

FIG LEAVES

Volume 20 Issue 4

April 2011

April FIG Meeting: Sunday, May, 1 at 1:00 pm

Cleopatra Exhibit at the Cincinnati Museum Center

Cincinnati Museum Center, 1301 Western Avenue, 45203

Cost: \$10 for FIG Members (Regular Rates are \$19 for group or \$23 for adults), \$19 for non-FIG members.

RSVP: If you plan on attending the exhibit or brunch, please RSVP to Shawn Jeffers at 513.404.8191 or e-mail at FIGCincinnati@gmail.com

The Cincinnati Museum Center is hosting Cleopatra: The Search for the Last Queen of Egypt through September 5, 2011, an exhibition featuring the world of Cleopatra VII, which has been lost to the sea and sand for nearly 2,000 years. The exhibition features nearly 150 artifacts from Cleopatra's time and will take you inside the present-day search for the elusive queen, which extends from the sands of Egypt to the depths of the Bay of Aboukir near Alexandria. See statuary, jewelry, daily items, coins and religious tokens that archaeologists have uncovered from the time surrounding Cleopatra's rule, all of which are visiting the U.S. for the first time.

At 11:30 AM, before the meeting, we will meet for brunch at the Frisch's (1001 Gest Street, Cincinnati, OH 45203). Frisch's is two blocks down (south) from the Museum Center and will allow us to meet up for food and carpool in order to save on parking fees for the exhibit. If you are interested in attending the exhibit and/or brunch, please contact Shawn Jeffers.

Congratulations George! All the Best!

George Maurer's Ninetieth Birthday

George Maurer is known to anyone who has been around FIG for a while as a genial, knowledgeable fellow. Many do not know that 20 years ago, he was one of the original founding members of FIG in November, 1991, when we filed our Articles of Incorporation with the State of Ohio. He became FIG's first Treasurer.

As Treasurer, he filed an application for Recognition of Tax Exemption with the IRS in July, 1996. It took many months to answer the Internal Revenue Service's questions and to overcome their apparent reluctance, but they gave in, and granted recognition of our tax-exempt status on March 25, 1997.

George also served as our President in the 90s, and was a member of FIG's Board of Directors until a few years ago.

George now lives in the Evergreen Retirement Community. He welcomes telephone calls from FIG members, (513) 871-8718

- Joe Levee

Inside Page

March Meeting.....	2
Science Cafe:	4
Things To Do, Things To See....	5
Science Book Club.....	5
Contradiction Corner	6
In The News	7
Poem: <i>The French Revolution</i> By Erasmus Darwin	7
Letters To The Editor	8
Poem: <i>Prometheus</i> By Johann Wolfgang Goethe.....	8
We Should Judge Their Politics, Not Their Religion By Herb Silverman	9
Hypocritical Values By Herb Silverman	10
<i>God And Sex: What The Bible Really Says</i> By Micheal Coogan Book Review By Wolf Roder	11

Events

April Meeting

Tuesday, May 1, 2011, 1:00 PM
Cincinnati Museum Center,
1301 Western Avenue, 45203

May Meeting

Tuesday, May 24, 2011, 7:00 PM
Hannaford Suites Hotel
Details are still being worked out.



March Meeting

Atheist Coming Out Stories

The meeting of the Free Inquiry Group in March was an exploration of the concept of being recognized as a freethinker and being public about the conclusions that we reach by practicing free thought. As Shawn Jeffers mentioned in the introduction to the meeting, many free thought leaders, particularly Dave Silverman, president of American Atheists, advocate “coming out” as atheists, secular humanists or non-believers in order to advance the free thought movement and claim a place for ourselves in social and public discourse. Our goal with this meeting was to help people to think about their own coming out stories, what led them to consider atheism, and to what level they might want to be involved with atheist organizations and activism.

Four members of FIG presented their coming out stories to the group. Their candid recollections about what led them to be non-believers, their decisions to reveal their new life-stance to others, and the results of their coming out were alternately inspiring, shocking, liberating, and sobering. FIG is grateful for the willingness and courage that it took to share such personal stories with our group. After the presentations, we took a short break and then split the group into four smaller groups, each containing one of the speakers. This allowed group members to express their opinions, attitudes and reservations about their own situations in a more intimate setting.

Our first speaker was Julianna Parnell. Her decisions to come out as a bi-sexual member of the LGBT movement and as an atheist were inextricably connected. She was not raised in a religious or homophobic household. As a pubescent teen, Julianna was prepared to be baptized after attending church for some time. Then she read the Bible. Her attraction to girls conflicted with the homophobic rants of Leviticus and her minister, causing self-doubt and guilt. Her conversation with her mother about not wanting to be a Christian anymore was difficult and stressful. It was more intense than coming out to her mother as being bi-sexual. What drove her to question her faith was the fact that it caused her to feel guilty about being herself. After several years of contemplation and study, she abandoned her remaining deist leanings and acknowledged her atheism. Most reactions to her outspokenness about her bi-sexuality and her atheism are positive.



Julianna Parnell

The next speaker was Dirk Iwema, whose separation from the church was the most recent. Two years ago, he made the conversion from being a very involved life-long member of the church to being a freethinking skeptic. Really studying the Bible was instrumental in his transformation. Finally realizing that the cherry-picking of certain Bible stories de-emphasizes other unattractive and contradictory parts of the Bible led him to question his faith and eventually leave it. His story of coming out to his daughters was difficult to hear. At first, his three daughters were shocked and distressed. They hoped that he would change his mind and return to religion. One of



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to figmessage at gofigger dot org; or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 53174, Cincinnati, OH 45253. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., its board, or officers.

FIG Board of Directors:

President: John Welte
 Vice President: Donna Loughry
 Secretary: Susan Davis
 Treasurer: Bryan Sellers,
 Program Chair: Shawn Jeffers,
 Members: Michele Grinoch,
 Philip Ferguson,
 Joe Levee,
 Pam McKenna
 Dennis Davis
 Terry Kassnel
 FIG Leaves Editor: Wolf Roder.



Memberships run from:

1 January to 31 December.
 One year: \$30
 Family: \$40

If you join during the year, you receive a \$2 discount for each month that has passed.

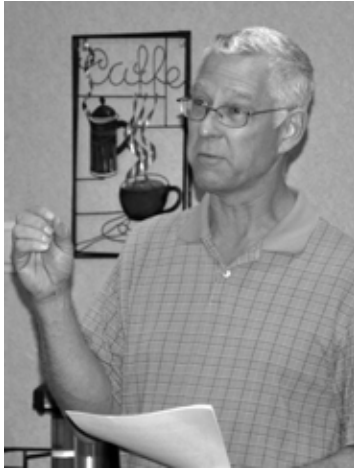
We request contributions above membership dues. Contributions are tax deductible.



FIG LEAVES



them revealed to another that she wished that her dad had said he had cancer rather than losing his faith. It would have been easier for her to accept. Imagine the pain this caused him to feel. Later, when his wife, Karen, came out



Dirk Iwema

to the daughters there was a lot of argument and she and Dirk were ostracized and kept from visiting with their grandchildren. Other family members told them that they were going to hell and that the devil had hold of them. They told them that they were not the same. They told them that they had changed. Dirk and Karen emphasized through an email to the family and in person when they could,

that they were the same people with the same morals and love for their family that they had always been. Not being outspoken or evangelical as a Christian, Dirk lived his life as an example of how to be a good Christian. Now he follows the same pattern. "Even without religion we can be good people, moral people, somebody with high ethical standards."

Lynn Lebevire is the vice president of the Cincinnati chapter of PFLAG (Parents Family and Friends of Lesbian and Gays), a support, education and advocacy group. After a non-religious childhood in Britain, she became a member of the Mormon faith at the age of thirteen. For many years while living in Germany and then the U.S., she did not give much thought to religion. Then she came to Cincinnati. She started to attend a Catholic church. She enjoyed the ritual and liked the people there. She became an acolyte. Eleven years ago, her son came out as being gay. Her priest did not offer sufficient support for her so



Lynn Lebevire

she joined PFLAG. Listening to parents trying to deal with their feelings about their gay or lesbian children, she realized that about 90% of those who had trouble coming to grips with the situation were religious. After initially being angry with these parents, she began a period of contemplation and study that led her to become an atheist. Being naturally outspoken she does not refrain from mentioning her atheism in groups she is involved with. She is continually shocked by people's reaction to her honesty. She has been asked if she was going to be a troublemaker. Her husband, who is not a churchgoer, was shocked by her use of the word atheist. Lynn compared coming out as an atheist as being the same as coming out as being gay. It is the point where you refuse to deny what you are and refuse to act as if you are something you are not.

Our last speaker was Dennis Davis. He was raised in an extremely fundamental "holy roller" religious family. He became an ordained minister in a Pentecostal church when he was 14 and had his own church by the time he was 19. He spoke in tongues, rolled in the aisles when overcome with the "spirit" and believed he should be able to heal the sick as it says in the Bible. Once, after fasting for days by consuming nothing but water and being emotionally distraught during prayer, he asked why God had not helped him to heal. People were still sick when he had sincerely believed he could cure them and had honestly tried to do so. Something told him, "Because there is no one there." He was to preach that night. Instead of preaching, he announced to the congregation that he was resigning as their pastor because he doubted what he once believed. After a year of study, he acknowledged his atheism. He became famous in his small town. His mother did not speak to him for three years. He proudly identified himself as an atheist even though he knew no one else who identified that way. This was a lonely road until he discovered FIG and the

⇒



Dennis Davis



Atheists Meet Up Group.

These stories have some common threads. All of these people went through a period of study, contemplation and reflection on the road to losing their faith. Atheism is not an easy or hasty conclusion. The almost complete rejection of these people by those who know them well is another common thread. However, the most impressive thread these stories share is the thread of integrity. Each of our speakers is unwilling to live a lie. They need to be true to themselves and to their family and friends. Discovering that you no longer have faith in what is generally accepted true by society is hard. Making that discovery known to those you care about when you know that it will cause disruption is even more difficult. Facing rejection is daunting but all of our speakers have mustered the courage to live as their conscience tells them they must. Their stories are emotional and inspiring. We thank them for sharing their stories and making this a memorable FIG meeting.

– reported by John Welte



Some Paraprosookian* Thoughts

- I asked God for a bike, but I know God doesn't work that way, so I stole a bike and asked for forgiveness.
- Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.
- We never really grow up, we only learn how to act in public.
- Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit; Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.
- Dolphins are so smart that within a few weeks of captivity, they can train people to stand on the very edge of the pool and throw them fish.



* A paraprosookian is a figure of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected in a way that causes the reader or listener to reframe or reinterpret the first part
In an e-mail from my Father - Donna

Report on the Science Café for March

Climate Change - Phooey

Dr. Eric Gruenstein presented this program to the group gathered for the Science Café. He is a Professor of Biochemistry at UC and is the founder of the UC Green Movement. He is also a graduate of the Gore Institute for Climate Change in Tennessee. He intended for the title of his talk to be ambiguous. Would he support anthropocentric global warming theories or be against them? He definitely came down on the side of the theory that global warming is occurring and it is a result of the activities of humans. He stated that there is no longer evidence to support a contradictory position. His concern for the well-being of his grandchildren in the future motivated him to learn about and speak out about global warming.



Dr. Eric Gruenstein

The major contributor to climate change is greenhouse gas in the atmosphere. With graphs and other visual aids, Dr. Gruenstein showed that the levels of greenhouse gases have risen in our atmosphere for the last one thousand years, but most precipitately since the dawn of the industrial revolution. Temperature changes have corresponded with levels of CO2 with warmer times having more CO2 in the atmosphere. Our levels of CO2 now are greater than they have ever been measured and are predicted by computer models to go even higher. This will cause major problems as the polar ice caps melt and sea levels rise. One of the main points made by Dr. Gruenstein is that climate change is non-linear. Some occurrences contribute to a feedback loop that accelerates warming. For example, ice reflects sunlight and helps to cool the planet. As the ice caps and glaciers melt there is less reflective surface and the ice will melt even faster.

Another contributor is the human population growth. As the population grows, more energy and crop land is needed. Dr. Gruenstein pointed out that this growth has begun to level off. Most scientists think that we are currently in the sixth major extinction event in our planet's history and that fifty percent of known species today could be wiped out by global warming. Sea animals





are the first to be affected as the chemical composition of the seawater changes making them unable to survive. Melting ice and subsequent flooding, plus the shrinking of forest habitats are major threats to land animals.

Easter Island was used as the foremost illustration of the human characteristic of keeping the status quo at all costs. The inhabitants of this island busily cut down trees in order to build homes, boats to fish, and log rollers to transport the huge stone effigies that they built and erected as status symbols. When they finally chopped down the last tree, they were unable to continue to build boats that would have enabled them to escape the environmental destruction that they had caused. After trees became extinct population declined drastically. We do not have the option of leaving since as of now there is no place else that we can go.

Another illustration that Dr. Gruenstein used concerned a frog. If you place a frog into boiling water, it will jump out. If you place a frog in cold water and slowly heat it to boiling, it will stay in the water until it dies unless someone rescues it. We must be aware of gradual changes in our environment in order to stop runaway effects of climate change. There is no one to rescue us when our "water boils."

Although much of Dr. Gruenstein's forecast was gloomy, he did have this good news. We have the knowledge and the technology to combat this problem. Wind, solar, geothermal, and bio-fuels are all renewable resources. Nuclear power is cleaner than coal but each plant must be built with state of the art safety technology. The French are at the forefront of some new methods of recycling nuclear waste. The Japanese will no doubt learn from the recent earthquake and tsunami disaster and build safer nuclear plants in the future. Conservation of energy can go a long way towards preserving a viable environment for our grandchildren. The biggest hurdle to overcome is the lack of political will to initiate these changes. We can all contribute by conserving energy and working to influence corporate and government leaders internationally at all levels to enact energy conservation measures. Hopefully it is not too late to reverse the negative effects that humans have had on the global environment.

- report by John Welte



THINGS TO DO...

THINGS TO SEE...



Science Book Club

All the meetings are held at the downtown Cincinnati Library in Meeting Room 3A at 2:30 on the third Sunday of each month with the following exceptions:

May 15 meeting in the Huenefeld Tower Room
June 5 and 26 on the 1st and 4th Sundays in Room 3A

Schedule for 2011:

April 17 - *You Are Not a Gadget* by Jaron Lanier, 2010, 209pp

May 15 - *On The Take : How America's Complicity With Big Business Can Endanger Your Health* by Jerome Kas-sirer, 2005, 251 pp

June 5 - *Wrong: Why Experts Keep Failing Us - and How to Know When Not to Trust Them* by David Freedman, 2010, 295pp

June 26 - *A Life Decoded: My Genome, My Life* by J. Craig Venter, 2007, 390pp

July 17 - *13 Things That Don't Make Sense* by Michael Brooks, 2008, 240pp

August 21- *The Dominant Animal: Human Evolution & The Environment* by Paul R. Ehrlich 2008, 420pp

September 18 - *Sacred Geometry* by Stephen Skinner, 2006, 160pp

October 16 - *What Have You Changed Your Mind About? Today's Leading Minds Rethink Everything* by John Brockman, ed, 2009, 387pp

November 20 - *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker, Pulitzer Prize, 1973, 314pp

December 18 - *The Dependent Gene: Fallacy of Nature vs. Nurture*, David S. Moore, 2002





Contradiction Corner

by Dennis Davis



For April I will focus on contradictions related to Jesus' death and resurrection since Christians will be celebrating Easter this month. Of all the myths in the Bible, the stories related to the passion and resurrection by far contain more contradictions than any other.

I'll begin with the passion story, but a little background information is necessary. Jews celebrate Passover with a feast to commemorate God "passing over" their houses in the Plague of the First Born just prior to the Exodus. Jews in ancient times, as still today, considered the day to run from sundown to sundown, so the Passover meal would be prepared during the day (known as the Day of Preparation) to be eaten that evening when Passover began after sundown.

In Mark 14, the disciples make preparation for their Passover meal with Jesus at what has come to be known as The Last Supper. After the meal is eaten, they go the Gethsemane where Jesus is arrested, then he is tried overnight, crucified and dies during the morning on Passover (at the ninth hour on Friday).

Let us compare this to the Gospel of John. Starting in chapter 13, John also tells of a final meal together but gives no indication that it is the Passover meal. Across several chapters John also has the betrayal occurring in the garden followed by trials. But more interestingly, in John 19:14 when Pilate pronounces Jesus' sentence, we are told that "It was the Day of Preparation for Passover, and it was about noon." So John has Jesus dying sometime on Thursday afternoon. It appears that the author of John was interested in drawing an allegory between the lambs being slaughtered for Passover and the death of Jesus, and this would not work had he used Mark's timeline.

There are many, many more contradictions in the passion story such as:

- In Mark 14:33 Jesus takes Peter, James and John with him to Gethsemane to pray where he was arrested, but Luke 22:39 has Jesus go "about a stone's cast" away from all his disciples on the Mount of Olives where the arrest takes place.
- Matthew 26:57 says that Jesus was taken directly from Gethsemane to be judged by the high priest Caiaphas while John 18:13 says he was taken to Annas his father-in-law

first.

- Mark 14:61-62 has Jesus answer "I am" at his trial before Caiaphas when he is asked if he is the Son of God, yet Luke 22:66-70 has him refusing to say so.
- At Jesus' trial before Pilate, John 18:33-37 has him reply to Pilate's questions with a mini-sermon while Matthew 27: 11-14 says he refused to answer his questions.
- Acts 1:16-19 tells us that Judas used his thirty pieces of silver to buy a field that he died in after he stumbled and fell there. But Matthew 27:3-8 says the priests bought the field with the money after Judas threw the silver at them in the temple. Matthew also says that Judas hung himself instead of dying from a fall.
- Matthew 27:32 has the Romans compel Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross for him while John 19:16-18 has Jesus carry the cross all the way to Golgotha by himself.

There are so many contradictions between the gospel stories of the passion that I could write a whole book on them alone; however, I will switch to the resurrection at this time.

- The differing resurrection stories have Mary Magdalene by herself (John); two women named Mary (Matthew); two Mary's and Salome (Mark); and an undetermined number of women (Luke) all being the first to discover the empty tomb.
- Mark 16:1 has the women arriving at sunrise while John 20:1 has Mary Magdalene arriving while it is still dark.
- Mark says the three women entered the tomb to discover a single young man sitting there, but John says Mary never entered the tomb and that she saw two angels instead.
- Matthew 28:8 says the women immediately ran to tell all the disciples what they saw, but Mark 16:8 says they didn't tell anyone about the empty tomb.

Of all the contradictions that I've written about so far, I find these to be the most amazing, because the death and resurrection of Jesus is the most fundamental bedrock of Christian doctrine. The modern day Christian accepts the myth that the gospels were eyewitness accounts, yet they contain contradictions on the most important details of the most important story. Can anyone imagine that eyewitnesses could forget which day of the week the most important person in their life died on? Is it plausible that any of the twelve Jewish apostles would have forgotten that their last meal with Jesus just happened to be on a Passover? Not very likely. From these contradictions we are forced to conclude that the New Testament gospels are a collection of myths and not factual accounts at all. ☚



House Committee Votes To Overturn Natural Law.

The price of gasoline at the pump is at the highest level ever for this time of year. That's not all bad; raising the price is the only effective way to reduce consumption, thereby improving the environment and delaying the dreaded Hubbert peak. There are, however, two ways to raise the price to the consumer: increase the profit margin of the oil industry, or levy a large consumption tax. The revenue from a heavy consumption tax would help to pay the crushing costs of the Bush economy. You will not be surprised, however, to learn that the Republican Congress overwhelmingly prefers the first method, which will be embodied in the Energy Tax Prevention Act of 2011, in preparation. But first they had to amend the Clean Air Act to eliminate the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency over greenhouse gases. According to an editorial in last week's *Nature*, the Republican disdain for climate science was evident in the "anger and distrust directed at scientists and scientific societies." The widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level, is unequivocal evidence of global warming.

- *What's New*, Robert Park, 25 March 2011



Midwesterners: is this us?

Here in the Midwest, we're brought up to act older and to be solemn little children, and serious young people. Many of us don't indulge in extravagances (vacations, impractical cars, haircuts that cost more than \$10) until our late thirties or early forties. Having been middle aged for most of the first half of our lives, we start thinking about maybe sowing some of the wild oats we've kept in the granary. Of course, it's hard to be wholly foolish knowing as much Scripture as we do, but sometimes in a particularly warm spring, we achieve a breakthrough and trade in the van for a red MG convertible, have our hair bleached and our foreheads Botoxed, take dancing lesson, buy the powder-blue tuxedo, look at beachfront property on Antigua, and switch from beer to Campari. Our friends are embarrassed for us. We disappear for six months and return, chastened, and take a back pew in church.

The Christian religion, let me point out, is no guarantee against foolishness. In the church that I go to, which is one of those old-fashioned churches where we sing out of hymnals, not off PowerPoint screens, and the minister doesn't have much hair and we don't hold our arms up in the air (we could but it would make it harder to sing from the hymnal), people seem to have about as many problems as they have over at First Atheist. We set out to love our neighbor and the next thing we're running off with her in the red MG.

- by Garrison Keillor, *Funny Times*, April 2011, p. 9



The French Revolution

Long has the giant on France's plains
 Ingloriously slept, unconscious of his chains.
 Round his large limbs were wound a thousand strings
 By the weak hands of confessors and kings.
 O'er his closed eyes a triple veil was bound
 And steely rivets locked him to the ground.
 While stern Bastille with iron cage entrails
 His folded limbs, and hems in marble walls.
 Touched by the patriot-flame, he rent amazed
 The flimsy bonds, and round and round him gazed;
 Starts up from earth, above the admiring throng
 Lifts his celestial face and towers along.
 High o'er his face his hundred arms he rears,
 Plowshares his swords and pruning hooks his spears,
 Calls to the Good and Brave with voice that rolls
 Like Heaven's own thunder round the echoing poles,
 Gives to the winds his banner broad unfurled
 And gathers in its shade the living world!

- Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802)



More Paraproductian Thoughts

- Evening news is where they begin with 'Good evening', and then proceed to tell you why it isn't.
- To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism; To steal from many is research





Letters To The Editor



Tuesday, March 29, 2011,
The Post and Courier, Charleston, SC

Papal Exoneration

Pope Benedict XVI has exonerated Jews of responsibility for the death of Jesus Christ. As pointed out by Michael Kogan in a March 13 *Post and Courier* article, the pope now claims that years of anti-Semitism resulted from a “misreading of the New Testament.” The pope spins the passage to be comforting because the blood of Jesus washes away sins. Unfortunately, this breaking news comes 2,000 years too late.

The passage from Matthew 27:25 that “the blood of Jesus is on all Jews and on all their children” has led to countless murders of Jews by zealous Christians. Martin Luther referred to the Jews as “full of the devil’s feces, which they wallow in like swine.”

At the time of the Holocaust, Germany was approximately 50 percent Catholic and 50 percent Lutheran. The Christian Social Party was an anti-Semitic party formed in the German Empire in 1878, a predecessor to the National Socialist (Nazi) Party. As theologian Richard Rubenstein pointed out, “Nazis did not invent a new villain. They took over the 2,000-year-old tradition of the Jew as a villain. The roots of the death camps must be sought in the structure of Christianity.”

While it’s nice to know that the pope has “exonerated” my fellow Jews and me, I’m disturbed that even today so many people base their understanding of morality on an ancient book with many outdated and untenable beliefs.

Ethical codes tend to reflect communal norms. Those who continue to view the Bible or the Koran as their only moral guideline must belatedly look for biblical justifications for socially evolved ethical conclusions.

I anxiously await an interpretation on how Jews are put in a favorable light by John 8:44, “The Devil is father of the Jews.”

Then again it would be much easier to apply common sense while reading ancient and modern texts, and on that basis decide what is reasonable and applicable today.

Herb Silverman
Wraggborough Lane, Charleston

Prometheus

Johann Wolfgang Goethe
(1773)

Cover your heaven,
Zeus,
With clouds and haze!
And, like a boy
Who beheads thistles,
Practice on oaks and
mountain tops!
You yet must
Let my earth remain.
For whose fire
You envy me.

I know nothing smaller
Under the sun than you
gods!
You meagerly feed
Your majesty
With forced sacrifices
And the breath of
prayers,
And you would starve if
Children and beggars
Were not fools dependent
on hope.

When I was a child,
And did not know one
thing from another,
I turned my bewildered
eyes
Toward the sun, as if
there was
An ear to hear my lament,
A heart like mine,
To take pity on me when
I was hard pressed.

Who aided me
Against the arrogance of
the Titans?
Who saved me from
death,

From slavery?
Did you not accomplish
everything yourself,
My devoted glowing
heart?
And in your youth and
goodness,
Deceived, did you not
warmly give thanks
for salvation
To the sleeper up above?

I honor you? What for?
Have you ever soothed
the pains
Of the burdened?
Have you ever stilled
the tears
Of the anguished?
Have I not been forged
into manhood
By almighty time
And eternal fate,
My lords and yours?

Did you perhaps imagine
I was to hate life,
Escape into deserts,
Because not all
My budding dreams
came to fruition?

Here I sit and form
people
In my image,
A race that shall be like
me,
To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy and to be
happy B
And to pay you no
mind,
Like I !



We Should Judge Their Politics, Not Their Religion

by Herb Silverman, *Washington Post*, 8 Feb. 2011

Silverman is Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston

With former Utah governor Jon Huntsman and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney both believed to be gearing up for a run for the presidency, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has again found itself answering questions about what these two prominent members believe.

Post reporter Sandhya Somashekhar wrote in a story published Tuesday that Mormon leaders see the ascendancy of these and other Mormons (such as convert Glenn Beck) as a sign “that the community has finally ‘arrived,’” but added “researchers say there remains a deep mistrust of Mormons and that little has changed in public opinion to suggest that voters will be more open this year than they were in 2007.”

If conservative Christian and Mormons share a political agenda, why do suspicions still plague Mormon politicians? Do media personalities such as Glenn Beck help or hurt the cause?

On my office wall is a cartoon showing a bearded guru with a sign-up sheet. A giant thermometer in the cartoon marks off increasingly larger categories of religion, starting at the bottom with “handful of wackos,” and then up the thermometer with “bunch of nuts,” “dittoheads,” “cult,” “faction,” “sect,” and at the top --mainstream religion. The poster next to the guru says, “Join us and help us reach our goal!”

Regardless of race, color, creed, sex, or sexual orientation, politicians try to portray themselves as part of the American cultural mainstream. Mormonism, a relatively young religion compared with others, is not yet part of that mainstream. In theory, though not at the present moment, I would like to see a Mormon become president. I voted for one, the late Senator Mo Udall, in the 1976 Democratic primary. I think the more political diversity we have, the better off we all will be. I watched with some sympathy as Mormon candidate Mitt Romney ran unsuccessfully for president in 2008. My sympathy was not for his political positions, but because surveys show the main thing athe-

ists and Mormons have in common is that a significant number of Americans wouldn’t vote for either, no matter how qualified the candidate may be.

In trying to explain how reasonable Mormonism is, Romney said on the June 5, 2006 Charlie Rose show, “The most unusual thing in my church is that we believe there was once a flood upon the earth, and that a man took a boat and put two of each animal inside the boat, and saved humanity by doing that.” As far as I’m concerned, Romney essentially said that his holy book is no more preposterous than the holy books of the other candidates. I think he has a point.

According to the Book of Mormon, after Jesus died, but before he went to heaven, he stopped in the United States. This story was chiseled in Egyptian hieroglyphics on gold plates and buried in Palmyra, New York. Mormons further believe that in 1827, the angel Moroni led Joseph Smith to the gold plates and a magic stone. When Smith put the magic stone into his hat and buried his face in it, he was able to translate the gold plates into English.

This story sounds silly to me, but no sillier than the claim that Jesus rose from the dead, or that one can drink his blood and eat his body every Sunday, or that a talking snake tricked Adam and Eve into eating a piece of fruit. Since many politicians feel they must say they believe in the foundations of their religion in order to get elected, I expect that many politicians simply pretend to believe.

But regardless of how “mainstream” a politician’s religion, the bottom line is that we need to avoid stereotyping “the other.” Mo Udall and Glenn Beck have essentially nothing in common other than calling themselves Mormons. The same can be said about Christian reverends Pat Robertson and Jesse Jackson, or Jewish senators Joe Lieberman and Bernie Sanders. And I can’t think of another Quaker who supported Quaker President Richard Nixon’s widening the war in Southeast Asia and secretly bombing Cambodia. I think the religious views of politicians should mostly remain a private matter. The only related question I would ask candidates is whether their religious beliefs are likely to influence their votes on public policy.

Ideally, whether someone is a Christian, Muslim, Jew, or atheist should not matter in a country that prides itself in having freedom of religion and conscience. We should judge our candidates on the content of their character and their political positions, rather than on their professed religious beliefs. That’s my idea of true religious freedom.



Hypocritical Values

by Herb Silverman, *Washington Post*, 30 March 2011
Silverman is Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.

If I had the power to administer truth serum to politicians, liberal or conservative, I would ask them three questions:

1. If your personal principles and values were the opposite of the majority of voters, would you pretend to believe what the voters believe?
2. If you didn't care one way or the other about an issue important to voters, would you pretend it was one of your most important issues?
3. Do you pretend to believe that God wants you to run for public office, has told you the issues to support, or has forgiven you for past transgressions after you were caught?

Those who would answer "Yes" to all three would score 100% in my hypocrisy test, not a value I prize. Since I don't have a truth serum to administer, I just make educated guesses about politicians.

During the 2008 primaries, I awarded my "hypocrisy" prize to Mitt Romney. He was for gay rights and abortion rights when running for governor of Massachusetts. As a Republican candidate for president, he claimed his positions had "evolved." One could say he was for equal rights before he was against them.

I agree with would-be American president Newt Gingrich's comment about politics to a group of Christian pastors: "If you don't start with values, the rest of it doesn't matter." But that's about it for my agreement with Newt. At least Romney's hypocrisy was not the butt of late-night comedians. Perhaps Newt Gingrich has even less respect for Pat Robertson's television network than I do, since he assumed viewers were gullible enough to believe that he committed adultery in the 1990s because he was working so hard for the country. Newt then claimed that God (if not the American public) understood and forgave him for his excessive patriotism.

Gingrich has a long track record for political pandering and hypocrisy. My state of South Carolina is home to Susan Smith, who in 1994 tragically drowned her two children and blamed it on a fictitious black carjacker. Three days after the drowning, Gingrich took

the opportunity to say that such violence somehow arose from a Democratic-controlled political system. However, Susan Smith's stepfather, Beverly Russell, hadn't been campaigning for depraved Democrats, but for Newt Gingrich. Russell had been a Republican leader in South Carolina and local organizer of Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, championing "family values" and "school prayer" as partisan Republican issues. Gingrich, however, remained silent during Smith's trial, when it was revealed that Russell had molested her since she was fifteen, and she had attempted suicide twice by age 18. That's a hard one to blame on Democrats.

Back to my three-question quiz. While it's scary to have hypocrites like Romney and Gingrich as viable candidates, I'm even more worried about potential candidates like Bachman, Palin, or Huckabee, who might actually believe what they say about God telling them what to do. I like my values to be based on evidence, not on supernatural voices; I also like my science to be based on the latest findings, rather than on a book written a couple thousand years ago in a pre-scientific era.

When it comes to values, no political party or politician has the right to define them for the rest of America.



.....

Moses was praying to God to free his people when the voice of God was heard from the heavens: "Moses," he said, "I have good news and bad news."

"What is the good news?" asked Moses.

And God said: "If Pharaoh will not let my people go I will send down a rain of frogs, a plague of locusts and a plague of flies, and I will turn rivers to blood. And if Pharaoh pursues you, I shall open a path for you through the Red Sea, but close it again to drown his army."

"That would be helpful," enthused Moses, "but tell me, what's the bad news?"

God said: "Before I can do all this, you have to prepare an environmental impact statement."

.....





BOOK REVIEW

God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says

by Michael Coogan

(New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc. 2010)

The author of sex in the Bible is a seasoned interpreter of Hebrew scripture; and the editor of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*. This collection of writings has a quite different meaning to Jews than to Christians. To Jews it specifies the nature and history of god's relationship with his people. Christians accept the Hebrew Scripture they call the Old Testament mainly for prophecies of the coming of Jesus, whom they regard as their redeemer. Jews find no such prophecy in their scriptures, neither do scholars. Christians disagree widely about what stories and which commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures they accept as true or binding.

Coogan's first chapter is devoted to introducing us to the euphemisms and obliquities of Biblical language. Many words can be used to refer to sexual intercourse. Most modern readers do understand that knowledge in the Biblical sense can mean carnal knowledge referring to sex – starting with the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis. References to hands, feet, eating, to lie with, to come into, to laugh together, all may refer to the sexual act, which is never directly labeled as such. Uncovering the nakedness as well means having sex with somebody, which raises all sorts of questions about what did Ham do to Noah when he “saw the nakedness of his father” (Gen 9, 22); and why was it such a horrific doing?

Fundamentalists still claim the Bible is god's word, anyone can read it, the meaning is plain, and indeed god is the author of the scripture. In that case, Coogan suggests, god is a terrible and forgetful writer: (p. xv)

Did he give Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb? Did David kill Goliath or did Elhanan? Was the Last Supper a Passover meal or not? For each of these questions and innumerable others, the Bible gives more than one answer. . . . – over and over, the same story is told and retold, with many changes and wildly divergent styles.

The author agrees with other scholars that the Bible can only be explained as the work of many human writers, who had different theological understandings and objectives and did not necessarily agree with one another. It is difficult to think Coogan himself still believes in god or the book.

The Bible takes as a given that free men will have several wives (*polygyny*). That some persons are slaves is another given. Men have absolute power over their wives and daughters, whose status is roughly equal to that of slaves. When the tenth commandment (Ex 20,17) lists coveting the neighbor's wife between coveting his house and his slaves and his livestock, we get the right idea that women were just another form of property. Men could have intercourse with their slave women and have children with them. The more sons, slaves, and followers a man had, the more powerful he would be.

A man could divorce his wife or send his slave woman away. As in polygynous societies in general, divorce was rare. Why get rid of a wife, only to forego her labor and service, when it is easy to add another, younger woman into his bed and household. Thus there are many rules in the Bible, which will strike us as different from what modern Christians allege or expect.

God and Sex is a relatively short book, 196 pages of text. It gives straight answers to questions about this topic, can be used as a reference book, and belongs into the hands of anyone interested in comparing modern Christian claims with just what the Bible does say.

- Wolf Roder



Quote

A sense of humor keen enough to show a man his own absurdities will keep him from the commission of all sins, or nearly all, save those worth committing.

- Samuel Butler

Unquote

Quote

Should we all confess our sins to one another we would all laugh at one another for our lack of originality.

- Kahlil Gibran

Unquote



May Meeting
Tuesday, April 24, 2010, 7:00 PM



April Meeting
Tuesday, May 1, 2011, 1:00 PM



FIG Is On Facebook
If you have a Facebook account, become a Fan of FIG. To join you can type in this long weblink: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Cincinnati-OH/FIG-Free-Inquiry-Group-of-Cincinnati-and-Northern-Kentucky/306015475868> or it is much easier to search for "Free Inquiry Group" and find it the first option on the search page.
By being a Fan you can receive FIG updates and meeting notices and RSVP for events such as the monthly FIG Community Dinners.

FIG Leaves
P.O. Box 53174
Cincinnati, OH 45253

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 - [figmessage at gofigger dot org](mailto:figmessage@gofigger.org), or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.