

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

July 2011

Special Points of Interest

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Sunday, July 10, 1:30-4:00 p.m. AOF 18th Anniversary Picnic in the Park



Please do not go to the Sierra 2 Center for the February 2011 general AOF meeting—we will not be there! Instead, go to the McKinley Park, Area 3, near the near the 33rd Street side of McKinley Park.

Eighteen years ago, in June 1993, Atheists and Other Freethinkers of Sacramento was born. It was not an immaculate conception, we did not spring full-formed from the brow of Zeus, and we did not call it "Atheists and Other Freethinkers" until much later. But it was very much a special creation. Now the Board of Directors will mark this milestone with a picnic in place of our regular July meeting; and the entire Sac-area Community of Reason is invited. Yes, even you!

So do not go to the Sierra 2 Community Center on this day. Instead go to the ever

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AOF in August AOF Summer Sizzler

This is it, the annual AOF Summer Sizzler event, to feed both body and brain. Come hear forceful mini-speeches as AOF friends and members rant and unload on whatever is topmost in their minds. The oratory may be a bit HOT at times, as speakers must impart their ideas within a time-frame (no exceptions!). But that's no problem because there will be COOL food too! -- a lavish potluck of salads, beverages and desserts. You will find all this plus jovial camaraderie at AOF's August meeting!

Something "COOL"

Rather than the usual chip-&-dip refreshments of our regular snack table, the ideal for the August Sizzler is a full summer meal for all. AOF officers will supply cold beverages, ice and tableware. For your part, please bring a favorite enticing salad, cool side-dish or dessert. When it comes to deciding what to bring, think COOL and supply your favorite dish (for hot weather) in sufficient quantity to share, so that several (besides yourself) can enjoy it.

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President's Message

By Jerry Sloan

What a great June meeting! David Fitzgerald had a terrific presentation taken from his new book, *NAILED: Ten Christian Myths Why Jesus Never Existed at All*. He explained many of the ways Christians set aside and ignore facts such as no contemporary historians or those for over 200 years after Jesus was supposed to have lived make no mention of him.



Our **attendance was about 50** and that is very encouraging.

The **July 18th Anniversary Picnic** should be enjoyable. A time to relax, enjoy each other's company, talk about the history and future of AOF and stuff ourselves with hot dogs and hamburgers.

The **August Summer Sizzler** is always a treat as members and friends give short speeches and we enjoy the pot luck dinner. I would like to encourage everyone to bring home made dishes and not stop at KFC as an after thought.

Even after 18 years AOF has a great future and a place in the Freethought Community of Sacramento as we continue to educate about our no supernatural beliefs and our dedication to the principles of the Separation of Church and State. So let us continue in carrying out our statement of purpose:

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.

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 Community Projects

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Folks Invite You to Attend the Next Outing

By Don Knutson

A perfect Saturday morning greeted a small cadre of AOF volunteers June 11 when we once again cleaned up AOF's 2-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. In our continuing participation in CalTran's "Adopt-A-Highway" program. **Don Knutson, Ken Nahigian and John Rieger** were joined by **Rich Prowse** who had participated several times previously in our cleanup but had been sidelined for the last year due to cancer. Now, apparently fully recovered, we were most enthusiastic to see his return! Our crew accumulated **13 bags worth** of mostly shredded refuse from CalTrans mowing. We return to the site for another cleanup **Saturday, July 30 @ 9:00 a.m.** Please consider joining us in this worthwhile project. Any inquiries can be answered at **(916) 447-2169**.



(Continued from page 1)

popular McKinley Park at McKinley and Alhambra Boulevards. The Birthday Picnic will be in Area 3, near the corner of those two streets.

AOF will furnish hamburgers, hot dogs, and veggie-burgers & veggie-dogs too, buns, condiments, some beverages, paper plates and napkins and such. But if you have your own favorite soft drink please bring it (but this is a dry park, please no liquor/wine/beer). This is partially a potluck, so you please bring appetizers, side dishes, potato/macaroni salads, etc., or deserts to share. Want to help with setup? Great! Arrive a half hour early for that.

AOF will have ten picnic tables, but some 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, maybe revive some of them.

So please come and celebrate this milestone, 18 years of freethought, wow, and enjoy the company of some bright and skeptical minds.

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 Most Mysterious Book in the World

By Ken Nahigian

Sometime in the 15th century, in Italy perhaps, a person or persons took up quill and pigment to create one of the great enigmas of literature. We understand not a word of what they made. Yet the design, syntax, composition and illumination suggest a complex meaning drawn in frost-feather detail, perplexing and seductive, and singing to us sweetly, pleadingly, almost mockingly, “Read me”—it calls, “know me.”

It might be just a hoax. If so how cruel, how sad, for the elite linguists and cryptologists who have poured their lives into it, striving to tease some meaning or a clue from the coded scriverings. In silence it has drunk their rage and tears. And they have dubbed it the most mysterious book in the world.

The Voynich Manuscript got its name from Wilfrid Voynich, a Polish-American bookseller. Its early history is obscure. Around 1583, English astrologer and mystic John Dee may have sold it to the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II of Austria. In the 17th century it fell into the hands of an alchemist from Prague. So perplexed was he that he asked the Jesuits for a translation. They failed. Voynich found the book in a Roman Jesuit University archive in 1912. He purchased it, puzzled over it, and shelved it for years. In 1969 it was donated to Yale University. It now sits in the Beinecke Library. Its official name is *MS 408*.

The manuscript is small, seven inches by ten, but thick, nearly 235 pages. The text consists of about 250,000 discrete characters or glyphs drawn from a 20- to 30-letter alphabet, arranged as in words and sentences. Some resemble Latin letters, others no script known. Through it are illustrations: odd plants, antique lab equipment, cosmological charts and symbols, networks of pipes, women dancing or bathing. None of the plants are clearly identifiable; many seem like amalgams of different root and leaf systems.

The lines flow left to right, with a ragged right margin, occasionally paragraphing but no clear punctuation. The textual *ductus* (regularity and style of letters and

spacing) is even, as if the scribe understood what he wrote, not as if he individually selected each character before setting it down. No corrections are apparent. A few dozen exceptional characters occur only once or twice each.

The “words” vary in length, obeying phonetic and orthographic laws—e.g., each word requires certain “vowels,” some characters never follow others, some may be doubled, others never. Statistical patterns are similar to natural languages. Some words appear only in certain sections, others are fairly common. In the herbal section, the first word on each page is unique and may be the plant’s name.

Other patterns suggest encryption, perhaps a system of anagramming, and are quite unlike any known European language. To muddle it further, various early owners added their own Latin script, with spellings suggestive of the 15th century. Carbon dating of the parchment sets an origin of 1404–1438.

Enfolded in the manuscript is a letter naming Roger Bacon as the author, but this is surely a forgery, perhaps by John Dee, who could be a rascal.



Michał Wojnicz (later known as Wilfrid Michael Voynich) c. 1885

No surprise, the Manuscript has drawn cranks, mystics and decipherment claims, but yet no substantive answers. Proposed “solutions” have been marvelous and mad—such as that each glyph is a compression of microscopic letters from a type of Greek shorthand (these were shown to be the fading and cracking of the ink). It continues to inspire books and symposiums. Active online forums exist. English author, critic and occultist Colin Wilson deadpanned a link to the *Necronomicon*, the fictional book from the stories of H.P. Lovecraft; but then Wilson is a notorious joker.

Current theories favor a *polyglot* (combination of languages) transformed through a cipher, but modern methods would almost surely have cracked most 15th century codes. If we ever crack it, what will we find? Maybe nothing earth-shaking. The illustrations suggest a scientific manual, perhaps a herbal with extra sections on astron-

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David Fitzgerald—NAILED: Ten Christian Myths

June AOF Meeting Recap

By David Flanders

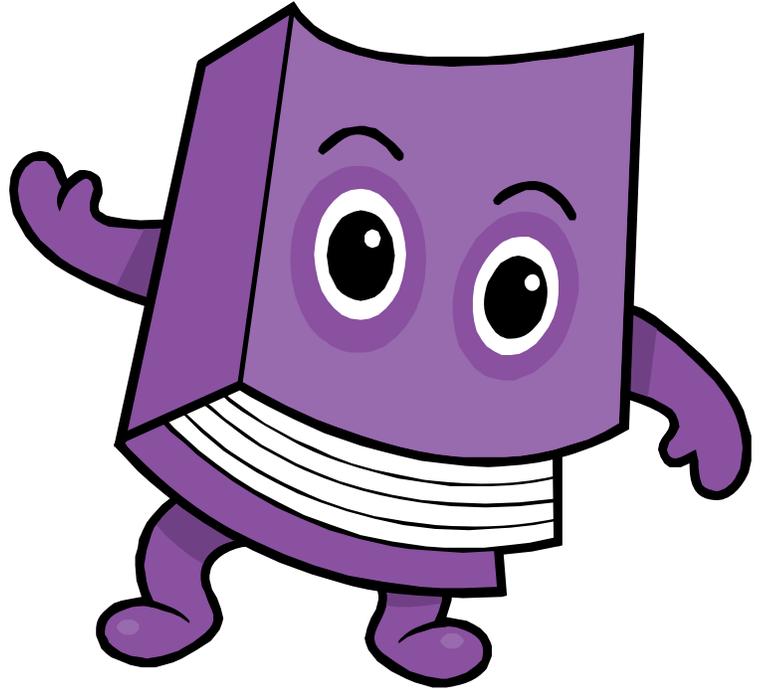
Intellectual curiosity—the appetite to find out the truth about things can motivate one to question things.

Years ago, David Fitzgerald, AOF's June speaker, wondered about the life of Christ. He found out there is no reliable historical evidence of Jesus' existence. And he wrote a book about it. David's new book sheds light on ten beloved Christian myths, and, with evidence from historians across the spectrum, shows how they point to a Jesus created by an allegorical alchemy of hope and imagination, a messiah transformed from a literary, theological construct into a familiar figure of Jesus—in short a purely mythic Christ.

Like other pagan deities of that era, Jesus Christ seems to be a God created in man's inverted image. Mortal, finite, limited, suffering from these constraints, human beings invert a power endowed with precisely the opposite characteristics with their faults turned inside out. Like fingers on a pair of gloves, they manufacture characteristics at whose feet they kneel and finally prostrate themselves. I am limited, but Jesus knows no limits. I do not know everything, but Jesus is omniscient. I cannot do everything, but Jesus is omnipotent. I am weak, but Jesus is the almighty. I live on earth, but Jesus lives in heaven. And so on.

It took two to three hundred years, but eventually a particular Christian god emerged and was chosen not just to be the one god—but the only god—a god who is intolerant of atheist and other free thinkers. One of the quotes in David's book is by Pierre Bayle: "In matters of religion it is very easy to deceive man, and very hard to undeceive him."

A lively question and answer period followed his speech, and David sold some of his books.



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omy, astrology, biology, pharmaceuticals and alchemy. But if so, why encode? One idea is that it hides a heretical theology, perhaps a manual of the Cathars, a liberal sect suppressed in the 13th century. And of course some see conspiracy, and some see magic.

The truth could be no more than this. A clever 15th-century poseur, perhaps John Dee himself, in need of funds, hired scribes to produce an unreadable book of wonder and mystery, filled with striking images. Together they devised an alphabet and code, excerpted random words from multilingual sources, and added a fake cover letter by Roger Bacon. The result was good enough to convince the very wealthy Rudolf II (who was gullible anyway, a collector of dwarfs, relics and curios). Dee and his scribes made a fat profit, and Dee also added polish to his occult reputation. And everyone was happy.

It is not a perfect theory, but as good as many. It will do for now. Like tea leaves, cloud banks or dreams, or like faith itself, the Voynich book is a fog of mirrors and wishes, where we may see just what we want.

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 Community Projects

AOF Invites Members To Next Davis Community Meals Volunteer Event—Free Meal Included!

By Don Knutson

The Davis Community Meals program, which AOF has been assisting **since 2002**, had another terrific dinner Tuesday, May 31st. DCM provides three meals per week for seniors, low-income and homeless individuals and their families of Davis. The menu is prepared by volunteer cooks and is always high quality. AOF volunteers **Don Knutson, Ken Nahigian and Ruth Rezos** put in a few hours setting-up, serving and cleaning-up for a meal which mightily fed about 85 people. A wonderful chili was served with vegetarian and chicken options with green and fruit salads and abundant donated desserts. And, as always, a violinist with tap-dancing shoes and her husband on piano provided the entertainment.

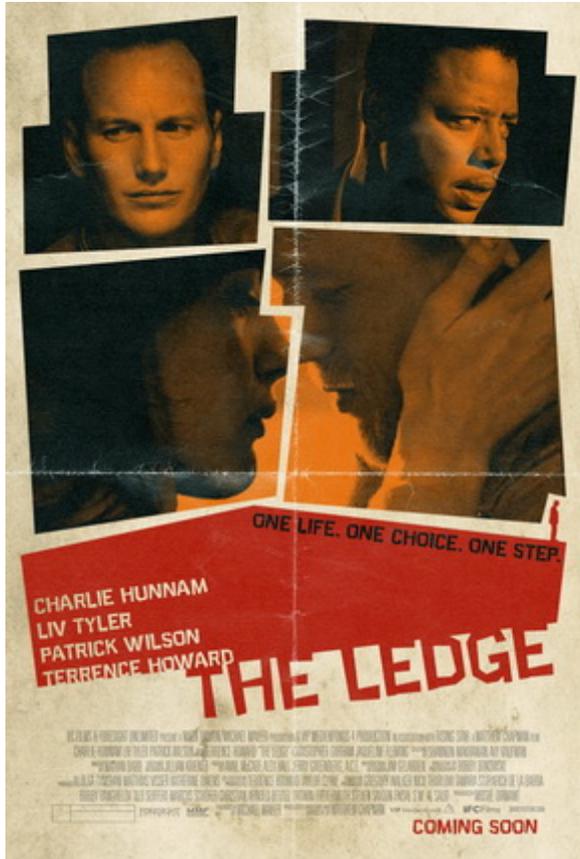
After serving, Davis Community Meals typically invites assistants to help themselves to a complimentary meal, if food remains—a great reward for doing a good deed for the day!

The next 5th Tuesday occurs **August 30** and that means AOF volunteers will pitch in again to help the needy of Davis.



Entertainment

Summer Movie "The Ledge"—Atheist Hero, All-Star Cast



Via Wikipedia (no spoilers!): "*The Ledge* is a 2011 thriller film written and directed by Matthew Chapman, starring Charlie Hunnam, Terrence Howard, Liv Tyler and Patrick Wilson. The film premiered in the U.S. Dramatic Competition at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.

After embarking on a passionate affair with his evangelical neighbor's wife (Liv Tyler), Gavin (Charlie Hunnam) soon finds himself in a battle of wills that will have life-or-death consequences. As an atheist, Gavin is lured by his lover's husband (Patrick Wilson) to the ledge of a high rise and told he has one hour to make a choice between his life or the one he loves. Without belief in an afterlife, will he be able to make a decision? It's up to police officer Hollis (Terrence Howard) to save both their lives, but the clock is ticking."

More information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ledge_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ledge_(film))

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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Something "HOT"

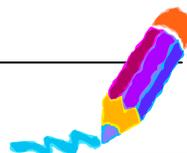
We invite you to prepare and present a small speech or verbal contribution to the day. This will be an "open mike" event. But each speaker must get across his/her point(s) before the clock runs out.

Time strictures are strict, so it is best to practice your mini-speech in advance so NOT to exceed its declared time limit. One can commit to either a brief sound-bite (2 minutes maximum) or to an actual short speech (5 minutes max). Follow that "advance preparation rule" and abide by your time limit, and you will qualify for the event's grand prize!

Have LOTS on your mind? Okay, then you may prepare talks for both the less-than-2 minute and the 2-to-5 minute categories. However, keep one talk clearly in your back pocket, because a second round will occur only if available time after each person who wishes has had a shot at edifying the audience of one topic.

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

July/August Calendar of Events

SacCOR Dinner Social: **Aioli Bodega Español**, 1800 "L" St., Sacramento;
Contact: Suzanne @ 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net

Thu, Jul 7, 6:30 p.m.

**AOF Meeting in July: AOF 18th Anniversary Picnic in the Park (Note:
At McKinley Park, not Sierra 2 Center)**

Sun, Jul 10, 1:30 p.m.

AOF Board Of Directors Meeting

Mon, Jul 11, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Event

Sat, Jul 30, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

AOF Meeting in August: AOF Summer Sizzler

Sun, Aug 14, 1:30 p.m.

AOF Davis Community Meals Supper Volunteer Effort

Tue, Aug 30, 4:00-7:00 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.

