

FIG LEAVES

Volume 17 Issue 4

April 2008

April FIG Meeting: Sunday, April 27 2:00 PM at the Vernon Manor

The Myth of Nazareth

by Rene Salm

Frank R. Zindler, editor American Atheist Press

In April, FIG will welcome Frank R. Zindler, editor of the American Atheist Press (AAP). Frank will discuss *The Myth of Nazareth*, a new book by Rene Salm that is being published by AAP. The book explores archaeological and historical data that shows Nazareth was not inhabited at the time Jesus, the Nazarene, was supposed to have been living there. Frank muses, "Can the Wizard of Oz be real if there never was a land of Oz?"

Frank lives in Columbus and FIG members may remember him from his participation in last May's Rally for Reason Speak-Out.

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Events (note date/time changes)

April Meeting

Sunday, April 27, 2008, 2:00 PM at the Vernon Manor

400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH

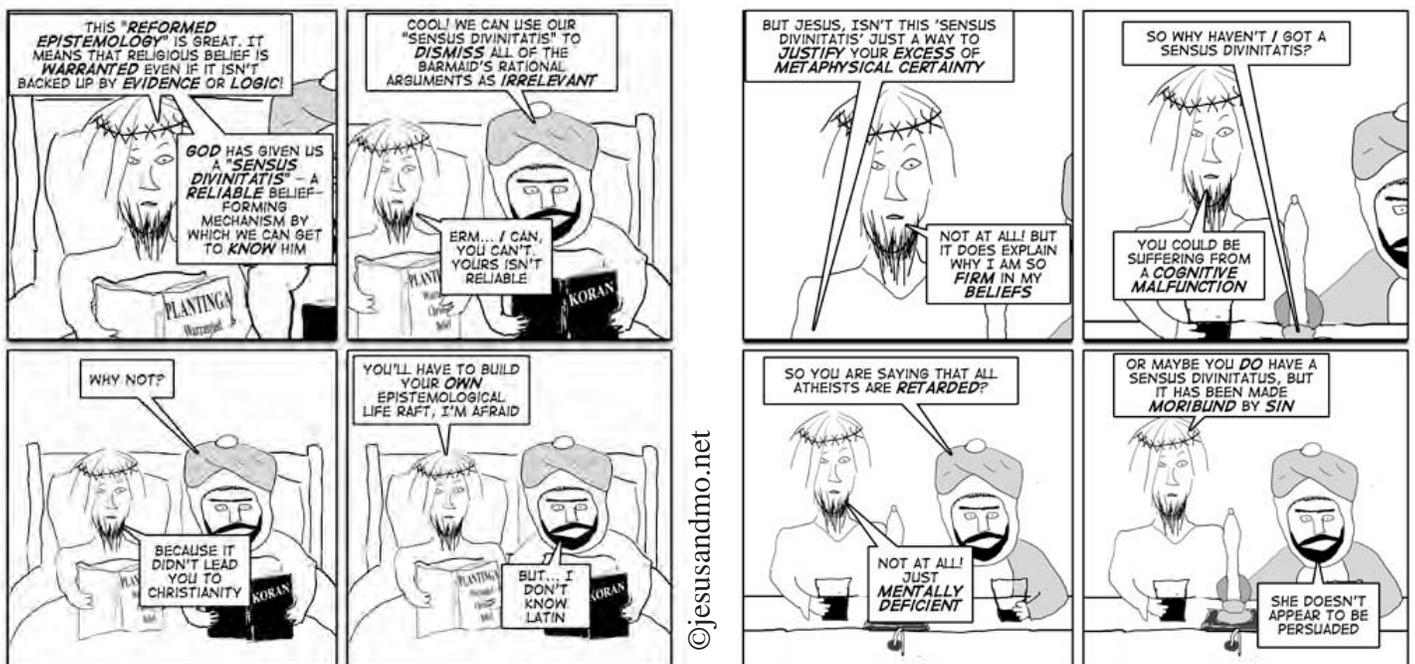
May Potluck

Monday, May 5, 2008; 6:30 PM

May Meeting

Tuesday, May 20, 2008, 7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor

400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH



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March Meeting

Developing Antibiotic Resistance: Poster Child for Evolution in Real Time

Dr. David Fankhauser, Professor of Biology and Chemistry at University of Cincinnati, Clermont Center

Dr. Fankhauser announced at the beginning of his talk he preferred to have a dialogue rather than a monologue so if anyone had questions during the talk they should ask and if we went off on a tangent that's exactly what he liked.

He suggested he didn't think he should have to defend evolution but in reality we need to defend it vigorously these days. It seemed to him that the emergence of antibiotic resistance in bacteria is as good an example in real time evolution as one could put together. His talk would explain how Darwin's theory explains changing antibiotics perfectly well. He would show how we can stretch the usefulness of the antibiotics we have.

It is well known that antibiotics were discovered in the 20th century. They cured many diseases when they first came into use, but in recent years have become less effective. If we lose the use of antibiotics, we may experience the epidemics of the past. The coming tuberculosis epidemic may make the AIDS epidemic look easy.

Paul Ehrlich in 1910 was looking for a magic bullet to use against bacteria. The magic bullet has two traits: it has to be poisonous to the pathogen (the agent that causes the disease), and it also has to be innocuous to the patient. Those two characteristics would make it the perfect therapeutic agent. In this search he developed Salvarsan, which is not exactly a magic bullet because it has arsenic in it, but it was effective against syphilis though the side effects were pronounced.

The age of true antibiotics was born in 1928. Alexander Fleming, a microbiologist, was working with *staphylococcus aureus*. These are the bacteria that cause boils and carbuncles and other skin diseases. When he left for a short trip to France he left petri dishes sitting on his desk. On his return he found a mold contaminating a bacteria plate He recognized that around the mold, there was an region of inhibition of bacterial growth. He realized this fungus was making something to inhibit the growth of *staphylococcus*. Others surely had seen the same thing but Fleming pursued it. This fungus was *penicillium notatum*, it secreted agent that would be called penicillin. We now know that penicillin inhibits the development of bacterial cell walls. Bacteria have weak cell membranes and without the help of cell walls, the bacteria will explode. Cell walls act like the wall of a tire. So if growing bacteria encounter penicillin, the cell walls burst and the beasties die. Humans do not have cell walls; we have cell membranes so penicillin does not affect us. It is an almost perfect example of a magic bullet, because it kills bacteria and has no effect on us. Someone asked a question about reactions to penicillin. Dr. Fankhauser answered that is a different story.



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to:

figinfo@fuse.net;

or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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It's a matter of allergy. This occurs when the immune system interprets penicillin as an invading foreign agent and attacks it and develops various degrees of abnormal immune reaction.

Penicillin was the first antibiotic to be discovered but there are a number of other antibiotics that attack different targets in the bacterium besides the cell wall. Some antibiotics inhibit protein synthesis, e.g. streptomycin, DNA replication, enzyme metabolism and cell membranes. All of these will have side effects for us because humans would be affected as well. There are some metabolic antibiotics like sulfa drugs that exhibit no side effects.

The central rule of genetics is: DNA makes RNA makes protein. If we can stop the growth of any one of these we are going to stop the growth of the cell. Some drugs prevent transcription, prevent copying DNA and RNA, some of them prevent the synthesis of protein, some drugs inhibit enzyme activity and some, although very few disrupt the membrane.

Shortly after Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin he noted it is not difficult to make microbes resistant to penicillin by exposing them to concentrations not sufficient to kill them and surmised the same thing could happen in the body.

A very dramatic example of resistance appeared abruptly: gonorrhea was treated with penicillin for many years. The slang name for gonorrhea was the "clap" after the French word *clapoir* meaning brothel, which is where it was caught. On Army bases it was almost a joke; one could go out and get a dose of gonorrhea, then get a



shot of penicillin and that would take care of the infection. Penicillin was heavily used during World War II. By 1947 the first clinical cases of resistance to *staphylococcus* began to appear. Today ninety percent of all

staph infections are resistant to penicillin, it no longer works against gonorrhea. Fifteen years ago so many strains of gonorrhea bacteria had evolved a resistance to penicillin that doctors had to stop using it. The sensitivity to penicillin is now increasing in gonorrhea again. Used today is cipro which is a broader



spectrum, much more potent antibiotic. But bacteria are becoming resistant even to cipro.

When penicillin no longer worked against *staphylococcus aureus*, medicine developed an effective new variant fungus, methicillin. The bugs are now becoming resistant. Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) has been in the news lately. This is multiply drug-resistant. The potentially most dangerous is Multiply Drug-Resistant TB. Tuberculosis is difficult to kill in the first place, and the drugs that have been used for years are no longer working. It's may become worse than AIDS. It is

easy to avoid catching AIDS, but TB can be passed on through breathing.

How do these resistant strains come about? This happens two ways. One is by mutation, altering one base for another base by random change. The majority of these changes would be deleterious and would kill the vector. Some, a very few would make the bacterium immune to the drug, those would proliferate. And, bacteria give rise to many generations of offspring in a day.

The second way is to exchange genetic material between two individuals sexually. The first evidence of special pieces of DNA that can pick up and transfer antibiotic resistance, was discovered in 1950 in Japan. Antibiotics were still fairly new and used uncritically. In treatment of a type of dysentery, shigella, it became resistant to four antibiotics. Moreover, when shigella was put with ecoli, the latter became also resistant to





all four of these antibiotics. After thorough analysis it appeared a plasmid was picking up genes and there was a strong selection for resistance to antibiotics. Heavy usage of antibiotics in hospitals exposed many microbes to resistant genes.

Darwinian evolution is a little difficult to understand because it is based on random processes. The prerequisite to Darwinian evolution is a heterogeneous population. Any animal develops a heterogeneous population through slow processes of mutation; the fast way is by sexual recombination. The purpose of sex is to generate genetically unique individuals, which allows species to adapt rapidly to the environment. Once a heterogeneous population exists, natural selection has something to work on. Environmental pressure,-- the antibiotics,-- prevents some members,-- the unfit,-- from reproducing, that is they die before reproducing. The fit that survive antibiotics, reproduce, transmit their genes, and proliferate.

Any antibiotic has a limited time of effectiveness because every time it is used you select bacteria for more resistance. Since there is a finite number of uses we must employ antibiotics judiciously.

- Reported by George Maurer ☘



THINGS TO DO...

THINGS TO SEE...



Media Events/Programs

The Humanist Perspective

Show times on Time-Warner Cable:

Channel 4: Tuesday 9:30 am and Thursday 7:00 pm

Channel 24: Friday 11:30 pm

Programs:

8-10 April: The Human Question, with Hervey C. Peoples

15-17 April: Inquirers on Campus, with Hemant Mehta, Rob Lewis, and Zach Miner

22-24 April: The Naturalism of Paul Draper, with Paul Draper and David Koepsel

29 Apr-1 May: Godless Physics, with Victor Stenger

Society for Evolution Education (SEE Life)

2008 Spring Lecture Series

The 2008 Spring Lecture Series is presented on eight Saturday evenings, from 7 to 9 PM. An hour-long lecture is followed by an hour of discussion.

Members: \$8 per person for each lecture

Non-Members: \$10 per person for each lecture

Reservations required.

Email: ftraina@sunrockfarm.org

OR Call (859) 781-5502

April 12: "***Kin Selection and Altruism: The Evolution of Cooperation***" Dr. Denice Robertson, Lecturer in Biological Sciences Northern Kentucky University

April 19: "***Plants and Pollinators: Co-evolution of a Beautiful Relationship***" Dr. Maggie Whitson, Assistant Professor in Biological Sciences Northern Kentucky University

April 26: "***The Darwin Menagerie***" Dr. Gene Kritsky, Professor of Biology College of Mt. St. Joseph.



How to make more effective use of our antibiotics?

Use judiciously. Any antibiotic only has a limited number of uses before resistant bacteria emerge.

Severely restrict trivial uses (animal feeds, etc)

Antibiotic sensitivity tests should be performed before prescribing a full course of antibiotic. But once sensitivity is confirmed, take full course so not to select partial resistance.

Change lifestyle to promote health and disease resistance

Hear! Hear! Answers in Atheism at

<www.answersinatheism.net>

JOIN US! - We are live on the internet Thursday evenings from 7 pm to 8 pm EST. Our shows are also available as archived audio files, so you can listen later at any time of your choice.

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European Union Parliamentary Bloc Implodes

Intelligence Report, Spring 2008

Just 10 months after it was formed amid great hopes on the radical right, an ultranationalist bloc in the European Parliament called Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (ITS) has collapsed - the victim of racist comments made by the granddaughter of Benito Mussolini that infuriated Romanian bloc members.

The irony, to many, was delicious. The group, formed in January 2007, had brought together more than 20 Euro-deputies, most with xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic views, in a voting bloc that was entitled, under parliamentary rules, to speaking time, committee posts, and some \$1.3 million a year. At least 20 members were needed to form such a bloc, something that was made possible only when Bulgaria and Romania joined the European Union on Jan. 1, 2007.

But it all fell apart in November, when Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of the Italian dictator and an ITS member, called Romanians "habitual lawbreakers" during a debate about an Italian woman allegedly murdered by a Romanian and suggested expelling the Romanian ambassador from Italy. One Romanian member furiously criticized the "unacceptable amalgam" Mussolini made "between criminal gypsies and the entire Romanian population." Five members of the deputy's

party then quit ITS, wrecking it by bringing it below the threshold of 20 deputies.

In a statement to the European Parliament, the members of the Greater Romania Party C which campaigned in Romania on a harshly anti-gypsy platform C decried Mussolini's "xenophobic attitude" and "insults" of Romanians.

The ITS bloc never had an easy time of it. A day after its formation was announced, bloc leader Bruno Gollnisch of France's National Front was convicted in his own country of Holocaust denial. Then, Euro-deputies of several parties worked together to deny ITS the committee leadership posts it was expecting. Finally, ITS' sole Briton, Ashley Mote, was jailed in the United Kingdom for benefit fraud.

The collapse of ITS was greeted with cheers and applause in the European Parliament. Scottish member Alyn Smith's reaction, delivered in a statement, was typical: "Watching these people argue amongst themselves warms the heart." ❧

.....
• *Quote* Those who seek absolute power, even though
• they seek it to do what they regard as good, are simply
• demanding the right to enforce their own version of heaven
• on earth. And let me remind you, they are the very ones who
• always create the most hellish tyrannies. Absolute power
• does corrupt, and those who seek it must be suspect and
• must be opposed.
• Barry Goldwater •

Unquote
.....

SCIENCE BOOK CLUB 2008 Schedule - all meetings will be held on the 3rd Sunday of each month at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library in Room 3A at 2:30 PM.

Apr 20 Eric Otto: *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* by Edwin Black

May 18 Bert Bruce: *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* by Oliver W. Sacks

June 15 Jerry Wiles: *In the Beginning* by Isaac Asimov.

July 20 Bryan Sellers: *Under a Green Sky: Global Warming, the Mass Extinctions of the Past, and What They Can Tell Us About Our Future* by Peter Ward

Aug 17 Bob Streifthau: *World Without Us* by Alan Weisman

Sept 21 Bob Riehemann: *Doubt and Certainty* by Tony Rothman and George Sudarshan

Oct. 19 Pauline Smolin: *In Search of Memory: the Emergence of a New Science of the Mind* by Eric Kandel

Nov 16 Gary Weiss: *What we believe but cannot prove: today's leading thinkers on science in the age of certainty* ed. by John Brockman

Dec 21 Randy Weaver: *Into the cool energy flow, thermodynamics, and life* by Eric D. Schneider

Jan 18, 2009 - Dr. Richard Bozian: *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* by Antonio Damasio





Bible Course may Become Elective in Texas schools

By Victoria Mgbemena, *The Lariat Online*, Baylor University, 18 March 2008

High school students statewide may have the option of taking Bible study courses for elective credit in the academic year starting the Fall of 2009. Last May the state passed a bill which would allow school districts to decide whether to implement Bible studies elective courses. The bill specifically proposed elective courses on the Bible's Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament), and the New Testament in their impact on history and literature of Western civilization. The school districts are not required to implement the studies; rather, it would be their choice to offer the courses.

Robert Scott, commissioner of education for the Texas Education Agency, sent a request to Texas Attn. Gen. Greg Abbott to review parts of the bill for clarity. The bill currently holds that there must be at least 15 students who request each of the courses in order for the district to consider opening them. There is also a question of interpretation, as the phrases "shall" and "may" were used interchangeably in one part of the bill.

State Board Committee member David Bradley said there are schools in the state that already offer Bible studies in a historical perspective. Bradley also said that a district has the ability to propose and implement any course they choose. "The state does not provide specific funding for coursework that individual districts decide to bring in," Bradley said. "It is up to the district to make a decision for their budget and generate specific funding for specific courses." Bradley said the decision to bring the option to the school districts stems in part from public support. "In recent years we have been petitioned to create a state curriculum for Bible studies, just as there are curriculums for science, math and other subjects," Bradley said. "We do not develop and approve curriculums, but are giving districts the option of implementation." Bradley said potential opponents to the decision are currently few, as local districts have been notified of the law.

The bill brings up the question of the separation of church and state, as well as selective implementation with regard to religion. "I will give someone \$1,000 to find where separation of church and state is stated in the U.S. Constitution," Bradley said. "The Bible is the largest-selling publication; it's an important book. What is being implemented is a literature course."

Zach Dawes, a third-year student at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, said he could see how the issue could be hotly debated among those who would desire other religions

to receive implementation in a school curriculum as well. "I do think that an initial reaction will reveal controversy," Dawes said. "Any time you approach faith in schools there will always be discussion. It's a question of how many different religious ideas or philosophies will desire representation in the curriculum once the issue gets to the forefront." Dawes said he would support the law if the classes were taught by qualified teachers. "I would be ... supportive of the law; this nation was founded upon Judeo-Christian principle," Dawes said. "I do believe that people have the freedom to express what they believe as they see fit. This will provide an opportunity for people to dialogue and seek understanding."

The attorney general may take up to six months to disclose an official opinion.

U.S. Must Embrace Obligations of Global Citizenship and Ratify and Apply International Treaties, Says Leading Humanist Organization

Amherst, New York (March 31, 2008)

The recent United States Supreme Court decision in *Medellin v. Texas*, allowing the State of Texas to ignore a judgment of the International Court of Justice, highlights the country's shameful failure to live up to its obligations as a global citizen, according to the Center for Inquiry, a leading humanist organization.

The Center for Inquiry's representative to the United Nations, Dr. Austin Dacey, commented, "If the United States has made a unique contribution to the world, it is the foundational American idea that the power of nation-states is shaped by norms that come before and go beyond the nation-state."

The International Court of Justice had ruled that the convictions of José Medellin and other Mexican nationals be reviewed because they had been denied their rights under the Vienna ConventionCa treaty to which the United States is a party. The Vienna Convention requires foreign consulates to be informed when one of their citizens is arrested.

The Supreme Court's decision forms part of a disturbing pattern in recent years in which the United States has either repudiated or refused to honor its international commitments and obligations. Since 2000, United Nations members have committed themselves to 929 new treaty actions. In that same period, the United State reversed its support for at least five major treaties, including the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty and the International Criminal Court.

In a recent editorial in *Free Inquiry* magazine, Center for Inquiry chairman Dr. Paul Kurtz observes that this stance represents a betrayal of America's commitments. "Following World War II, there was great support in the United States for a new kind of world order based on cooperation ➡"



among nations,” Kurtz said. “This country was in the vanguard of those proclaiming and defending explicit visions of human rights. By contrast, U.S. foreign policy in recent years has been unilateral and preemptive, costing us friends worldwide.”

Refusal to honor our obligations to the global community squanders this country’s moral capital around the world. As an expositor of humanist values that transcend boundaries of state, ethnicity, and sect, the Center for Inquiry calls on the United States to honor our international commitments and implement fully the provisions of the Vienna Convention and all other international treaties and covenants to which the United States is a party. The Center for Inquiry also calls upon Congress and the leadership of both major parties to work to ratify other important treaties that have been accepted by the vast majority of the international community.

The Center for Inquiry/Transnational, a nonprofit, educational, advocacy, and scientific-research think tank based in Amherst, New York, is also home to the Council for Secular Humanism, founded in 1980; the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (formerly CSICOP), founded in 1976; and the Commission for Scientific Medicine and Mental Health. The Center for Inquiry’s research and educational projects focus on three broad areas: religion, ethics, and society; paranormal and fringe-science claims; and medicine and health.

The Center’s for Inquiry’s Web site is: www.centerforinquiry.net

Theory? - Is Florida teaching the whole country?

As *WN* has been reporting, the compromise on science standards approved by the Florida Board of Education calls for replacing the word “evolution” with the phrase “scientific theory of evolution.” This gives teachers an opening to explain to students how science works. Now, according to an editorial in yesterday’s *New York Times*, school officials have inserted “scientific theory of” before every major scientific consensus in the standards, such as the “scientific theory of electromagnetism”. Thanks to a free press doing its job, what began as an attempt by religious conservatives to impose their superstitious beliefs on Florida students is now a lesson to people around the country on the openness of science.

Will the Florida Legislature intervene? A Republican State Senator filed a bill she calls the *Academic Freedom Act*. It would disallow actions against students for taking a position on evolution and ban penalties for teaching alternatives to evolution. The “scientific theory” rule should take care of that; there is no “scientific” alternative to Darwinian evolution.

– *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 7 March 2008



Humanists Join Legal Brief in Pharmacist Controversy

Washington, D.C. - 13 March 2008

The Appignani Humanist Legal Center (AHLC), the legal arm of the American Humanist Association (AHA), participated Wednesday as a sign- on to a “friend of the court” brief prepared by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. The brief was submitted to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit and sets forth the legal opinion that Washington State has the right to require pharmacists to fill doctors’ prescriptions. The brief argues that two Washington State Board of Pharmacy regulations, which require pharmacies to dispense all medications in a timely manner, don’t impinge upon the religious freedom rights of pharmacists and should therefore be upheld.

The brief in the case of *Stormans, Inc. v. Selecky* asks the appeals court to kick the decision back to the district court with instructions to use a different standard for reviewing the regulations.

“Pharmacists know what they’re getting into when they take the job,” commented Bob Ritter, legal coordinator of the AHLC. “Though pharmacies should accommodate religious beliefs when possible, the rights of the patient to receive needed medication takes precedence. Moreover, the regulations don’t target any particular religious belief, as secular pharmacists are required to fill prescriptions also. So the idea that pharmacists are being negatively singled out due to their religion doesn’t hold true.”

The regulations were put in place by the pharmacy board after it became aware of pharmacists in Washington and other states refusing on religious grounds to fill prescriptions for medicines such as birth control and the morning-after pill. However, as noted in the brief, regulations appropriately accommodate pharmacists’ religious beliefs by allowing them to have a colleague at the same store fill the prescription (if the other pharmacist is willing to do so). The brief argues that the regulations don’t single out religious beliefs, and requiring pharmacies to fill prescriptions is a religiously-neutral regulation.

The American Humanist Association was involved in reviewing the Americans United-written brief and recommending changes. The American Humanist Association (www.americanhumanist.org) advocates for the rights and viewpoints of humanists. Founded in 1941 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., its work is extended through more than 100 local chapters and affiliates across America. Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism, affirms our responsibility to lead ethical lives of value to self and humanity.





The Pope Is Coming to America...

And We'll be Ready to Protest the Vatican' Oppressive and Theocratic Agenda for Our Country and the Rest of the World! <<http://www.atheists.org/temp/popeVisit2008.html>>

Pope Benedict, a/k/a Joseph Ratzinger B formerly head of the Holy Inquisition and now Pope of the Roman Catholic

Church B is coming to visit the United States/ Leading clerical and political figures B including President George W. Bush B will be meeting with him during papal visits to Washington, DC and New York City.

American Atheists will be hosting peaceful demonstrations in both cities to protest the papal agenda for cultural, social and political hegemony. We invite all Atheist, Freethought, Secular Humanists and other nonbelievers to join us in speaking out. Whatever label you use to describe your nonbelief and opposition to clerical authoritarianism of all denominations - whether you're a Rationalist, a Bright, a Humanist, Agnostic, Atheist, or a strict Separationist - we welcome you!

Washington, DC - April 16, 2008

The Pope will join Bush for a reception on the south lawn of the White House. Join us beginning at 10:00 AM across the street from the White House in Lafayette Park. Bring signs and banners conveying a polite but firm message in opposition to the Vatican/Ratzinger agenda. There will be a brief program of speakers including:

- Ellen Johnson**, President of American Atheists
- Arlene-Marie**, President of Michigan Atheists and State Director, AA
- Margaret Downey**, President of Atheist Alliance
- Fred Edwards**, Director of Communications, American Humanist Association
- Christopher Arntsen**, President, Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists
- Rick Wingrove**, Capitol Hill Representative, Virginia Director, American Atheists

Lafayette Park is convenient to the McPherson Square station of the Metro.

For further information, contact Rick Wingrove at <rwingrove@atheists.org>

New York City, NY - April 18-20, 2008

The pope is scheduled for two days of events in New York City, and so far the police have not announced specifics on when or where demonstrations will be permitted. We will post that information as soon as we have it.

In the meantime, stay in contact with Ken Bronstein of NYC Atheists. Reach Ken through <nycatheists@aol.com>.

American Atheists is a nationwide movement that defends civil rights for Atheists; works for the total separation of church and state; and addresses issues of First Amendment public policy.

Is Religion Influencing Your Health Care?

New York, 16 March 2008

"Religion's Intrusion into Medicine May Sway Doctor's Decisions," says Professor.

Some 14 percent of physicians in the U.S. will favor their religious beliefs over the well-being of their patients and refrain from administering procedures that their religion is opposed to, says a study published recently in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

These physicians won't tell the patient that these procedures "such as abortion, contraception, contraception for teenagers without parental consent and terminal sedation even exist," says Dr. Richard Sloan, professor of Behavioral Medicine in the Department of Psychiatry of Columbia University Medical Center, New York. "They won't tell patients that they have legal options in those areas and they won't refer these patient to other physicians who will deliver those procedures."

"With 14 percent of physicians influenced by, and acting on, their religious beliefs, that translates to about 40 million Americans treated by those physicians" Dr. Sloan adds. "And that's not counting the other ways in which religion creeps into health-care delivery, such as the belief that prayer will aid a patient's recovery. The claims for a scientific basis for the impact of religious devotion on health is a complete misuse of science and evidence of junk science," the professor states.

"The intrusion of religion into medicine raises ethical issues of manipulation, coercion and invasion of privacy, not to mention actually causing harm; all of which are completely antithetical to the role that physicians are supposed to play in clinical medicine," Dr. Sloan says.

Dr. Sloan is the author of *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine*.

The War God: Bush Speaks To Religious Broadcasters

On Tuesday, the President delivered a 42-minute speech to the National Religious Broadcasters 2008 Convention in Nashville defending the Iraq war policy. It was a friendly audience. Mr. Bush promised to veto any legislation that seeks to reinstitute the hated "fairness doctrine" which required broadcasters to give air time to opposing views: "This organization has had many important missions, but none more important than ensuring our airways - America's airways - stay open to those who preach the "Good News." (Applause, and shouts of "Amen".)

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 14 March 2008



Voodoo Medicine: Treating Acupuncture Addiction.

A couple of weeks ago the Metro Section the Washington Post ran a front page story about a pilot program in a Washington suburb to incorporate acupuncture into the treatment of drug addiction. There is something called the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association that certifies people to administer acupuncture for drug addiction. As I read this I paused to watch a chiropractor on Good Morning America wrenching some poor women's neck to lower her blood pressure. It raised mine. But back to acupuncture: this morning I was sent a notice from the University of Maryland Health Center about it's acupuncture services. "Originating in China about 5,000 years ago," it began, "acupuncture is the oldest continuously practiced medical system in the world." You might prefer something a little more up-to-date. If my health is involved I want to know what was learned yesterday. It goes on to explain that acupuncture is based on the circulation of qi, "the life-giving energy that circulates along channels to all organs and enables them to function." My own university put this out? There is no qi. It's superstitious nonsense. After you stop laughing, check out the health service at your institution. The American health system has completely sold out to this crap.

America's addiction to acupuncture began with New York Times correspondent James Reston's 1971 trip to China, during which he was operated on for acute appendicitis. Contrary to widespread accounts, he was injected with a standard local anesthetic, not acupuncture. It was two days later that he experienced indigestion with only a traditional Chinese physician on duty. He was treated with moxibustion, a form of acupuncture, and needles were used to "get the qi flowing." An Alka-Seltzer might have been better. Reston's own words can be found on the web.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 4 April 2008

Science on the International Space Station. *WN* reported in January that a Japanese astronaut was training with a world-champion boomerang thrower to see if a boomerang can circle in zero gravity. We are pleased to announce that Takao Doi has now conducted the experiment and reports that "it flew the same way it does on Earth." The experiment does help to put the ISS in perspective.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 28 March 2008

Friedrich Nietzsche on faith... (1844-1900)

*Faith: not wanting to know what is true.
If your god doesn't like the way I live,
let him tell me, not you.*

A Big Prize: Templeton Buys Another Scientist.

The 2008 Templeton Prize was awarded yesterday to Polish cosmologist Michael Heller, 72 a Roman Catholic priest. The monetary value of the award is adjusted to be larger than the Nobel Prize. Initially, the prize was given to more saintly types, beginning with Mother Teresa in 1973, but of the last ten winners, seven have been physicists or cosmologists. After all, what's the point in becoming rich and powerful if you can't buy that which is important to you? For the governor of New York, what was important was submission of beautiful women. For Sir John Templeton the important thing is scientists declaring that they see the hand of God in the laws of nature. In 1998 he tried to buy the AAAS Dialog in Science and Religion. He came close, but settled for buying one scientist at a time. Heller believes God's existence can be found in the mathematical nature of the world. At the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow, Poland, where he is a faculty member, Heller says he will use his prize to create a center for the study of science and theology, and will introduce his concept of "the theology of science."

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 14 March 2008

Too Little Water, Or Too Many People?

"More than a billion people do not have access to safe drinking water and two billion have inadequate sanitation." So begins a special section "Water under Pressure" in this week's *Nature*. No matter what fixes science comes up with, they will in time be inadequate if population continues to grow. Global warming, energy crisis, and clean water supplies are the current warning signs. Before that it was hunger, but in a triumph of science, the Green Revolution turned hunger into a political problem. The man most responsible for the Green Revolution, Norman Borlaug said in his 2003 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, "...we are dealing with two opposing forces, the scientific power of food production and the biologic power of human reproduction." In the end, human reproductive instinct always wins; ask Elliot Spitzer. Reproduction means increased food production, that means irrigation, irrigation means wells, that means less ground water. In coastal regions, the wells are bringing in saltwater.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 21 March 2008

Pot and Kettle.

Quote

Weigel, a Catholic theologian, cites Father Richard John Neuhaus's concise definition of jihadism as a religiously inspired ideology built on the teaching "that it is the moral obligation of all Muslims to employ whatever means necessary in order to compel the world's submission to Islam."

Unquote

- Jim Hoagland, *Washington Post National Weekly* (7-13 January 2008) p. 5



Your Editor asked for discussion on the paper *The New Atheism* by Brendan O'Neill in the February issue of *FigLeaves* and he got it:

A Plague on the “New Atheism”

By Gil Gaudia, Ph.D.

I frequently exclaim, “Jesus Christ!” when I strike my thumb with a hammer, but I doubt that these reverent utterances will gain me entrance into Union Theological Seminary, . . . unless I had the assistance of Brendan O’Neill who seems to have the ability to take anyone’s words and give them whatever meaning he chooses, as he does in *FigLeaves* February, 2008. I have no doubt he could reconstruct some of Abraham Lincoln’s writings so that had Honest Abe lived in the twentieth century, Hitler would have chosen The Great Emancipator to head up Auschwitz.

There are many things wrong with Brendan O’Neill’s claim that the “New Atheists are screechy and intolerant,” bent upon bringing “God crashing back down to earth” and “to downgrade mankind itself.” I don’t think he means to insult us Atheists so much as he seems to be arguing for conciliation and tolerance, but in my opinion he revealed a monumental misconception about some of his fellow Atheists like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, whom he names, but also, implicitly, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett, and many others, including myself, all of whose humanistic views are more admirable than those which he implies are his. I’m willing to give him the benefit of the doubt when he says that “the new atheists have given atheism a bad name,” in that he is aiming for a toning down of the rhetoric, but he is completely missing the point which is, that it is necessary to write this way in order to advance the ideas of science, logic and rationality in the face of the religious onslaught facing us today.

His choice of epigraphs, Freeman Dyson’s “There are two kinds of atheists-ordinary atheists who don’t believe in God and passionate atheists who consider God to be their personal enemy,” reveals his lack of perspicacious thinking. I don’t know what kind of an Atheist O’Neill considers himself to be, but both he and Dyson display that their logic is pretty weak since it’s hard to conceive of a personal enemy who doesn’t exist. (“Yeah, the Jabberwocky doesn’t exist and besides he’s my personal enemy.”)

It is significant that the scientific figure he has chosen to set the theme for him, is an English-born American theoretical physicist and mathematician, who is also a believer in UFOs and a Christian. This may say more about Dyson and O’Neill, than Dyson’s many scientific accomplishments ever will. Anyone who can say “Science and religion are two windows that people look through, trying to understand the big universe outside, trying to understand why we are here. The two windows give different views, but they look out at the same universe. Both views are one-sided, neither is complete. Both leave out essential features of the real world. And both are worthy of respect,” is placing religion on an equivalent balance with science as a source of truth, and therefore needs a scientific attitude adjustment.

There is the ring of Stephen Jay Gould’s pandering statement about Non-Overlapping Magisteria, to the claim that both science and religion are pathways to understanding the universe. That means that the account in Genesis of the Creation is as accurate a description of reality as the work of all the astronomers, physicists, geologists, biologists, chemists and anthropologists who have ever lived-combined. I will not bother with other religious (Christian and others) assessments of the universe and its components, that if believed and followed would eradicate the accumulated wisdom of all the repositories of scientific achievement, in all the museums, libraries and universities of the world.

In giving religious bigots even more ammunition than they have already concocted and acquired in labeling Atheists as “evil-intentioned,” O’Neill says, “consider their bizarre and fevered obsession with religious symbols, such as crucifixes worn around the neck, or statements of religious belief by public figures like Tony Blair and George Bush....”

It is hard to believe that such a statement could emanate from an educated person, a display of such fundamental ignorance of psychology and human motivation, that perhaps his views should be ignored as just the ranting of another kook. Symbols are among the most powerful energizing forces among sentient beings and more people have died fighting for or against symbols such as flags, swastikas, and the words in books than most other urges, and yet O’Neill calls such motivating factors a “bizarre and fevered obsession with religious symbols,” a product of their “shallow anti-intellectualism.”

Those whose professions demand that they indoctrinate human beings into killing attitudes such as soldiering and genocide well-understand the force inherent in presenting a symbol as the enemy and then transferring the hatred of the symbol to innocent women and children as the Nazis did in the case of yellow Stars of David. Drill sergeants all over the world and for all time, equally well-understand the power of the flag to inspire young men to throw themselves into the maw of withering lead curtains, screaming, “For my country,” when what they are really dying for is some king’s or president’s oil investments..

O’Neill speaks of the “inhumanity of the new atheism,” “mankind’s twisted genetic makeup” and the “monkeyman realism of the hectoring atheists,” as if these characteristics were accurate descriptions of all the members of FIG; American Atheists (of which I am a member); Humanist Association of America and millions of freethinkers everywhere who by any measure are among the most liberal, humanistic, non-violent and progressive members of societies everywhere.

O’Neill may have unwittingly begun a new branch of Atheism called “self-loathing unbelievers” whose members are so insecure of their legitimate position as leaders in mankind’s quest for freedom from religion, that he forgets the accumulated terrorism of centuries of religion’s oppression and jumps into the fire of self-accusation to protect the undeserving philosophies of supernaturalists.

If most atheists, are to be accused of anything it is the sin of displaying too much acceptance, too much tolerance and too much political correctness with regard to religion and people’s belief in God. By urging moderate and uncritical reaction to patently absurd ideas such as God, heaven, hell, prayer and miracles, O’Neill and other apologists for what he himself calls, “the institution of religion and its ridiculous adherents,” are encouraging the demise of atheism.

As Sam Harris points out in his 2004 book, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the End of Reason*, we atheists may not survive because:

(m)oderates . . . want us to continue using the word ‘God’ as if we knew what we were talking about. And they do not want anything too critical said about people who really believe. . . because tolerance . . . is sacred. To speak plainly and truthfully about the state of our world-to say, for instance that the Bible and the Koran, both contain mountains of life-destroying gibberish-is antithetical to tolerance as moderates currently conceive it. But we can no longer afford the luxury of such political correctness. We must finally recognize the price we are paying to maintain the iconography of our ignorance.





BOOK REVIEW

Deer Hunting with Jesus
Dispatches from America's Class War
by Joe Bageant
(New York: Crown Publishers, 2007)

The author of these dispatches is from a working class family in a small town in the mountains of Virginia. Though his home town, Winchester, is almost within commuting distance of Washington, Bageant tells us the heart of the place is Scotch-Irish, Calvinist backwoods mountaineer. He informs us what the American lower class or working class is about, and why their politics side with the party of corporations and the rich.

Class divisions in this country surely rest on money income, and often is the difference between a median family income and something not much over minimum hourly wages. In the US this generally means having finished high school or less, contrasted to the college educated. In other words, the working class tends to be uninformed of the world beyond the home town, ignorant of reading beyond the local paper, and oblivious of the wider world and its issues. Instead an almost endless non-rational belief system flourishes, from religion to psychic manipulations. Bageant informs us of "the four cornerstones of the American political psyche" are (1) emotion mostly substitutes for thought, (2) fear of the unknown, (3) ignorance, and (4) easy acceptance of propaganda, (p. 82).

Religious belief and zeal is concentrated in the lower class. Working class people have always been evangelicals and fundamentalists, mostly Protestants. The reading classes have amused themselves in depicting unruly, lower class religious fervor and raving evangelist preachers as far back as the 1820s. Fundamentalists tend to be kind, brave, and hard working people. They embody all those virtues Americans are supposed to have, and which movies and TV pictures promote for us. The backwoods, mountain tradition includes hunting, and doing ones own, and the heck with all the panty waist, environmentalist urban busy bodies. In other words, lower class people love their guns. And they can be blood thirsty - didn't god smite the Canaanites. So they volunteer for the Army and

Marines, to fight in Iraq. Bageant calls it "the nation's de facto draft - economic conscription."(p. 200). Mostly they are fleeing economically depressed small towns, and dead end jobs at minimum pay without a future. Thus we get fanatical religion with bellicose chauvinism, "and, a new twist, the high-tech fist of Jesus smiting godless heathen in the name of a crude oil stained flag." (p. 205).

Baigent describes these ignorant, religious, lower class, minimum income people with a great deal of understanding, and yes, love. He grew up thus, but got away in the sixties to educate himself and become a writer and editor. After thirty years he returned to his home town. The self-insight of the sixties is gone, the possibility of "getting away" from your back ground is much less today. And, he points out the less educated, ignorant, religious are the "Americans," for they are the majority. Only about 25 to 30 percent of Americans have college degrees, and a few percent more have some college education.

In conclusion Bageant argues we live today in a culture of illusions, woven for us by the powers of television, but also by the internet and advertising. "Social realism in this country is a television commercial celebrating America."(p. 261) Our equivalent of Soviet social realism is Kirstie Alley on our TV screen, or Jenny Craig promising glad tidings to an obese republic.

I have a distinct feeling of deja vu, as if Bageant has only recently discovered that America is not the brilliant, forward looking country he thought it was. That many of us are not only ignorant, but delight in our ignorance, and even boast of "not knowing." Yet, he has written a very readable book based on his personal experience of home after years away. It is worth reading, but is best taken with the proverbial grain of salt. - Wolf Roder

Quote
Strange a God who mouths Golden Rules and forgiveness, then invented hell; who mouths morals to other people and has none Himself; who frowns upon crimes yet commits them all; who created man without invitation, then tries to shuffle the responsibility for man's acts upon man, instead of honorably placing it where it belongs, upon Himself; and finally with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor, abused slave to worship Him! - Mark Twain
Unquote



May Potluck:
Monday May 5, 2008 6:30 PM



April Meeting
Sunday, April 27, 2008 2:00 PM
At the Vernon Manor



FIG Leaves
P.O. Box 19034
Cincinnati, OH 45219

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists.

Though most of our members are secular humanists, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.



To foster a community of secular humanists dedicated to improving the human condition through rational inquiry and creative thinking unfettered by superstition, religion, or any form of dogma.

In accordance with our purpose, we have established the following goals:

- To provide a forum for intelligent exchange of ideas for those seeking fulfillment in an ethical secular life.
- To develop through open discussion the moral basis of a secular society and encourage ethical practices within our own membership and the community at large.
- To inform the public regarding secular alternatives to supernatural interpretations of the human condition.
- To support and defend the principles of democracy, free speech, and separation of church and state as expressed in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights.

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail figinfo@gofigger.org, or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.