

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

June 2011

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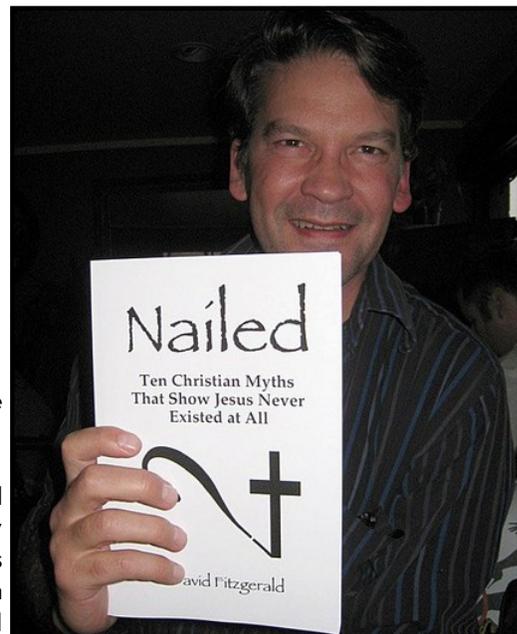
**Sunday, June 12,
1:30-4:00 p.m.**

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.)

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
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**Author David Fitzgerald,
with a copy of his book**

AOF in July AOF 18th Anniversary Picnic in the Park

Eighteen years ago, in June, Atheists and Other Freethinkers of Sacramento was formed. To mark this milestone in our history the Board of Directors has voted to have a picnic in place of our regular July meeting so **DON'T go to the Sierra 2 Community Center on July 10.**



The picnic will be held in the ever popular McKinley Park at McKinley and Alhambra Streets We will be in Area 3 which is close to the corner of Alhambra and McKinley.

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President's Message

By Jerry Sloan

“The purpose of 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.”

As we look back at the 18 years of AOF serving the Sacramento community it has indeed fulfilled its stated purpose.

We have helped to create Darwin Day which observes the birthday of Charles Darwin. This annual event draws hundreds to hear some outstanding speakers on the subject of evolution.

AOF was the originator of Freethought Day which has become an annual outdoor event in October focusing on the separation of church and state with wonderful entertainment and our rogues gallery of freethinkers.

Our two most enduring projects are the Highway Cleanup and the quarterly trip to Davis to help feed the disadvantaged of that area. A couple of years ago we were recognized by the State of California for our long and faithful service of cleaning a two mile strip of Highway 99 just north of the city.

We have raised money to buy books for the Sacramento Library and to support the Sacramento Children's Home.

We have challenged the city and county when in violation of the California and U.S. Constitutions—money was given to support a chaplains group which required their chaplains to subscribe to a fundamentalist statement of faith. Our contention was, statement of faith or not, government had no business supporting religious organizations with tax money.

This organization has helped many to come to realize they were not alone in their nonbelief. They learned there were many willing and ready to support them in their nonbelief. AOF is an all volunteer organization so over our eighteen years all of our accomplishments have been done by our many wonderful volunteers and supporters.

As we see the influence of theocrats and dominionists grow in the political arena let's hope we will continue this important organization and work for many more birthdays.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY AOF!

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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Raji Al Munir— Analysis of Islam May Meeting Recap By David Flanders

Raji Al Munir was AOF's May speaker.

His Talk was on his book "Islam, God, and the New Enlightenment.

It is a science-based analysis of the Koran, the Abrahamic God, human morality, and the future of civilization.

One of the goals of the book is to encourage those with a Muslim background to become an enlightened humanist. Raji began his talk describing the origins of Islam. He indicated that Islam is a home grown religion, similar to Christianity, invented approximately 700 years later.

The Koran promises a rewarding relationship with the supreme reality. Like other religions, it provides ad-hoc explanations of the outer world that don't agree with scientific laws of the universe.

Raji said he hopes his book will assist the reader to become more sci-

entifically and religiously literate. And in turn that will help the reader to be a more enlightened humanist.



The AOF speaker's image remains a mystery

Additional information about the book can be obtained at <http://www.rmunir.com>.

Raji also showed a video on the Zeitgeist Movement. They have websites that suggest better ways to run the world.

During Raji's talk, he responded to many questions from the audience. He said that the majority of Muslims are moderates, that overall religion is a net negative on human progress.

He said we must move beyond the current fragmentary religion-based systems and move toward a worldwide secular-humanism-based universal and ethical values system.

(Continued from page 1)

serves on the boards of San Francisco Atheists and Center For Inquiry in SF, and is founder and director of both the world's first Atheist Film Festival and Evolutionpalooza, San Francisco's oldest Darwin Day celebration. 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 this month's meeting; prepare to be entertained or scandalized, depending on your own view of Jesus; but not bored.

Location : Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10, 2791 24th Street, Sacramento

Contact : 916-447-3589

Help make it a fun meeting! Bring something light & edible for the snack table, if you can: finger foods, fruit juice or soda pop (nothing needing utensils, please).

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

Evil's Banality

By Ken Nahigian

In September 2007 at the American Atheist International conference, Sam Harris recalled the American racial lynchings of early last century, how respectable bankers, doctors, lawyers, police, teachers, ministers, newspaper editors, sometimes even Congressmen and Senators, might turn out as if for a family picnic to watch the torture-death of some young man or woman, then the body hung on a tree or lamppost for public display. If you doubt it, visit <http://www.americanlynching.com/photos-old.htm> for a chilling education.

From our vantage it seems surreal, a fever-dream out of Hieronymus Bosch: all the fine folk in their Sunday best, men and women and children, blandly smiling, arranged and arrayed in cravats and parasols as for a postcard photo under a lacerated or cindered human body. Yet these genteel folk, who as Harris reminded us might even bring home souvenirs of body parts—teeth, ears, fingers, internal organs—were otherwise decent citizens, law abiding, loving to neighbors and pets, benevolent to strangers, and almost invariably, passionately Christian. It was as natural to them, as moral, as breathing.

To think of this must crack something open in your mind, like the fall of a facing of ice from an immense cliff to reveal a terrible geology: and that is a glimpse into the banality of evil.

Race-lynchings are an example. For another turn to Adolf Eichmann, the prime architect of the Holocaust. Jewish writer Hannah Arendt interviewed him as he awaited trial in Israel, as described in her famous 1993 book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. She had expected a ravaging, malevolent monster, but found an anonymous, vaguely befuddled, vaguely likable old apparatchik, a bureaucratic minion who seemed confused about all the brouhaha. Eleven million dead, well those are the

breaks, he was just doing his job, a cog in the process. After all it was *war*. Excuse me, is there a problem?

It might show in our own daily lives, in a casual acceptance of daily suffering or torture, such as the refusal to think of what really happens at factory farms or in meat packing plants, or in a muddled disinterest in war crimes or genocidal atrocities in far lands, or in the idea (reluctant, of course, for we are all good, decent, *moral* people) that sometimes torture—please, let us call it "enhanced interrogation"—is needful for public security. Within our moral geometry such torment is legitimate if we keep our distance, acceptable because we stand away. We never see the electrode-burned flesh, never hear the screams, and rarely encounter the broken, hollow-eyed, walking-wounded souls who survive it. It is *abstract*. Our leaders sanction, and we shrug.

Yet all the minions and apparatchiks—the legislators who legalize it, the President who enforces it, the attorneys who defend it, the officers who only follow orders—are perpetrators. And we too, failing to see because it has soaked its way in, insinuating

itself by inches, to find a cozy home.

Something else is quite on par with this, partaking the same banality: that is how decent, loving Christians can be blasé about Biblical atrocities, exalting in things like Old Testament child-rape or mass murder, even the "ripping open" of pregnant women, because it was long ago, and the Bible says God wanted it; or blasé about a theology that teaches that any who die in a mistaken faith, even children, must burn, sealed within a red-hot oven, forever. The screams are far, far away, and the church says not to listen. So we do not. And all is sweet and beautiful.

It is an evil abstracted, absent of malice, soft and subtle and insidious, which enters the soul like the breathing-in

(Continued on page 5)



Sunday, June 5 @ 1:00 p.m.

Sun City Roseville Humanist Camp Quest Fundraiser

By Cleo Kocol

Sunday, June 5, 1PM, Card Room at Timbercreek Lodge. An AUCTION to raise money for Camp Quest, a summer sleep-over camp for children held near Nevada City in July. Not all kids can afford to attend. We want to help with funds.

The emphasis of our AUCTION will be on service items. We are not in competition with the parking lot sale! Some Service Suggestions: Offer your talent as an actor, singer, dancer, musician, comedian, poet, story-teller for a party, dinner, or event. If you have a green thumb provide some gardening for those who can't garden. Offer to visit with someone who is housebound. Bake a cake or cookies. Sew, knit or crochet an item. Offer a dinner for two or more. Hold a luncheon, a breakfast or brunch. Offer to provide snacks or drinks for a party of eight. Pledge to drive someone to the airport or to a doctor's appointment. The list is endless. Have your service item printed on a file card and bring the card to the auction to be part of the live auction.

Other items such as books of all kinds, fiction and non-fiction, philosophy, history, social comment, dvds, games, (whatever you think will be of interest.) will go for a silent auction. If an item is not sold, whoever brought it must take it home. Use your imagination. Bring your items and cards at 1PM on June 5. At 1:30 we will hold the auction. Time left over after the auction will be for people to contribute readings or recitations or talks with a Humanist theme. Come prepared to "Spout off." Come prepared to help children.

For more information, please contact Cleo Kocol at cburll@hotmail.com, or contact AOF (see page 2) .

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of dark fog, and becomes part of us.

But the stain is ever as red.

From Neil Gaiman's American Gods (HarperCollins, 2001):

"Look, here is a good man, good by his own lights and the lights of his friends: faithful and true to his wife, he adores and lavishes attention on his little children, he cares about his country, he does his job punctiliously as best he can. Efficiently and good-naturedly, he exterminates Jews. He appreciates the music that plays in the background to pacify them. He advises them not to forget their identification numbers as they go into the showers - many, he tells them, forget their numbers, and take the wrong clothes when they come out of the showers. This calms them. ... Our man supervises the detail taking the bodies to the ovens. If he feels bad for anything, it is that he still allows the gassing to affect him. Were he a truly *good* man, he tells himself, he would feel nothing but joy as the earth is cleansed of its pests. ...

Without individuals we see only numbers: a thousand dead, a hundred thousand dead, "casualties may rise to a million." With individual stories, the statistics become people - even that is a lie, for the people suffer in numbers that themselves are numbing and meaningless. *Look*, see the child's swollen belly, and the flies that crawl at the corners of his eyes, his skeletal limbs: will it make it easier for you to know his name, his age, his dreams, his fears? To see him from the inside? And if it does, are we not doing a disservice to his sister, who lies in the searing dust beside him, a distorted, distended caricature of a human child? And there, if we feel for them, are they now more important to us than a thousand others touched by the same famine, a thousand other young lives who will soon be food for the flies' own myriad squirming children?

We draw our lines around these moments of pain, and remain upon our islands ... They are covered with a smooth, safe, nacreous layer to let them slip, pearl like, from our souls without real pain."

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).

AOF Family News

In Memoriam: Norma Howe (1930-2011)

Ken Nahigian writes: Norma Howe, AOF Member, longtime FFRF Member & supporter, Shakespeare researcher and popular YA fantasy author, went away last month, leaving an hole in the world. The obituary below is from the May 3rd edition of the Sacramento Bee, page B4 (<http://www.sacbee.com/2011/05/03/3596902/obituary-norma-howe-was-young.html>)

Norma Howe, an author of lighthearted, young-adult novels that tackled age-old philosophical questions – such as whether free will exists and the conflict between faith and reason – died April 19 of thyroid cancer. She was 81.

Married in college, Mrs. Howe stayed home with her children after earning an English degree at San Jose State University while her husband taught high school in San Bernardino. She started writing confession tales for True Story and Modern Romances magazines before the family moved to Sacramento in 1962.

After her children were grown, she wrote and published eight novels and two short stories for young adults. Her first novel, "God, the Universe and Hot Fudge Sundaes," about a teenager who questions her religion after her sister is diagnosed with a terminal illness, was made into a 1986 after-school television special on CBS.

In her 1999 novel, "The Adventures of Blue Avenger," a 16-year-old boy who draws a comic strip takes on the identity of his superhero. Besides rescues, romance and humor, the story offers a look at social issues including handgun violence and asks whether life events – such as becoming a superhero – are choices or destiny.

The book was well received and led to "Blue Avenger Cracks the Code" in 2000 and "Blue Avenger and the Theory of Everything" in 2002. Her last novel, Angel in Vegas: The Chronicles of Noah Sark, was published in 2009. Mrs. Howe received favorable reviews for witty, honest and well-written novels and stories that are thought-provoking and entertaining for young people and their parents. She told The Bee that she enjoyed writing for young people be-



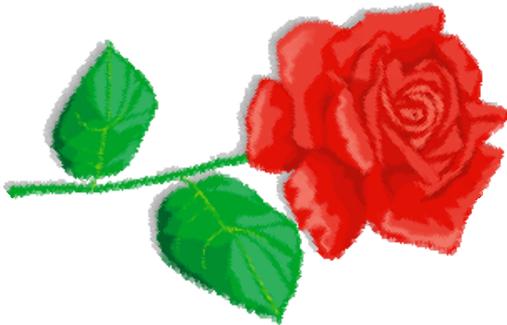
cause she identified with their age group.

"I'm a tomboy and have the feeling I never really grew up," she said in 1991. "Somehow, I got stuck at about age 13." Norma Claire Nadeau was born in 1930 in San Jose. She was married for 60 years and had seven children with her husband, Robert L. Howe, who retired as a state Department of Education administrator. She was predeceased by a son, Douglas.

Mrs. Howe was a well-read, charming woman with a playful nature. She went out almost daily with her husband for coffee and doughnuts or to share a banana split or ice cream sundae. Although neither smoked, they collected more than 20,000 advertising ashtrays as souvenirs.

She had a keen eye for small, everyday events that turned up in her fiction. She traveled often to Italy and other European locations where her stories were set.

Like "Blue Avenger," she questioned who wrote the plays and sonnets attributed to William Shakespeare and attended conferences of the Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre at Concordia University in Portland, Ore. "Over the years, she said The Sacramento Bee had never reviewed any of her works," her husband said. "It looks like she's finally getting that review. She'd be pleased."



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.

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The picnic will start at 1:30 pm and run until we are through—probably around 4 pm.

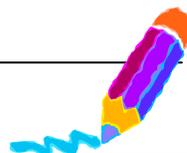
AOF will furnish the hamburgers, hot dogs, buns, condiments and some sodas but if you have a favorite soft drink please feel free to bring it. (liquor/wine is NOT allowed in the park) Also it would be nice if members brought potato/macaroni salads, etc., or deserts to share with the celebrants. Some volunteers to help set up would be helpful too.

We will have ten picnic tables but everyone might be more comfortable if they brought their own chairs.

Over the years AOF has engaged in many different projects and we will take some time to reminisce about them and maybe revive some of them.

So please come and celebrate this milestone and enjoy the company of your companion non-believers.

Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail newsletter@aofonline.org





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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

June/July Calendar of Events

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| SacCOR Dinner Social: Formoli's Bistro , 3260 J Street; Contact: Suzanne @ 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net | Thu, Jun 2, 6:30 p.m. |
| Sun City Roseville Humanists: Camp Quest Fundraiser Auction (page 5) | Sun, Jun 5, 1:00 p.m. |
| AOF General Meeting in June:
"Nailed: Ten Christian Myths" | Sun, Jun 12, 1:30 p.m. |
| AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Event | Sat, Jun 11, 9:00-11:00 a.m. |
| AOF Meeting in July: AOF 18th Anniversary Picnic in the Park (Note: At McKinley Park, not Sierra 2 Center) | Sun, July 10, 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.

