personnel.

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 2012: Date to-be-announced

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs

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

*The purpose of the organization,
AOF, is to promote the civic
understanding and acceptance of
atheists in our community.*

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

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

Jerry Sloan, American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org/>

Jerry Sloan, American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org/>

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

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AOF Partners With Davis Community Meals Feed the Hungry—Imagine Yourself Between Ken and Paul In This Pic- ture!

By Don Knutson



AOF members Ken Nahigian, Paul Geisert, and Ruth Rezos assist with meal service at the March 29 Davis Community Meals event. Photograph by Don Knutson. The next DCM event is May 31—come out and participate!! Carpooling available. For more information, call 916-447-3589

(Continued from page 1)

Innovation today arises from America, East Asia or Europe, not from Islamic countries. The answer, as Raj sees it, is for a general acceptance of what he calls the new enlightenment—including a scientific worldview, the decline of dogmatic religious belief and some form of secular humanism.

Come to AOF's May meeting to hear this courageous man who has put his life on the line to appeal for an honest enlightenment within Islamic culture. All jihads and fatwas to be checked at the door—and please, no baggy clothing.

Raji will bring extra copies of his book for sale and signing after his talk.

For more about him, and to read the book introduction and selected sections, please visit his websites, <http://rmunir.com> and <http://science-religion-morality.org>.

AOF Members Honored

On April 16, 2011, AOF members **Charlie Peer and Jerry Sloan** were given a **Medal of Honor** for their **leadership in the Sacramento gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community** by the outgoing Emperor 37 Terry Sidie of the **Court of the Great Northern Inland Empire**, a GLBT charitable organization.

Congratulations, Charlie and Jerry!!

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

The Cottingley Fairies

By Ken Nahigian

Cousin Elsie was 16 years old, cousin Frances was 10. Newly arrived from South Africa, Francis Griffiths was living with Elsie Wright's family in Cottingley, near Bradford, England, while her father fought in the Great War. It was July of 1917. It was a summer of storms and portent.

In the garden was a stream; the girls often came back from it with wet feet. When Elsie's mother reproved them, they said they simply went to see the garden fairies. Fairies, said Elsie's mom, pshaw.

As it happened, Elsie's father was an ardent amateur photographer. The girls asked to borrow his glass-plate box camera. Amused, he agreed, and showed them how to use it. They returned it an hour later. When he developed the photo-plate, it did indeed seem to show Elsie posing with a fairy—surely a clever trick. A month later the girls produced another exposed plate showing Elsie posing with a gnomish sprite. The skeptical father filed it away. But Elsie's mother wondered.



The first of the five photographs, taken by Elsie Wright in 1917, shows Frances Griffiths with the alleged fairies. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cottingley_Fairies

Mid-1919, she attended a meeting of the Bradford theosophical society, for a lecture on "Fairy Life." Earnest spiritualists, the Theosophists were quite serious about elves and fairies—in their view, powerful nature spirits or elementals, "devas," which we with our quaint perception might see as gauzy, winged or small, if at all. The mother produced the photo prints. Delighted, the lecturer passed them to a group leader, who authenticated them with a photographer he knew. Said the expert: these were "genuine unfaked photographs of single exposure, open-air work, show movement in all the fairy figures, and there is no trace whatever of studio work involving card or paper models, dark backgrounds, painted figures, etc." Good enough. And the prints circulated the excited theosophical community.

They soon caught the eye of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—the very Sherlock Holmes author. A passionate spiritualist, Doyle took it as sure proof of a fairy world. Besides, *Strand Magazine* had asked him to write an article on fairies for its Christmas issue, so it was a godsend. Doyle sought other expert opinions with mixed results. Kodak technicians averred that the photos indeed showed no signs of fakery (i.e., no double exposure, no spliced-in drawings), but were not "conclusive evidence" of fairy beings. Other opinions were equivocal. One was suspicious of the figures' hairstyles: "distinctly Parisienne," he noted.

But Doyle heard what he wanted to hear.

Busy with other work, Doyle sent his Theosophist friend, Edward Gardner, to Cottingley to investigate. Gardner presented Frances and Elsie with two Cameo cameras and 24 marked plates (the girls insisted that the fairies would appear to no one else). They soon produced more photos. Gardner and Doyle were ecstatic. Doyle wrote his article, and the *Strand* issue sold out within days.

Some readers believed, most scoffed. And we might scoff, seeing the photos with modern eyes. Beyond the fairy hairstyles and storybook garb, you might note a cer-

tain flatness, posed appearance, and lack of contour and shading. The texture is unreal, and shadows seem wrong. But be kind to Doyle and his Theosophist friends, so desperate for a spiritual world: popular photography was a new, scientific-seeming art, and the images convinced and enraptured them as easily as a devout Catholic might see the Virgin Mary in a water-stained wall. We see with our eyes. But we are human, and our hearts see too.

A newspaper broke the aliases Doyle had used to protect Frances and Elsie. A reporter visited, but found nothing sensational or new. Even so Doyle followed up with a second *Strand* article, then a book, *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922). More inquiries followed, more visitors to Cottingley. No further fairy evidence turned up. Had the

(Continued on page 5)

Next Event Saturday, June 11 @ 9:00 a.m.

Clean-Up AOF's Stretch of Highway!

By Don Knutson

After being rained out the first day of Spring, an AOF crew returned to perform a highway cleanup, **April 16.**

Newcomer **Gary Alexander** was joined by grizzled veterans of past highway cleanup wars, **Joe Fiffick, Peter D. Henan-White and Don Knutson.**

We collected **16 bags** of refuse noticing an increase in **big rig tire castings.**

Many of these represent constant threats to motorists' tires and appears to be unhealthy to a landscape during Summer days when they bake in the sun.

I am pursuing with CalTrans questions as to whether the trucking industry has a responsibility to pick up these unsightly, abandoned bits of refuse.

We will return to the site on Highway 99, **Saturday, June 11 @ 9:00 a.m.** for another cleanup.



(Continued from page 4)

girls outgrown the magical childhood innocence needed to commune with the sprites? Or had they simply outgrown the game?

Eventually they married, and moved away. But over the years, clue by clue, the truth came.

In 1966, a reporter tracked down Elsie, who mused that the fairies might have been "figments of my imagination." The BBC interviewed her again in 1971. "I've told you that they're photographs of figments of our imagination," snapped Elsie, "and that's what I'm sticking to." In 1978, skeptic and stage magician James Randi investigated the fairy images, as did photography expert Geoffrey Crawley in 1982 and 1983. Both concluded the photos were fakes.

Finally in 1983, Elsie and Frances admitted they had faked the images, most of them anyway, with hand-sketched cutouts from a popular children's book of the day. They had supported the cutouts with hat pins, snapped the photos, then discarded the props. The girls disagreed on the last photograph—Elsie said it was also faked, but Frances thought it might be real. But why the lengthy farce?

It began as whimsy, Elsie said, then they were embarrassed when many adults—including the respected creator of Sherlock Homes, one of the most coolly rational, unsentimental characters in literature—fell for it. Doyle died in 1930. By then Elsie and Frances barely thought of their old jest, until the new inquiries began. After that it was all inertia, a story spinning from its own persistence.

"I never even thought of it as being a fraud," said Frances, "it was just Elsie and I having a bit of fun and I can't understand to this day why they were taken in—they wanted to be taken in." We might ask, how many other miracle or paranormal stories began so, a joke that fell among believers like sparks on straw? But we are the skeptics, the cynics, the spoilsports.

Frances died in 1986, Elsie in 1988. Most of the Cottingley Fairy material is now on display at the National Media Museum in Bradford. In 1997, Hollywood adapted it into a movie, "Fairytale: A True Story," and as usual, got the facts wrong. But never mind. The movie is good fun; and for once, let's enjoy the joke.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

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

Membership Level (please circle one):

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

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)
 Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductible as permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

April AOF Meeting Recap The Social I.Q. Lady By David Flanders

Andrea Griffith was AOF's April speaker. Andrea said she grew up in a Christian home. Religion seemed to help provide a type of "social glue" in the community that she grew up in. She married a very religious man who was a scripture literalist.

When she noticed that her husband's mind was more in love with a particular interpretation of the Bible than he has towards her, she sensed irreconcilable differences. Andrea questioned religious authority: What are the real intentions or religious authoritarians? She decided to get a divorce from her husband.

She also questioned the representation of "God" that was in her mind as well. All she heard was silence for half a year.

Andrea interpreted that as indifference and eventually said farewell to the "deity" that was in her mind. She then realized that she was an atheist.

The Christian community that she loved in her earlier years abandoned her.

Over time she encountered another man and is now married.

As Andrea spoke to fellow atheist at the AOF meeting, one could sense she continues to value reality over illusion. Proper argument requires us to argue not only forcefully and rationally, but also honestly. We should give the best arguments that we have to offer. It is easy to knock down weak arguments for religious belief. But there is no achievement in pinning down amateurs to the canvas. What counts is how well we do against the pros.

The Social I.Q. lady is trying to help us become even better pros than we are today.

Her website is <http://www.socialiqldady.com/>. The chairs were filled as she spoke, and the audience enjoyed her lively presentation.



Comedy at Luna's Café, 1414 16th Street; Friday, May 20 @ 8:00 p.m.

Ha Ha Heathens: Season 2 By Keith Lowell Jensen

"Science Comedian" Brian Malow, Troy Conrad of "Comedy Jesus" fame, Trevor "No clever moniker but quite funny" Hill, and "Atheist Comedian" Keith Lowell Jensen plus special guest Bryce Druzin.

This is a stellar line up!

Brian Malow, Troy Conrad and Keith Lowell Jensen are all headliners on their own.

Together they make this the most power house Ha Ha Heathens line up yet.

And its the night before the world ends, so we'd better make sure we have a good time, yeah?

Luna's only seats about 40 people. I'll set up advanced tickets. If we come close to selling out, we'll add a late show.

Friday, May 20 @ 8:00 p.m.

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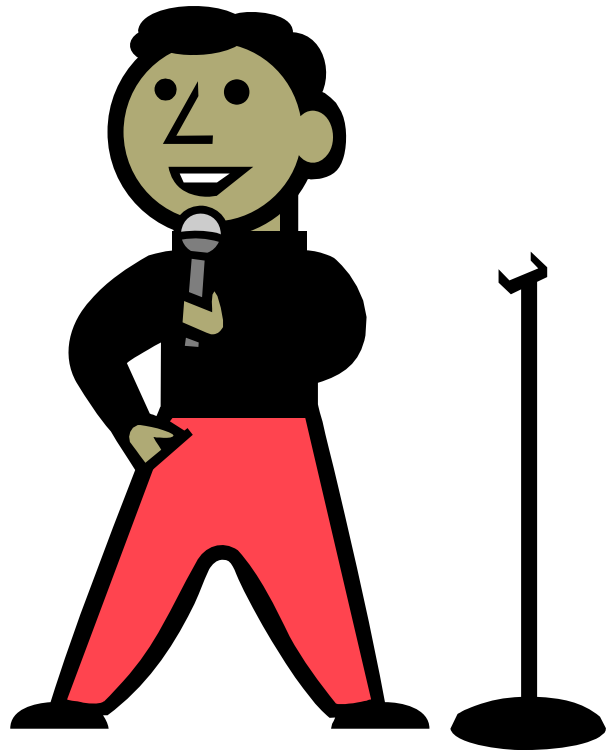
founder and director of both the world's first Atheist Film Festival and Evolutionpaloosa, San Francisco's oldest Darwin Day celebration.

His blog is online at <http://davefitzgerald.blogspot.com>, his Wikipedia page [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Fitzgerald_\(author\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Fitzgerald_(author)).

He also lectures around the country at universities and national secular events, and is known for his popular multimedia presentations "The Ten Thousand Christs and the Evaporating Jesus" and "The Complete Heretic's Guide to Western Religion."

David is a busy guy.

Come to June's meeting; prepare to be entertained or scandalized, depending on your own view of Jesus; but not bored.



Newsletter Submissions

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

newsletter@aofonline.org

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

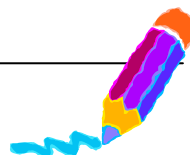
Preference is given to material in a word processing format. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

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





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Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

May/June Calendar of Events

SacCOR Dinner Social: The Magpie Cafe (http://magpiecaterers.com), 1409 R Street #102; Contact: Suzanne @ 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net	Thu, May 5, 6:30 p.m.
AOF General Meeting in May: Raji Al Munir, "Analysis of Islam"	Sun, May 8, 1:30 p.m.
AOF Board of Directors Meeting (Planning Meeting)	Sun, May 8, 4:30 p.m.
AOF Davis Community Meals	Tue, May 31, 4:00 p.m.
AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Event	Sat, Jun 11, 9:00-11:00 a.m.
AOF General Meeting in June: "Nailed: Ten Christian Myths"	Sun, Jun 12, 1:30 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 2011), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (Feb 2012). 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.

