

FIG LEAVES

Volume 22 Issue 4

April 2013

FIG Family Game Night Friday 19 April 2013 from 7:00 - 9:00 pm at 644 Linn Street Cincinnati, OH 45203

For April, we are doing something new, so I appreciate your help in sharing this information on the Meetup site, social media/website, and email list.

On Friday, April 19, from 7pm we will have a FIG Family Game Night. We will host at 644 Linn St, 45203 (Paycor building at the corner of 8th and Linn St in the West End). There will be board games and activities for kids and adults from card games and board games to Apples to Apples and Cards Against Humanity. Please bring more games along with you. FIG will provide snacks and soft drinks and folks are able to bring beer and wine if they want.

As well there will be information about Camp Quest Ohio on hand for any parents who are interested in learning more about Camp.

There is also a Facebook event for the Family Game Night that can be shared at <https://www.facebook.com/events/561618343871093/>



April 2013 Meeting:

Tuesday Apr. 30, 7 PM,
Hannaford Suites Hotel

Gun Control For Liberals

by Edwin Kagin

For our April meeting, Edwin Kagin joins us for a discussion of gun control and breaking it down for our liberal sensibilities. The topic of gun control has been in the news since the shooting in Newtown, CT last December and there have been many proposals about how we move forward as a country. Edwin will provide a deeper understanding of guns, the current laws on guns, and the proposals under consideration. He maintains a blog where he discussed issues regarding guns in a blog post titled *Guns are Innocent of their Use in Human Hands*. <http://freethoughtblogs.com/kagin/2013/02/15/gunsareinnocentoftheiruseinhumanhands/>

Edwin Kagin is a lawyer and currently serves as the National Legal Director for American Atheists. Edwin was a founding member of FIG in 1991 and helped found Camp Quest in 1996 and served as Camp Director until 2005.



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Events

Family Game Night

Friday April 19, 7:00-9:00PM
644 Linn Street
Cincinnati, OH 45203

April 2013 Meeting

Sunday April 30, 7:00PM
Hannaford Suites Hotel
5900 East Galbraith Rd.
Cincinnati, OH

Please Let Us Have Your E-mail Address!

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March Meeting

The Growth of Secularism

presented by August Brunzman

Our announced second speaker, Amanda K. Metskas, executive director of Camp Quest, unfortunately was unable to come. August Brunzman, the executive director of the Secular Student Alliance discussed the growth of secularism in several aspects. He began with a few words about his own development and becoming an active secularist. Growing up as, at best, an apathetic Christian he learned of secularism through discovering a Humanist magazine and finding the Humanist Community of Central Ohio. He became involved with atheism at college and has been involved with the Secular Student Alliance since 2000.

Brunzman described the 2012 Rally for Reason in Washington as a major event, perhaps a breakthrough to national cognizance for unbelievers. It has been estimated that some twenty thousand people rallied despite the drizzle. Yet, it was not the first rally in Washington. Brunzman spoke of the 2002 March on Washington called and managed by American Atheists. That meeting was relatively small, but the contrast with the Reason Rally illustrates how far we have come.

The speaker discussed the rise of the “nones” in survey research. People who claim association with no religion have risen from some six percent of respondents thirty years ago to about twenty percent recently. Yet, most of these unaffiliated persons, some 68 percent, continue to believe in God of some kind. They do represent a reservoir of potential and recruitable doubters. Brunzman suggested that in fact few people change their view of god in later life, but that much of the increase in nones comes with the change of generations. There is little change within each generation, but the scepticism of gods rises with each new cohort. Undoubtedly an important aspect for the Secular Student Alliance. This Alliance grew from 310 member institutions last year to 423 today, and a paid staff of thirteen. SSA runs several internet activities, including recruitment on facebook, and ask an Atheist day.

Brunzman described some of the activities of the Secular Coalition for America. This represents a headquarters in Washington, DC, and is essentially a lobbying group to present the views and concerns of secular Americans to our representatives and government in general. The Secular Coalition maintains a website, issues regular weekly reports, as well as other reports and is generally interested in our relevant problems and wishes.

Camp Quest was founded in Cincinnati in 1996 with one camp, has grown to sixteen camps in 2013. These are each locally sponsored and autonomous, yet all, no doubt, are visited by the invisible, pink unicorn, which neither hears nor reacts to prayers. Camps generally last for one week to introduce youngsters to humanistic reasoning and values, to discuss famous humanists and freethinkers, and to let kids know they are not alone as unbelievers and atheists. Camp Quest is now reaching the age when former campers are becoming counselors and eventually camp directors.

Brunzman is deeply involved in the Humanistic Community of Central Ohio, which he described as vibrant active group. He mentioned 11 to 13 events per month. On the whole the speaker sees the organized secular movement as growing rapidly, - indeed he referred to this growth as “snowballing.” He left us with the knowledge that much is happening, and the impression that freethought is prospering.

- Reported by Wolf Roder



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.

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Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



For this month's Contradiction Corner I will begin discussing facts about the Bible that ministers know but don't share with laymen. This is not so much a conspiracy to hide the truth, but rather this information is not shared because it is complicated, kind of boring and not very inspiring.

I will begin with the Septuagint, more commonly known as the Books of Moses. Readers interested in further exploration of this month's topic should read *Who wrote the Bible?* by Richard Elliot Friedman, *The Bible Unearthed* by Israel Finkelstein, and *Mythical Past, Biblical Archeology and the Myth of Israel* by Thomas L. Thompson.

Most Christian laymen believe that the first five books of the bible were written by Moses, but this is not what is being taught in biblical history courses at seminary. The fact that he was not the author should be obvious when you consider that it records his own death and is filled with statements that this person or that person was the father of tribes in Canaan that didn't exist in Moses time or he could not have known about. Instead, the books we know today as Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy were a collective effort by four different sources known by scholars as J, E, D and P.

Biblical scholars generally conclude that the earliest writings were from two of these sources known as J (referring the use of YHWH in Hebrew, more commonly Jehovah) and the E source which refers to God as El or Elohim. J source stories are usually placed in Southern Palestine and appear to be commissioned by the monarchy in Jerusalem while E material is often takes place within the borders of the northern Kingdom of Israel with its capital in Samaria. The J source tends to refer to God as a more mystical ethereal presence while the E source tends to attribute physical characteristics to God referring to him walking, smelling and having body parts like a face, even referring to the divine buttocks!

This parallel writing can easily be seen in the several "doublets" where the same story is told twice from different perspectives, sometimes even with different characters. Examples include the twin Creation stories in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, several duplications in the Noah Flood story, Abraham misleadingly calling his wife his sister before two different heathen kings, and Joseph being sold into slavery told twice.

At this point I should point out what we know of ancient Canaanite fertility religions of ancient Palestine. The Canaanites worshipped a pantheon of gods very similar to the familiar Greek and Roman religions. The most powerful

Canaanite god was considered El Elyon (El = god; Elyon = the Most High), known as god of the mountain and father of most of the other lesser gods known as Elohim (sons of El).

The Canaanite El became so blended with the YHWH of Judah that it becomes very hard at times to separate them in the archeological record. Both appeared to be worshipped in "High Places," stone pillars where sacrifices were burnt in the mountainous regions like Bethel and Sechem, and Mt. Moriah. Canaanite inscriptions refer to El's wife Asherah mother of gods as the consort of both El and YHWH. The Canaanite god El Elyon can plainly be seen in Psalms 97:9 "For you, LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods." English translators in this case directly changed El to LORD and Elyon to the Most High.

This mixture of El and YHWH can be further seen in that the Biblical god often spoke from mountains (the habitation of El); for example, Sinai where Moses receives the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, it was the Elohim (sons of God) that lusted after the daughters of men and fathered giants in Genesis 6:2.

The next source of material compiled into the patchwork Septuagint was the D or Deuteronomic source comprising the entire book of Deuteronomy created during the Jewish monarchy, most likely the reign of Josiah. In addition the books of Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel, and I & II Kings are thought to be by the same author. The D author appeared to be primarily concerned with politically solidifying the northern and southern peoples into a single Jewish nation through expansion. Combined with the blurring of Canaanite El with YHWH it appears that the Jews were nothing more than a collection of Canaanite tribes pulled together by an elaborate propaganda campaign and not an invading force of escaped Egyptian slaves.

The last source is called the P (or Priestly) source and is generally thought to be redactions and reedits of previous material and a small amount of new material added after the return from Babylon captivity. Priestly source material can be identified by its fixation on purity and laws concerning sacrifice. P source material is not a single large chunk but instead interspersed within the other J, E, and D material. Many scholars also credit this P author as rewriting much of the previous material to hide the pagan Canaanite and polytheistic influence.

As we can see, the students in seminaries are learning a completely different biblical history than the story that laymen church members know. Next month I'll reveal more biblical secrets that ministers know, but don't share. See you then!





The Secular Coalition for America is happy to announce its acquisition of *Secular News Daily*, a website focused on informing the secular and nontheist community on secular issues via opinion pieces and news. The Secular Coalition will take ownership of the site on March 15 and changes to the site will take place over the coming months. The founder and previous owner of the site, Darrin Brightman, joins the Secular Coalition for Oregon as a cochair and has already begun lobbying on behalf of the Secular Coalition in his home state.

Editor's comment: a readable website.

Compared to the wealth and size of the religious lobby, the Secular Coalition for America can seem like the brave, tenacious Chihuahua battling the lumbering, giant Great Dane. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life study, A Lobbying for the Faithful: Religious Advocacy Groups in Washington, D.C., @ the

religious right spends \$390 million dollars a year to lobby federal government officials on their issues.

The Secular Coalition for America spends just \$348,000.

However, we have a secret weapon that allows us to grow stronger in spite of each obstacle:

The generosity of supporters! Because of you, we have captured the attention of lawmakers here in Washington, D.C., and at our annual Secular Summit and Lobby Day, hundreds of nontheists and allies will converge on Capitol Hill to stand up to the old dogs and let their secular voices be heard. On April 24-26, 2013, participants in our Lobby Day and Summit will go directly to the Hill and meet with Representatives, Senators and congressional staffs to say we are here, we are voters, and we are secular!

Join the Secular Coalition for America and every nontheist attending our Secular Summit and Lobby Day by00 making a contribution of \$50, \$100 or more. We are proud to fight for you. Your contributions support the training, resources, and visibility for secular and nontheistic Americans throughout the country. Your gift will help the Secular Coalition for America remind the government that atheist, agnostic, humanist and secular Americans are steadfast in their commitment to real, lasting recognition and change. Just like that Chihuahua, we are more powerful each time we are heard!





THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Members' Library

Last year, we started collecting donated books with the idea of establishing a library for FIG members. We now have two tubs of books and media and continue to accept donations.

Audio Spotlight: John Welte (past FIG President and current State Director for American Atheists) donated his extensive audio collection of lectures. At the August 2008 FIG meeting, Sean Faircloth spoke about, "The Rise of Secular America". The audio CD of his talk is now available to members on loan. I listened to it while driving in the car; he gave a thought provoking presentation.

Book Spotlight: We have a copy of "Letters to a Christian Nation" by Sam Harris. It's a great quick read that offers very clear arguments against religion. Wall Street Journal called it, "A breath of fresh fire".

The FIG library isn't cataloged or organized in any way (which just adds to its charm). At some point, we may create a basic inventory list and possibly make the audio works available online. In the meantime, feel free to browse through our library tubs at any meeting.

From Terry Kassner



Upcoming Meetups

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group

Sex and God: How Religion distorts sexuality

Tuesday, April 9, 2013, 7:00 PM

Darrel Ray, Organizational Psychologist, Speaker, Author, Founder of Recovering From Religion (organization dedicated to helping people navigate the path out of religion) Discusses his new book, Sex and God: How Religion Distorts Sexuality (2012)

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group

Monday, April 15, 2013; 6:30 PM

Rio Grande Mexican Restaurant
40 Carothers Road, Newport, KY 41071

Thursday, May 2, 2013, 7:00 pm

First Thursday @ Pomodori's Pizzeria
121 W Mcmillan St.
Cincinnati, OH 45219

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

@ The Hofbräuhaus

Tuesday, May 7, 2013 6:30 PM

Science Book Club

2013 Schedule

All meetings on 3rd Sunday of the month except in June on the 2nd Sunday. All meetings at the Cincinnati and Hamilton County downtown Public Library in room 3A except in February in the Huennefeld Tower Room and in March and May in room 3B.

April 21 *The Universal Sense : How Hearing Shapes the Mind* - Seth S. Horowitz, 2012.

May 19 (room 3B) *Personality Types: a Systems Science Explanation* - Walter Lowen, 2007

June 9 *Why Does the World Exist? An existential Detective Story* - Jim Holt

July 21 *The Signal and the Noise : Why Most Predictions Fail but Some Don't* - Nate Silver, 2012.

August 18 *The Earth in Turmoil: Earthquakes, Volcanoes, and their impact on HumanKind* - Kerry Sieh, Simon LeVay, 1998

September 15 *End this Depression Now!* - Paul Krugman, 2012

October 20 *Incognito: the Secret Lives of the Brain* - David Eagleman, 2011

November 17 *The Republican Brain : the Science of Why They Deny Science and Reality* - Chris Mooney, 2012

December 15 *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe* - Lee Smolin, 2013





“For God And Country” Shows Fundamentalist Christianity Rampant In U.S. Armed Forces

The Center for Inquiry’s Office of Public Policy today released a new position paper that details a disturbing expansion and entrenchment of Christian fundamentalism in the U.S. military a cultural force which remains at times

both tacitly and overtly endorsed by senior military leaders.

Over the past decade there have been multiple news reports highlighting an intensified tension regarding what constitutes proper religious expression in the U.S. military. However, there has been a scarce amount of thorough research examining the connection between these reports and, in addition, proposing possible solutions. As a result, there has been a lack of information with which to stoke change.

CFI’s position paper, titled “For God and Country,” presents several case studies demonstrating a clear pattern of unconstitutional religiously sectarian behavior; explores the merits of the competing philosophical perspectives on the proper role of religious expression by men and women in uniform; and concludes with recommendations that those in power should implement immediately in order to fully protect the U.S. military’s necessarily secular foundation and the religious freedom of all who volunteer to serve.

“For God and Country” was authored by James Parco, PhD., Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.), an associate professor of economics and business at Colorado College. Parco graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1991, was a member of the faculty for many years, and retired from active duty as a lieutenant colonel in 2011. He has also served on the National Security Council at the White House during the Clinton Administration, as well as in a diplomatic capacity overseas with the American Embassy in Tel Aviv.

All Religions Are Equal

Aaron Williams, 25, went to the Dayton, N.J., Motor Vehicle Commission to renew his driver’s license. When it came time to take his photo, he refused to remove his head covering. MVC employees explained that it must be removed unless it’s being worn for religious reasons. Williams insisted that it was, and wouldn’t take it off. “I take it as seriously as anybody else when it comes to religious beliefs,” he said. When he took out his camera and started taking a video of the office employees, they called the police. Officers told Williams he had to apply to the state before he’d be allowed to wear the headgear for his photo, and Williams removed it. The head covering in question:

a spaghetti strainer. Williams says he’s a Pastafarian a member of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, which is a movement opposed to teaching “intelligent design” and creationism in schools. (*Newark StarLedger*)

Talk About Religion In India

In December 2012, Sanal Edamaruku visited Spain. He traveled across the country, met with rationalists, skeptics and atheists from all walks of life - among them many scientists, artists, students and professionals - and gave talks in Barcelona, Madrid, Granada and Gijon. In the first of his speeches, held on 15th December in Barcelona’s Civic Centre, Sanal provided insight into nature and mechanisms of various facets of the Indian belief in the paranormal and into the techniques of rationalist work. He spoke about the secrets of flying yogis, the cords that bind many Indian top politicians to astrologers and godmen, about the haunting morning when all statues of the elephant faced god Ganesha started guzzling milk and the unusual TV campaign with which Sanal and his supporters could stop the frenzy before sunset. Sanal also spoke about some of India’s most successful godmen and their crimes and backgrounds, about his exposure of Pilot Baba who claimed to survive several days under water, about his meantime legendary Tantra Challenge and about his exposure of the Catholic “miracle” in Mumbai and the dramatic developments that followed.

- *Rationalist International Bulletin*, 7 March 2013

Religion On The Move! New Dynamics Of Religious Expansion In A Globalizing World

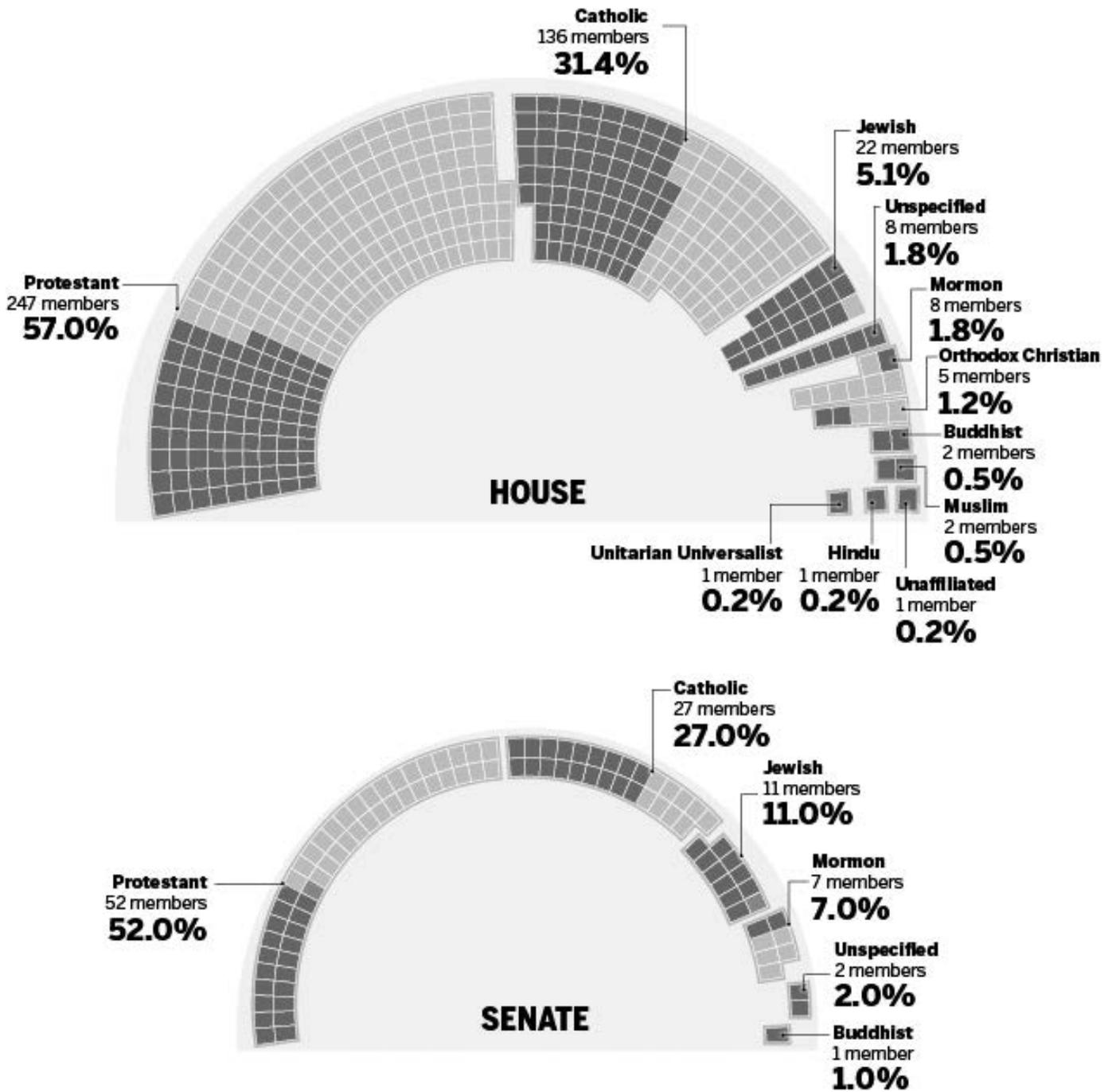
Edited by Afe Adogame and Shobana Shankar

How do religions spread in today’s world, where Christian missions have lost influence and modern nations have replaced colonial empires? *Religions on the Move* is a collection of essays charting new religious expansions. Contemporary evangelists may be Nigerian, Korean, Brazilian or Congolese, working at the grassroots and outside the mainstream in Pentecostal, reformist Islamic, and Hindu spiritual currents. While transportation and media provide newfound mobility, the mission field may be next door, in Europe, North America, and within the “South,” where migrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America settle. These essays, using perspectives from religious studies, ethnography, history and sociology, show that immigrants, women, and other dis-empowered peoples transmit their faiths from everywhere to everywhere, engaging in globalization from below.





The Religious Makeup of the Chambers of the 113th Congress



Source: Data for Congress from CQ Roll Call and Pew Forum. Reflects those being sworn in as members of Congress on Jan. 3, 2013. Blue squares represent Democrats, red squares represent Republicans and gray squares represent independents.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life



Why Atheists Should Embrace America's "godless" Constitution

By Herb Silverman, *The Washington Post*, 4 March 2013

Many atheists, myself included, are offended by what we view as unwarranted antagonism toward atheists. I've participated in a number of debates on topics like "Can we be moral without a belief in God?" In these debates, I try to change stereotypical opinions that atheists are inherently immoral and untrustworthy. It's sad that debates like this even take place in the twenty-first century. It would be unthinkable to see a debate in this country on "Can a Jew be moral?" or "Can a Catholic be moral?"

For decades, Gallup has asked people if they would vote for a generally well qualified person for president who happens to be Catholic, black, Jew, atheist, woman, Mormon, Muslim, or gay. While our country is becoming more tolerant toward all these groups, atheists remain consistently at the bottom of the approval list. The good news is that "only" 43 percent of those polled in 2012 said they would vote against an atheist, the first time the percentage has fallen below 50 percent.

We are fortunate that our secular Constitution makes no mention of any gods and guarantees freedom of religion. Nevertheless, many politicians fail to understand that religious freedom includes the freedom not to believe. Why else would Joe Lieberman, who in 2,000 became the first Jewish vice presidential candidate on a major ticket, have the chutzpah to say during his campaign, "The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, not freedom from religion."

But enough complaining. The political climate for atheists has improved, and will continue to improve. There will come a day when an open atheist can be elected president. Some might say that atheists are "blessed" to be living in the United States rather than in countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Maldives, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. What these countries have in common

is that atheists can face the death penalty for their critical thinking. Other Islamic countries, including Bangladesh, Bahrain, Egypt, Indonesia, Kuwait, Tunisia and Turkey, have also stepped up prosecution for "blasphemy" and for any criticism of religion. Some countries even ban atheism, and force their people to officially adopt a faith.

The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) recently highlighted the criminalization of atheism in many parts of the world. In a document submitted to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, the IHEU pointed out that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties protect the freedom of conscience for everyone, including the right to reject any religion or belief and the right to openly criticize religion.

Many Muslims, both here and abroad, worry about a rising tide of "Islamophobia." However, the cure some have proposed is far worse than the disease. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) would like to see Western countries criminalize the denigration of religion. The head of this 21-country Arab League told the U.N. Security Council that the OIC will propose a binding international framework to ensure "that religious faith and its symbols are respected."

Some of the countries in the OIC fail to see the hypocrisy of prohibiting the denigration of any religion while at the same time sanctioning the death penalty for atheists who live responsibly and peacefully without religion. Perhaps that's their version of freedom of religion, but not freedom from religion.

Political leaders in every country, including the United States, must understand that we can't have freedom of religion without freedom from religion. We either have freedom of conscience and belief or we don't. And our godless U.S. Constitution says we do.

Herb Silverman is founder and President Emeritus of the Secular Coalition for America, author of *Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt*, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.





The Real Church Scandal

By Herb Silverman, *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2013

I have faith that the pope reads my On Faith blogs because he followed my advice in a column in 2010. “Popes sometimes choose the name of a previous pope whose reign they wish to emulate. Whether coincidental or not, Pope Benedict XVI can take the same action as a morally challenged namesake. In 1045, Pope Benedict IX resigned.” However, since the pope has never taken any of my other advice, perhaps I shouldn’t rely on faith to justify a conclusion devoid of evidence.

How much faith do I have that the next pope will be significantly better than the current one? Not much, because Benedict appointed more than 57 percent of the cardinals who will choose his successor. Nevertheless, I remain optimistic, but only because the papal improvement bar is set so low. Why should I even care who the next very fallible pope is? Thanks to the HBO documentary *Mea Maxima Culpa, And Other Revelations*, the world is finally paying attention to pedophilia within the church, and the next pope won’t have as much coverup freedom as previous popes.

If Catholics choose to be counseled about marital or sexual difficulties by celibate priests, that’s their right. But I’m amazed by a church that opposes both abortion and condom use that reduces the number of abortions; that requires celibacy before marriage, yet opposes masturbation, which makes it easier to remain celibate; that requires married women to be fruitful and multiply regardless of circumstances, but prevents church leaders from being fruitful and multiplying; that encourages monogamous marriage to avoid promiscuity, yet opposes monogamous marriage for committed gays.

I especially worry about an increasingly politically engaged Church that tries to impose its religious prohibitions (contraception, gay marriage, stem cell research, etc.) on nonCatholics. If a pope can ignore the evidence and argue that condom use increases the risk of AIDS spreading, I can argue against a church that is helping to spread a virus that infects the rest of the world, not just its faithful sheep. I wish Catholics would ignore the pontiff when he pontificates theologically, and even more so when he pontificates politically. Liberalizing any of these prohibitions by a new pope would be an improvement, but I must admit that part of me wants the next pope to be even more severe, and not because

I’m a sadist. The scandals, coverups, and misogynistic views of the church have significantly damaged its reputation and reduced the ranks of those who adhere to Church doctrine. What if the next pope were the Catholic equivalent of Pastor Fred Phelps, of Westboro Baptist Church, whose views make the current pope seem like a gay rights activist? Fortunately, Phelps has a tiny following. Not so, the pope.

My concerns about Catholic Church doctrine affecting the world are mostly sexrelated. Morality should not be viewed through the narrow prism of sexual conduct. Although sex is an important part of life, there is much more to life than sex, and much more to morality than sex. Ethical and moral behavior is about treating others with respect, dignity, and compassion.

A lot has already been written about what the next pope should do, and probably won’t do. While I don’t expect “miracles,” I hope for a modest papal change on a position that hasn’t received much attention: the church’s opposition to the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS adopted by the UN General Assembly—“The Holy See does not accept so called ‘harm reduction’ efforts related to drug use.” There is conclusive evidence that needle exchange programs are a valuable component in reducing the spread of

HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. I challenge the church to produce even a mustard seed worth of evidence that addicts would stop using drugs if they lacked clean needles. Further, some who enroll in needleexchange programs develop relationships with their providers, who sometimes assist them in giving up drugs. If the next pope really wants to help the least among us, he could begin by revising policies that endanger drugaddicted people without the wherewithal to obtain clean needles. The church might choose to believe that telling gays and drug addicts to repent for their sins has been effective, but health professionals who live in the real world recognize drug addiction as a health issue that requires realistic preventive and treatment programs.

The church can cry “abstinence only” until the sperm come home, but lives are being destroyed by this faithbased approach. Drug addicts have been burning while Nerolike popes have fiddled in Rome. It’s time for a change, of popes and of at least a few of the damaging policies that place more emphasis on abstract doctrines than on suffering humans.

Herb Silverman is founder and President Emeritus of the Secular Coalition for America, author of *Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt*, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.



Science Left Behind: Feelgood Fallacies And The Rise Of The Antiscientific Left

By Alex Berezow and Hank Campbell

(New York: Public Affairs - Perseus Books, 2012)

**The Progressive War on Science
a book review by Kenneth W. Krause**

Let's settle this thing once and for all-right here, right now. Who are more anti-scientific-Republicans or Democrats, conservatives or progressives? Conventional wisdom would have us believe-or at least so says science writer Chris Mooney-that Republicans have waged an unparalleled and all out war on science.

Indeed, certain big business interests continue to see basic climate science as an entirely too inconvenient truth. And, yes, some religious leaders will likely always deny the facts of human evolution, abortion, homosexuality, and stem cell procurement and therapeutic cloning. Responsible journalists have documented and exposed these affronts to reason quite thoroughly with appropriate vigor.

But are progressives really so different? Not according to Alex Berezow and Hank Campbell. In *Science Left Behind*, the authors contend that American media have long bestowed a "free pass" on the political Left (primarily progressives), who are just as likely to "misinterpret, misrepresent, and abuse" science to advance their ideological agendas. In fact, the authors say, progressives are currently waging an "undeclared war on scientific excellence itself."

They accuse progressives of propagating a number of socially destructive myths, among them the assumptions that everything "natural" is good and everything "unnatural" is bad. Accordingly, homeopathy is just as good as or better than traditional medicine, vaccines actually harm children, and nuclear energy promises unprecedented sickness and loss of life. And despite studies showing conventional crops to be equally nutritional and both personally and environmentally safe (never mind vastly less expensive), "organic" foods-whatever that means in a

shamefully unregulated industry-are somehow superior products. Ditto for raw, unpasteurized dairy products and juices left untreated for foodborne illnesses.

Meanwhile, genetically modified foods are decried as both personal and environmental menaces. Never mind that years of testing has yielded no evidence of risk. Forget about the

potential of drought-resistant wheat and wilt-resistant bananas to feed starving Africans. And, please, don't be fooled by researchers' allegedly noble intentions to use GMOs to combat disease, reduce the use of pesticides, increase agricultural efficiency, and feed starving millions who would otherwise go hungry.

Ideologues also continue to berate scientists for considering cultured, or in-vitro meat. Technophobic and anti-corporate, say Berezow and Campbell, progressives claim that laboratory amino acid production will always be more expensive and resource intensive than the obviously foul and unsophisticated system we use on farms today. They have even threatened legal action and years of red tape to discourage the research itself.

But the facts of "slowgrown" meat are compelling, to say the least. Gorging themselves on 40 percent of the planet's cereal grain, livestock also use and despoil about 30 percent of the earth's surface, 70 percent of its arable land, and eight percent of its water supply. The world's 1.5 billion livestock are responsible for between 15 and 24 percent of all anthropogenic greenhouse gasses, and beef ranching accounts for 80 percent of Amazon deforestation. Cattle dump 64 million tons of sewage in the United States alone, and pigs, of course, are no less prolific.

The antibiotics we use on farm animals contribute mightily to the emergence of multi-drug resistant strains





of bacteria. And what are the most common causes of foodborne diseases in the U.S., EU, and Canada? That's right-contaminated meats and animal products. In rather stark contrast, meat grown in culture doesn't poop, burp, fart, eat, overgraze, drink, bleed, or scream in agony-and it's a great deal less likely to poison or infect us.

Unsurprisingly, progressives have corrupted the social sciences too, perhaps to the point of permanent reputational taint among both the general public and the scientific community. Recall, for example, the oppressive and unscholarly manner in which Harvard president Lawrence Summers was vilified in 2005 for merely suggesting that, one, men and women might have distinguishable natural abilities related to math and science, and, two, that personal preference rather than discrimination might account for female "underrepresentation" in highend STEM careers.

"Summers learned the hard way," the authors say, "that the feelgood fallacies of progressive thought are stronger than the values of free inquiry and the primacy of the scientific method." Indeed, where was the intellectual debate before Summers' resignation in 2006? Is it really so improbable that different genders evolved or learned different talents? Or is it more likely, perhaps, that academics have been bullied into the "gender equality" camp with threats of being branded as sexist?

Berezow and Campbell refer to a "mountain of scientific data" that refutes the unlikely notion of biological gender equality. First, controlling for body size, men's brains are 100 grams heavier than women's brains, which results in a 3.6 point intelligence difference. Second, although women have more white matter, men possess more gray matter, which is related to information processing. The jury is still out on the issue of aptitude, the authors admit, but progressives seem to want to "cut science out" of the deliberations altogether.

And the problem appears to reemerge when the question centers more specifically on careers in science. Though progressives continue to "blame sexist men or an oppressive society" for female "underrepresentation" in the highend STEM fields, say the authors, it has become "increasingly clear" that biology strongly influences our personal preferences.

Cornell University researchers Stephen Ceci and Wendy Williams recently published a hardhitting and no doubt divisive paper addressing this very issue. After

reviewing 20 years of data, Ceci and Williams-married with three daughters of their own-decided that the evidence of discrimination against women in math intensive fields is "aberrant, of small magnitude" and "superseded by larger, more sophisticated analyses showing no bias, or occasionally, bias in favor of women."

In agreement with their previous analyses, Ceci and Williams surmised instead that the gender gap results primarily from women's career preferences and fertility and lifestyle choices. In other words, adolescent girls tend to gravitate toward careers focusing on people as opposed to things, and female Ph.D.s interested in child rearing are less likely to apply for or maintain tenure track positions. Incidentally, as a secondary explanation, the duo pointed to evidence for upper tail disparities in cognitive ability.

Richard Lippa, a psychologist at California State University, Fullerton, has recently observed that "contemporary gender researchers, particularly those who adopt social constructionist and feminist ideologies, often reject the notion that biologic factors directly cause gender differences." Feminist beliefs are so contrary to mainstream biology, Berezow and Campbell concur, "it is fair to compare their antiscience rhetoric to that of evolutiondenying creationists."

So let's return to our question-who are more anti-science, conservatives or progressives? Frankly, Berezow and Campbell go too far in their criticisms and provide too little evidence for their claim that all Lefties are "social authoritarians" bent on an everlasting "culture war."

The fact is that all ideologues are impediments to science, whether libertarians, religious zealots, and freemarket fundamentalists on the one hand, or environmentalists, feminists, and social engineers on the other. Science-indeed, truth generally-is served mostly by those who conceive of themselves as individuals first and group members second (if at all). But seldom if ever are its ends advanced by committed disciples to any idea or cause.

The authors are entirely correct, however, in illuminating a salient distinction between politics and science. The former consists of "gotcha" moments and scoring points against the other team. The latter is about proceeding openly and vigorously wherever the data lead, and allowing others the same courtesy. ☞



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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.

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