

If you missed the **Thomas Paine Birthday celebration** on Jan 29, 2022, great news: you can now view it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mq-oOdD5g94>. The event, about 3 hours of music, speech and presentations, included inspiring words by Ann Druyan, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Julia Sweeney, Margaret Downey and others. Worth a visit!

## ✧ ✧ Upcoming AOF Events ✧ ✧

### ➤ Free Movie Night!

**Fridays, Feb 4 and Feb 18, 7pm – 10pm**

Twice a month, [Reason Center](#) (RC) and AOF host a **Free Movie Night** just for you! We can't announce the movie titles, but we can hint, sometimes.

On Feb 4 it's a heartbreak-honest film from 2018, in which a writer feeling lost in post-war London society bonds with denizens of an island as she learns of a book club they formed during WWII German occupation. Starring Jessica Brown Findlay and Tom Courtenay. On Feb 18 ... we haven't decided. Maybe you have ideas?

To attend, you'll need a personal Netflix account + a laptop or desktop computer with the [Google Chrome web browser](#). If you don't have these we apologize -- please be patient until RC can open its doors. Else, here's how to join us:

1. Open your Chrome web browser right now and install the Netflix TeleParty Extension. Get it at: <https://www.netflixparty.com/>. (Really, do it *now*, don't wait till movie night!)
2. Just before show time, fire up the Chrome browser again and go to the very special Netflix Movie TeleParty link, which will appear on the AOF website about a half hour before showtime. Sorry, we just can't get the link until then!
3. **Click that link.** The Movie TeleParty page will open. Log into Netflix (if not logged in already). At the top right of the browser frame check your "Extensions" list and find the letters **Tp** in red. You may need to click on the letters.
4. The Netflix movie party should begin. You'll be watching it along with the rest of us. Meanwhile we can chat on the side of the screen and make silly, snarky comments.

Free Movie Night was made for Reason Center members, but non-members are welcome too. But it might be nice to toss a few bucks to RC to cover costs. How can you do that? Sign up at <http://reasoncenter.com/donate/>. Membership is a measly \$5 a month and is tax deductible if you itemize. And the perks (like this one) are good as pie.

**Location:** A Netflix TeleParty link, see above.

**Contact:** See <http://reasoncenter.com/contact>, or email "programs (at) aofonline (dot) org".

**Details for Feb 4:** <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/dtmjgsydcdbgb/>

**Details for Feb 18:** <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/zsmjgsydcdbxb/>

### ➤ Sacramento Darwin Day Celebration

**Sunday, Feb 6, 2022, 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm**

Presenting the 25<sup>th</sup> fabulous year (Silver Anniversary!) of the **Darwin Day Birthday Gala**, the coolest, most singular, most go-to local event of science and humanity, brought to you by area science advocates, civic groups and nerds on too much coffee. An online event, marking Charles Darwin's 213<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Open to all. But registration is required.

[Darwin Day](#) is a science-rush like no other, a celebration of scientific inquiry honoring of the life and work of the great Charles Darwin (b. 12 February 1809), sponsored worldwide by community and educational groups. Not an AOF event, strictly speaking, but AOF helped found the local gala, and continues to support it and commend it to all our friends in the Sacramento community of reason. Because science! And what's science but reason in the trenches?



The 2022 program will begin at 2:30 o'clock *post meridiem*. This year you can attend by video from the cozy comfort and lockdown safety of your home. The key speaker will be [Dr. Eric A. Nauman](#), Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Basic Medical Sciences and Biomedical Engineering, at the University of Cincinnati, Purdue. His talk will focus on human cell and tissue mechanics, with a focus on concussive injury from a human evolutionary perspective.

For the safety of all, attendance will be via online Video. No special software needed to attend, just go to the link before the program starts, enter your name & email address, and enjoy.

### How to Register:

Please sign up ahead of time (fee just \$10, or \$5 for students with student ID). The convenient Videoconference link will come to you by email. Register here:

<https://paybee.io/quickpay.html?handle=sacdarwinday#optionList>

For more general details on this event, see <https://www.sacdarwinday.org/>

Or see the event flyer at <https://www.sacdarwinday.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Darwin-Day-Flier-2022.pdf>

**Location :** An online videoconference - see link above.

**Contact :** Pat Desmond, ph. 530-598-6080, or email "patdesmond8 (at) gmail (dot) com".

*Almost cheap as free, and donations cheerfully accepted. Support science in Sacramento!*

### ➤ Tell Us a Tale

**Sunday, Feb 27, 2022, 2pm - 4pm**

Everybody has a story, maybe two -- events that make good telling, or awaken fits of first-degree nostalgia. You know how it is: perhaps a harrowing near-death by-skin-of-your-teeth escape, a first piano recital, or that time you awoke in a Mexican jail in a puddle of suspicious liquid.

You have already shared it privately perhaps. Now AOF invites you to share in again with your freethinker buddies, to tell us all about "it".

5-7 minute stories or less, please. Unless it's *really* good. And your tale need not pertain to religion or atheism, though we won't mind if it does.

What, no story? Too shy? That's OK. Just come and listen to others. No pressure. Honest!

We'll have a general talk-it-up afterwards so everyone will have a chance to comment on what they have heard. Oh, and if you empurple a bit, or tell a tall tale, no one will know ever. Just saying.

**This is an in-person event. See location below.**

**Location :** Sam's Hofbrau meeting room, 2500 Watt Ave, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/Sf8o8QKV1WcDQcFQA>.

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

*Park free in the lot. Get snacks at the food bar. Meet in the private room at the back. Sac County mask requirements will apply (see <https://dhs.saccounty.net/PUB/Documents/ME-HealthOrder20210729.pdf>).*



## ✧ ✧ Other Upcoming (non-AOF) Events ✧ ✧

### ➤ Sacramento-area Online Meetings

Local freethinkers continue to meet via online teleconference. Slack off and join them from your home, for free.

- **Monday, Feb 7, 5pm – 7pm: Who TF am I now?** For those left feeling perplexed, confused, depressed or anxious in the aftermath of departing faith. Former pastor Ferron Wiley will provide support. Online meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/186729414>.
- **Tuesdays, Feb 8 and 22, 7pm – 9pm: Porch Talk.** A gathering on a virtual front porch, a chat on the news of the day. Topic ideas welcome. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81116895135?pwd=VDVYWHJMQUIJL3R5K1V0VmxBQWVNdz09>.
- **Wednesdays, Feb 9 and 23, 7pm – 8pm: Black Lives Matter and Me.** Talk, read, watch videos; discuss social justice, reforms, privilege and power. Meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82590278514?pwd=K1pzaXA0dGVESzlvS1UcEs4RnE2UT09>.
- **Friday, Feb 11, 7pm – 8:30pm: Rescuing Truth from the Big Lie.** Join an online discussion on what actions individuals can take to help reduce the toxic polarization we now see. See details at <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/whmvrzydcdpbp/>.
- **Saturday, Feb 12, 5pm – 7pm: Women's Virtual Support Group.** Providing ongoing and personal support to women letting go of religious belief. For those who self-identify as female only. Online meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87403436249>.
- **Thursday, Feb 17, 7pm – 9pm: Recovery from Religion General Support.** Providing ongoing support to anyone letting go of religious belief. Online meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82268955990>.
- **Thursday, Feb 17, 6:45pm – 8:45pm: Reason Center Video Clips.** Watch short videos on atheism, religion, science, current events, critical thinking, comedy and more. Online link: <https://zoom.us/j/93640958377?pwd=QSt4SEZJbHR2dWJYR2RvUmNkQlg5Zz09>.
- **Sunday, Feb 20, 10:30am – 12 noon: Online Coffee & Community.** Join us for coffee and discussion – BYO beverage, of course. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87468875186?pwd=dGkxTXY5a2p3cTFPTmx2MU95ZWpnUT09>.
- **Sunday, Feb 26, 70m – 9pm: Literacheer!** The discussion theme is illustrated books, including graphic novels and comics. See details at <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/283451199/>.
- **Saturday, Feb 26, 3pm – 5pm: BHNBS Book Club.** Part 4 of a discussion of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond, the modern classic by an evolutionary biologist. For details and to attend, see <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/283449232/>.

### ➤ Blasphemy Breakfasts

**Feb 12 and Feb 20, 2022**

Want to hang out with local like-minded folk? Want to know fellow freethinkers in smaller groups? Or do you just get munchies in the morning? Welcome to the Blasphemy Breakfasts at Original Mel's Diners in Folsom and Rocklin. RSVP requested.

**Saturday, Feb 12 at 10am:** 13399 Folsom Blvd, Folsom. Details, see <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/zbnrsydcdbqb/>.

**Sunday, Feb 20 at 9:30am:** 6708 Lonetree Blvd, Rocklin. Details, see <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/cphpsydcdbbc/>.

## ➤ Saturday Morning Hike

**Saturday, Feb 12, 2022, 10am – 12 noon**

Sacramento is filled with gorgeous nature trails. Hike, meet new people, observe wildlife, and step on a snake or two.

**Location:** Pioneer Express Trail on Folsom Lake. See <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/hfkcqsydcdbhb/>.

## ➤ Book Club

**Tuesday, Feb 15, 2022, 6:30pm – 8:30pm**

Discussing *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds*, by Merlin Sheldrake. At Selland's Market Café, 915 Broadway, Sacramento. Mask rules apply. Details at <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/sqgtqsydcdbtb/>.

## ➤ Sacramento Skeptics in the Pub

**Friday, Feb 25, 2022, 6:30pm – 9:30pm**

A social meetup for the Sacramento Area Skeptics, a community of people, friends, and families that champion the methods of science and critical thinking. Visitors and new skeptics most welcome! For details see

<https://www.meetup.com/sacskeptics/events/svctmsydcdbhc/>.

**Location:** Sac City Brews Neighborhood Tap House, 3940 60th St, Sacramento.

## ➤ Other Sacramento Area Events

As of this writing, the Sacramento Coalition of Reason global calendar is offline. But later it might be back, so please check <https://unitedcor.org/event-calendar-2/> for more fun activities. Because we just won't let you rest.

***You can help us. Here's how.***

### **Support Reason Center**

Remember Reason Center? It opened in July 2014, hosted hundreds of events, and accrued twelve partner organizations. Supporting a social and intellectual community for freethinkers, it contributed to society through education and community service, advanced the civic understanding and acceptance of freethinkers, and upheld the separation of religion and government. Then, in November 2020, it closed. Will "RC" ever return? That depends on support from members and donors. Please stand up for Reason Center as it stood up for you. To donate or join, visit [ReasonCenter.org](https://ReasonCenter.org).

### **Support AOF**

You can support AOF *without spending a dime*. How? When you purchase goods at Amazon.com, simply use this link: <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/68-0325762>. Bookmark it now! Prices & service will be the same, but AOF will receive a small kickback for whatever you purchase. Sweet!

### **Suggest a Meeting**

Have a good speaker or meeting idea? Tell the AOF Program Committee! Go to <http://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>, click "Program Committee" in the drop-down line, and enter your thoughtful suggestion. (AOF pays reasonable honorariums to speakers.)

### **Volunteer?**

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

## ✧ ✧ **Secular Holiday (just one in February)** ✧ ✧

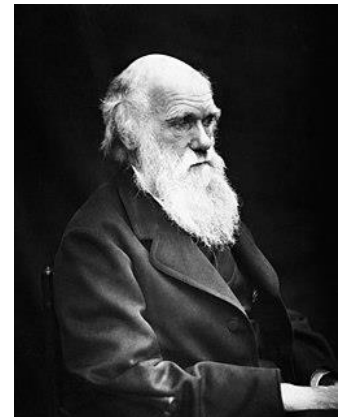
### ➤ **Darwin Day** (the *day*, not the *event*, don't be confused)

**Saturday, Feb 12, 2022**

**Darwin Day** celebrates the life and work of Charles Darwin, a secular holiday widely celebrated within the global community with participation from all sectors of society. Even mainline churches have participated, celebrating the day as [Evolution Sunday or Evolution Weekend](#) (see the [Clergy Letter Project](#) for details).

Under any of these names, this day celebrates the wonder and beauty of both science and humanity, and serve to recognize and celebrate the achievements of a man who cast a bright, explanatory light on reality, our self-knowledge, and on the world of which we are part.

Darwin contributed to our understanding at the deepest level, forever changed how we see ourselves within this vast, impersonal universe, and brought us a paradigm shift of seismic proportions. He symbolizes the brave, human enterprise of science in confronting the mystery





of existence. His life and work exemplify the spirit of wonder, curiosity and adventure along with the excitement that the quest for knowledge and understanding can provide.

[The Darwin Day Program](#), an educational non-profit organization, encourages interested groups and individuals throughout the world to participate in the annual celebration of Darwin Day by coordinating events and activities in their area on or around February 12. The program also offers a year-round educational outreach project to help in reaching the goal of improving the public's understanding of science and foster an appreciation for our shared humanity.

Darwin Day, Evolution Sunday and Evolution Weekend encourage us to come together to champion science and humanity throughout our global community. They let us celebrate the astonishing engagement of our common intelligence with the wonder and excitement of life in the universe. If you agree, visit the [National Darwin Day](#) site and sign the petition calling for national recognition of this day. Then, visit [Epic of Evolution](#) for a great adventure.



### 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](http://www.aofonline.org).

AOF President: Prolific Pamela Rivera

Vice-president: Marvelous Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Rapid Ruth Rezos

Treasurer & Registrar: Kinetic Ken Nahigian

Webmistress: Palpable Pat Kelley

Program chair: Super Susan McLean

Facebook page: Keen Kaeleigh Pontif

Directors at large:

Roger Zabkie, Fran Evanisko, Christine Tweet,

Rae Howard, 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>.

### CHARLES ROBERT DARWIN HAS POSTED A THEORY...



# St. Boniface: interfaith dialogue wasn't his thing

**S**AINTE BONIFACE was a British missionary to Germany in the early Middle Ages. This was about the same time as Patrick, another Brit, was converting Ireland, and Columba (Irish) was converting Britain. So the idea that you have to go abroad to tell people about Jesus is nothing new.

Anyway, back to Boniface. He had already led a mission to what is now Holland, but it achieved little, so he visited the pope, changed his name (understandably, since his original name was Wynfrith), and took on Germany.

In Rome, by the way, he was said to have become lifelong friends with a nun by the name of Bugga, a factoid that actually gains in the translation.

In Germany, Boniface came across a tribe called the Catti, who worshipped an enormous tree in the forest of Geismar, Thor's Oak. He tried to tell them about the cross of Jesus being a much better tree, but they just kept going on about how good their tree was. So he hacked it down.

Stripping to the waist and without a word, he set about the six-foot wide tree with his evangelistic axe. When he had finally brought it to the ground, he leapt up on the fallen tree with the immortal words, "My God's stronger than your God."

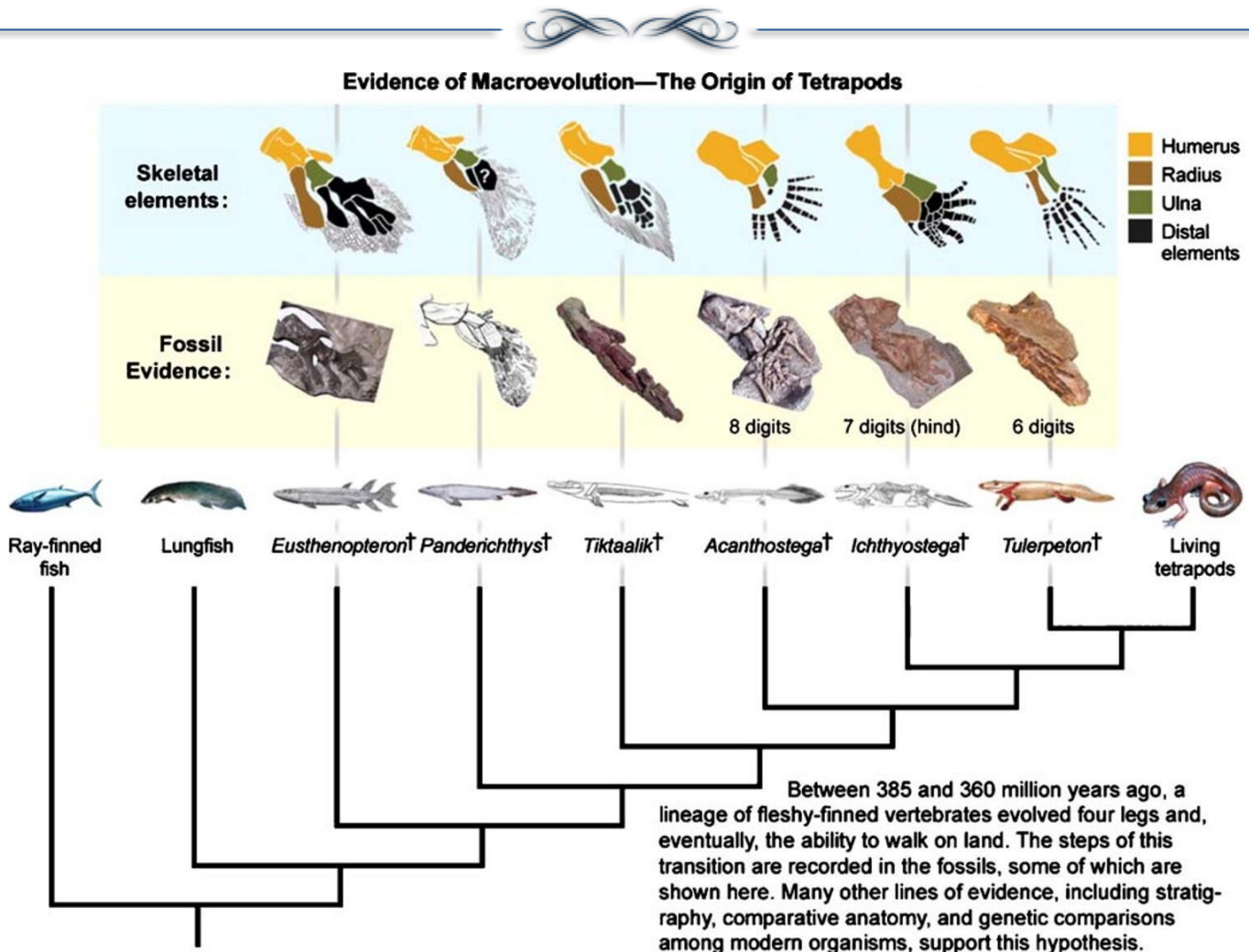
Sure enough, the Germans were so amazed that Boniface didn't get hacked down himself in reprisal from a hacked off Thor, they signed up for Christianity.

Traditionally, Boniface is credited with thus inventing the Christmas tree – though it is hard to see how destroying an oaken idol is supposed to inspire people to bring fir trees in at Christmas.

However, one account tells us that a lovely fir tree immediately popped up out of Thor's defeated trunk, whereupon Boniface told them it was "the tree of the Christ child" and "to surround it with gifts." But if you believe that, you'll believe in the pope who became a donkey.

Of which more another time. (Look up Antipope Gregory VIII if you like spoilers.)

[Thanks to [ship-of-fools.com](http://ship-of-fools.com)]



**Save the date.** On March 12, a noted author and journalist will visit the Roseville area for a revealing presentation about the Religious Right. The event is brought here by the [Greater Sacramento Chapter of Freedom From Religion Foundation](#), which rocks. More details next month, including how to register. Just mark your calendar now.



## Valentine from an Atheist to a Religious Scholar

by Adam Frank, from [Cosmos and Culture](#), National Public Radio

Sometimes the debate between atheism and religion can be enlightening, showing us how both of these different approaches dive deeply into the currents of human experience. Sometimes, however, it can be deeply depressing, devolving into hard lines and acrimony. As an atheist, I often find myself exasperated with what I call "strident atheism."

People in this vein seem intent on ignoring the long narrative of human spiritual endeavor. They often reduce it to histories of ignorance and intolerance. Believers in strident atheism convince themselves that it's OK to ignore the scholarship on the long and ancient history of human spiritual endeavor. And that brings me to my Valentine.

I love [Karen Armstrong](#) for the breadth of her writing. From the history of the three great monotheistic religions to nuanced accounts of Buddhism and Hinduism to an incisive account of myth and its role in the evolution of human culture, her curiosity emerges as a kind of infectious fire. Armstrong burns to understand all forms of aspiration to the sacred, seeing it as a fundamental human need. It's this overarching perspective that makes her the perfect guide to spirituality for the novice, open-minded atheist.

Many strident atheists dismiss the domains of spiritual endeavor without digging deeper. In their ranks, you will often find folks who have never read William James, Rudolf Otto, Emile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade or Wendy Doniger. Failing to explore these domains is like rejecting all of physics after spending 20 minutes in an intro class. Religion is more than fundamentalism and what Karen Armstrong provides is an engaged account of the long view, the long history of humanity's sometimes stumbling, sometimes horrific, sometimes transcendent attempt to engage with this persistent sense that there is *more* to life than day-to-day survival.

Armstrong has been criticized for shallowness and for skipping over the subtleties that formal scholarship would reveal. I am sure some of that criticism is true. I can see that she is, indeed, often painting in broad strokes. But like a good science writer, she is opening doors into the history of ideas and experience that we can all follow.

There is another reason I, a scientist, love Karen Armstrong. All of her writings are illuminated by a deep and resonant compassion. As a scientist I am always interested in universals, things that are always true. Armstrong, who founded the wonderful [Charter for Compassion](#), is interested in the same thing when it comes to human behavior as an expression of spiritual longing. Compassion, she tells us, must always come first, must always be the first concern of a religious life. I am not religious but I could not agree more.

Thank you Ms. Armstrong. Will you be my Valentine?

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My normal approach  
is useless here.