

FIG LEAVES

Volume 13 Issue 12

December 2004

December FIG Meeting: Sunday, 12 December 7:00 PM

PICKING UP THE PIECES: The 2004 election, what it all means, and what Atheists need to do.

Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists analyzes the 2004 election and lays out a strategy for putting Atheists, Freethinkers, Secular Humanists and other nonbelievers on the 'Road to Victory' in future elections.

"We need to study how the religious right built up their power base over a three-decade-long period, what lessons they learned, and what we need to learn from them," says Johnson.

Ellen Johnson is a leading spokesperson for Atheist civil liberties. She has presented testimony on behalf of American Atheists to numerous government agencies, including the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Ms. Johnson also led their historic "breakthrough" meeting with officials of the White House Liaison Office.

A wife and mom with two children, Ms. Johnson is vitally concerned about the cultural issues affecting Atheist families of all descriptions.



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January FIG Meeting Tuesday, 25 January 2005

Kirk D. Little a practicing psychologist will speak on **Morality and the Laws of Evolution: Beliefs, Emotions, and Behaviors**

February FIG Meeting Tuesday, 22 February 2005

Meeting: **Dr. Gene Kritsky** on *The Darwin Bootlegs*

The total Darwin Archive consists of over 15,000 letters and several thousand bits of papers with notes and observations. These letters and notes reveal aspects of Darwin that were not disclosed in his published writings. This presentation will examine some of these notes to reveal some of the unknown facts about Darwin and his thinking.

Last year Dr. Kritsky, professor of biology at the College of Mount St. Joseph, took time out of his busy schedule as a leading authority on cicadas to give us a wonderful talk about Charles Darwin as a person. We are delighted that he will come back to talk to us about the fruits of his research into Darwin's papers.

Exhibition of Original Art.

Our Fig member, Vivian Kline, is celebrating fifty years of enameling by having a one woman showing of her work. Opening is on December 4, from 5 to 7 in the afternoon at the Unitarian Universalist Church on 320 Resor Ave. in Clifton. The show will continue there through December. The exhibition will then move to Pendleton Studios Room 806 on December 17 from 5:30-9 pm and final Fridays thereafter.

Events - PLEASE NOTE SCHEDULE CHANGES

December Potluck

Tuesday 7 December 6:30 PM
At the home of

December Meeting

Sunday 12 December 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

January Potluck

Tuesday 4 January 6:30 PM
At the home of

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Tuesday 12 January 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
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November Meeting

The Post-Election Meeting Means: It's Your Turn to Talk!

The format for this meeting was different from the usual. Each of the volunteer speakers had ten minutes to present his thoughts on his own chosen topic with time for questions at the conclusion of their presentations. These six volunteered: Scott Seidewitz, Peter Lloyd, Edwin Kagin, Charles Hughes, W.H. Giles, and Wolf Roder. Scott also acted as emcee and also served as timekeeper.



Scott Seidewitz said: "What I would like to talk about is 1) the myth that Moral Values determined this election and 2) how Republicans use the media effectively and Democrats don't."

He asked how many in the audience knew about the poll where AP asked voters what was the most important thing that decided them. The thing picked more than the economy, more than the war in Iraq, was moral values. What percent of the people cited

moral values? 22 percent. Of those how many voted for Bush, 80 percent. He then asked how many thought that this issue had decided the election. Some did. He said it might be so, but he doubted it. If he had seen these figures before the election he would have asked for a cross tabulation. How many of the 80 percent who voted for Bush were died-in-the-wool Republicans or fundamentalists who would have voted for Bush in any circumstances. Among the undecided values probably was a non-issue. The second thing he wanted to talk about: how could Democrats appeal more effectively to values. There are values that the American people care about that Democrats also care about.

I mainly consult with companies about how to position products and what to say about products or services. On the non-political side when you talk about products on a simple level, you talk about attributes. So if, for example, you talk about a razor, you talk about how sharp the blades are, what the handle looks like, what color it is. On the next higher level, you talk about benefits, a sharper blade gives you a closer shave, then you have a level of consequences of the closer shave, women are going to want to stroke your face, etc. In politics it's the same type of thing, and the Republicans do this brilliantly. You have policy issues or proposals, you have personal attributes, and you have your political record. Where the Republicans go on to values and not necessarily moral values. The attacks on Kerry were all about a strong leader. They pitched it as why Kerry was not a strong leader but Bush is. A stronger leader would make your children safer. So the appeal was to that kind of consequence.

With Portune, we had very specific things we talked about. We portrayed him as conservative even though he is fairly liberal because the swing voters in Hamilton County tend to be very conservative. I said it again and again, taxes were down since he came into office, he cut a hundred million from tax requests, the Reds stadium was



FIG Leaves - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in Electronic format via the internet - figleaves@fuse.net; 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. 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.

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in on time and under budget. That is what we talked about all the time and that led up to a better-run county government. We always brought it up to passing on a better world to future generations so we were appealing on an emotional level.

He's blow off his studies, hang out with his buddies
Raise hell in the Skull and Bones den
Why even bother when you've got a father in O-I-L.

© Copyright 2004 Peter Lloyd

The next "speaker" was Peter Lloyd who chose to sing his contribution accompanying himself on the guitar. Since the songs are rather long and the lyrics are biting we have included only a sample. People with access to the



Internet can find the complete lyrics at <<http://www.gocreate.com/songs>>

When you fail to find Osama, bomb Iraq
When the market's in a trauma, bomb Iraq
When the "terrors" are getting' frisky
North Koreas looking risky, bomb Iraq.

When you fail to find Osama, bomb Iraq
When you got no allies with you, bomb Iraq
Aw forget the damn inspection
Look ahead to next election
When you think somebody's dissed you, bomb Iraq

Wanna make a big impression? Bomb Iraq
It's pre-emptive, it's aggression, bomb Iraq
They got weapons we can't see
And that's all the proof we need
Wanna make a big impression? Bomb Iraq

When you want to be a hero, but your IQ's seven- zero
Don't even try to reason, bomb Iraq.

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George Dubya Shrub

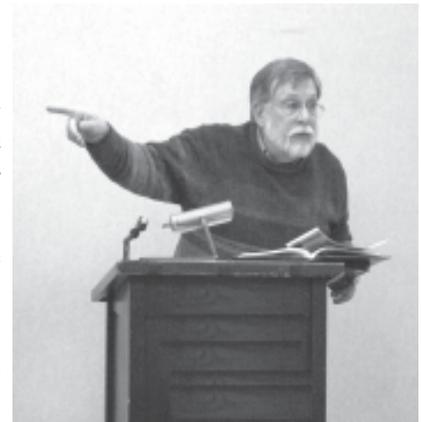
(Sung to the tune of *The Band Played On*)

George Dubya Shrub was born into a club run on O-I-L
Raised in the South, silver spoon in his mouth thanks to O-I-L
He was branded a fool from his first day at school
But he went to the wells for his grades
Though he barely could spell it, his dad sure could sell it, O-I-L

Shrub's college days disappeared in a haze thick as O-I-L
He kept his brain stewed so his wits remained crude, just like O-I-L

The next speaker was Edwin Kagin whose topic was "An update on the American Religious Civil War."

Edwin started by citing a Kagin's Column he had written for the August 1995 issue of Fig Leaves titled the "The Coming American Religious Civil War." He reminded us that not many people paid attention to it then, so we face it now. Approaching war from the believers' point of view, they firmly believe that George W. Bush was appointed by god to lead this country. It's that simple! The analogies to what happened in Germany in 1933 are truly frightening. We really do have two countries. A great many people hold a worldview that is so far removed from the way the people in this room think it's really scary hard to understand.



If you dump religion out of this last election, Kerry would have won hands down because he was obviously the more qualified candidate. But Bush won for the simple reason that a large number of people believe in a faith that puts him in the White House; assigned there by god to tell the rest of us what to do.

He then held up some books he had purchased in a Bible bookstore. One of them was called *The Presidential Prayer Team*, little prayers for our president, our country, for Armageddon, and the Rapture; further we have *The Power of a Praying Nation*. These people believe that the Second Coming of Christ is imminent, that the only reason for supporting Jerusalem is to bring about this event. They need to bring the Jews from the Diaspora, which has been done. They intend to reestablish the Temple of Solomon on the Temple Mount. There is a slight hitch there because the site is now occupied by a Muslim Shrine, the Dome of the Rock. They need to bring it down, rebuild the Temple of Solomon and sacrifice a red heifer.





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The whole thing is aimed at power and control. All of this war centers around certain key themes. The believers don't want same-sex marriage; or anything having to do with abortion, including stem cell research. The Roman Catholic Bishops have insisted to vote for Kerry is a sin. We are going to find out the hard way why we have separation of state and church.

When Oliver Cromwell took power in England, he executed the king, made himself Lord Protector, outlawed Christmas, closed the theaters, and essentially forbade people to have fun. When the English people had enough they brought the king, Charles II, back from France. About that time the Puritans got on the Mayflower and came here. Their descendants are the Christian fundamentalists of today. It's time for us not to be so sensitive and to start talking back. When they are talking about moral values, they are talking about what they want, not what you want; when they are talking about judicial activism, they are talking about decisions they don't like; when it's something they do like it's called strict constructionism. When their belief doesn't fit the evidence; discard the evidence. That is my update on the American Religious Civil War.

The next speaker was Charles Hughes on: "Why Do We Voters Select the Candidates We Do?"

According to his thinking the elected are mainly: fatheads, selfish, corrupt, thoughtless and puppets. But can we blame the voters? Their parents and society and the laws force them to observe respect for authority. Their thinking minds are being affected by aspartame, fluoridation, mercury dental amalgams, mercury in the air and water and in our



vaccinations; much reduced nutrients because of improper food processing and cooking; much reduced nutrients in our farm soils. Our science has developed mind control electronic capabilities, genocidal and endemic

new diseases.

Most of the electorate has hundred or less IQ which means that they are unable to understand any serious and

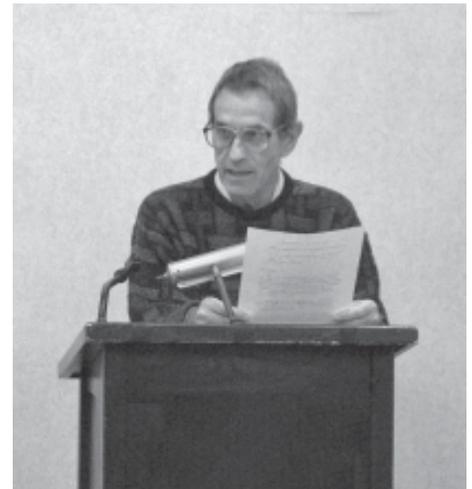
complex topic, especially if it involves being in any way controversial or violates the respect for authority. There is a secret group that controls everything: Congress, the mass media, the executive branch, economic systems, banks, stock exchanges, manufacturing, transportation, dentists and universities.

There are two theories on 9/11. One theory is that terrorists came out of Afghanistan; hijacked some planes and drove them into the Twin Towers. The other theory is that these planes were radio controlled by the CIA. Our speaker clearly believes in conspiracies.

The next speaker was W. H. Giles.

Although most of you know that this is the Free Inquiry Group, most of us are also aware that inquiry is not free in the world or in this country. Our third president said, "Here we are not afraid to tolerate error as long as reason is left free to combat it." He may have been the last United States president who worked to keep our freedom of inquiry.

I expect that the next four years will continue the diminution of our population's two most magnificent human assets: (1) the ability to make sense: and, therefore, (2) our understanding of reality. It matters little who won this election. With our politicians' mandatory "public" schools as they are in the United States, as they have been since their beginning near the middle of the nineteenth century, the citizens will retain and expand their "Faith,"-their "belief without reason or evidence"-as their only guide to reality. Actually their faith is not a "guide"; it is a *barrier* between them and their good sense and reality.



When nothing makes sense, when everything is without "reason" there is no recourse except to be obedient. When students memorize mere lists of isolated data; without meaningful connections among or between data and reality, there is no way to deal with their world except to be obedient.

I wanted to vote against both candidates because I knew both of them would worship their precious public schools





precisely as those schools had been for a century and a half. But I voted against Mr Bush. Because I thought there might be a slight chance that a Democrat would nominate a wiser and more knowledgeable Supreme Court judge.

The last speaker was Wolf Roder. His topic: "Why We will Never be an Atheist Country."

He read a quote which is typical of many arguments you see in humanist or freethought literature:

"It should be a humanist hope that someday the institution of religion and its disgusting corporate-like foundation will fall and all people will come together for the celebration of the entire human race, compassionate reason will prevail and sustain mankind for eternity."

About a hundred years ago we heard the first speculation about the possibility that religion would fade away as science increased. Today you can read there are fourteen percent of Americans without religion. A secular humanist leader in Phoenix, Arizona, commented if only ten percent of the community is non-theistic, it should mean there are two hundred thousand atheists and humanists in the Phoenix area. So why aren't we holding our meetings in Sun Devils Stadium? Where are all the freethinkers?

Perhaps some day when we have lots of time, we could try to determine if there is a difference between secular humanists and just plain secular people. But now we must ask: "Why do so many people hold to religion?"

Most of us here have come to our unbelief, not as children, but we somehow achieved it through experience and life and reason and thinking. Perhaps most of us have a little more intelligence than the average. Most of us didn't become unbelievers until we were adults or at least teenagers. We tend to think through what it means to live in a world without any supernatural, governed by reason or where science explains what reality is like. It is not a pleasant world. We live on a very small planet in a very indifferent solar system, in an uncaring, indifferent cosmos. The universe doesn't give a damn if we live or not. As Shakespeare phrased it, "the world is a place full of sound and fury signifying nothing." How much better feels faith in a caring god.

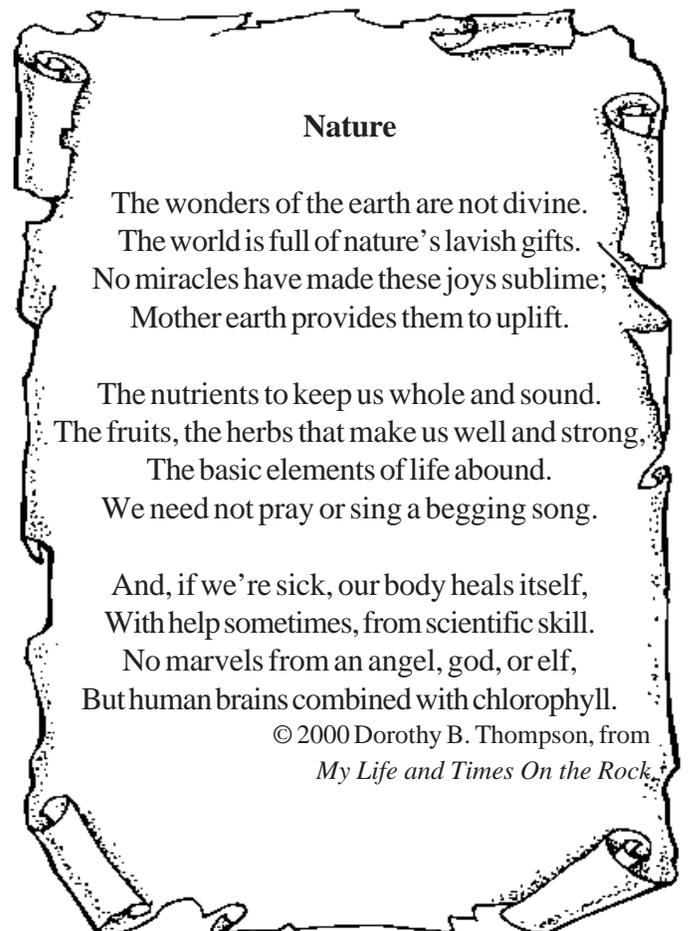
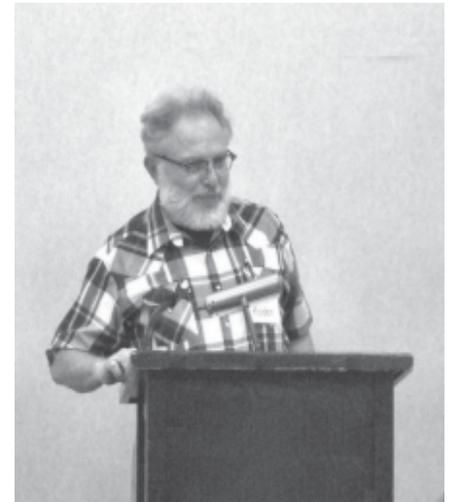
When you start bringing up children as unbelievers, to begin with they will take your word on faith. Children have to take on faith what their parents say for only that is safe. "Don't touch that stove!" And you'd better believe what I tell you unless you really want to try to hurt yourself. When you raise

your children as atheists they will believe you. In the end you will wind up with this atheism as just another religion.

As long as we remain a small elite group, we will attract committed thinkers. If we should raise a generation of unbelievers, we will wind up like the Soviets where athe-

ism became the official line of faith. The government and people conformed and atheism simply became another perceived wisdom, in short, what we call "religion." And that is why I think we can never be an atheist country.

— reported by George Maurer



Nature

The wonders of the earth are not divine.
The world is full of nature's lavish gifts.
No miracles have made these joys sublime;
Mother earth provides them to uplift.

The nutrients to keep us whole and sound.
The fruits, the herbs that make us well and strong,
The basic elements of life abound.
We need not pray or sing a begging song.

And, if we're sick, our body heals itself,
With help sometimes, from scientific skill.
No marvels from an angel, god, or elf,
But human brains combined with chlorophyll.

© 2000 Dorothy B. Thompson, from
My Life and Times On the Rock



Some views of a humanist from San Francisco named Eric on how we waste our time, energy and attention on the stupid stuff.

I really feel that we Humanists, or what ever label we choose for ourselves, people who argue for a rational approach to life, one not based on sky Gods and ancient sacred books do ourselves a great disservice when we take on issues like this. It seems to me this cross on the hill and the Ten Commandment plaque in the Alabama court house of a year ago are rabbits to chase. By focusing on symbolic issues like these we only strengthen the religious right. Religion, as the right wingers will point out, is the foundation of our culture, let it be so. By challenging the religious ideology and its symbols we elevate it to a status it does not deserve. I am certain that the Alabama judge put the plaque up to gain attention and marshal the Christians to fight for the things that really matter. The leaders of the religious right are much more crafty than many in our camp often give them credit for. They learn the art of power politics within their institutions, Catholic, Protestant and Mormon, and seem to be much better at playing the game than we often are.

The issues of reproductive/abortion rights, same sex marriage (I feel that the cause of equality for Gay/Lesbian people would have been much better served by a coordinated, state by state campaign for civil unions with an outreach for straight folks who want to support to get hitched via civil union as opposed to "marriage". Instead a battle over symbolism which **cannot be** won is conducted and lost.), and the big daddy of them all the teaching of Creation ideology to our children have to be fought and won. We cannot rely on the courts, the right wingers control them and this was the wrong approach even decades ago before they did.

We have no weekly meetings where our world view is described in humorous and poetic language. We do not discuss ethics and tackle the complicated questions of how to organize ones private life. We have no ceremonial celebrations of birth, coupling (gay or straight), or the end of life, we have no charities. If you are a battered woman in the SF bay area you're best bet is a Christian, and I mean fundamentalist, run shelter out in Livermore called Sheppard's Gate. The few Humanist/Atheist events I've been to were a bit hard to deal with, everyone is so busy being angry at Christianity there's little room for anything else. If we're really serious about this we need to model the success of the churches and build institutions that are more attractive

and better at filling the needs of the Human community than the churches are. We're right aren't we? Then lets not worry about symbols. I'm curious what anyone thinks about this.

Taslina Nasreen receives major UNESCO prize.

(Dr. Nasreen spoke to FIG last year.)

Rationalist International congratulates its Honorary Associate Taslima Nasreen, who received the 2004 **UNESCO Mandajeet Singh Prize** for promotion of tolerance and non-violence. Taslima Nasreen was honoured for her courageous and undefatigable fight for human rights, freedom and equality for women under Islam. The Bangladeshi physician, poet and writer of more than twenty books, some of them translated in many languages, had to flee her country in 1994, when Islamic fundamentalists vowed to kill her. Since then, she has been living in exile in Europe and in the USA. Taslima is also recipient of the *Kurt Tucholsky Award* of the Swedish PEN Club, of the *Sakharov Prize* for Freedom of Thought of the European Parliament and of the Indian literature prize *Ananda Puroshkar*. Currently she is at Harvard University researching on secularization and women's emancipation in Islamic countries.

The bi-annual prize was created in 1995 with the help of the Indian writer and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Mandajeet Singh. It was presented on 16 November by UNESCO director general Koiichi Matsuura in a festive function at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. It includes an award of \$100,000. In 2002 the prize was awarded to Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar.

— *Rationalist International* #135 (21 Nov. 04)



When I was your age . . .

The minister was passing a group of teens sitting on the church steps and stopped to ask what they were talking about. "Nothing much, Pastor," replied one boy. "We were just seeing who can tell the biggest lie about his sex life." "Boys, boys, boys!" he scolded. "I'm shocked. When I was your age, I never even thought about sex." In unison they all shouted: "You win!"

Quote

- **The Latest Twist in Outsourcing!**
- *The New York Times* reports prayers are being recited in
- India because it is cheaper than doing it in the West. Talk
- about mixing Mammon and the Messiah!

— *The Indian Express* (17 June 2004)

Unquote



© New York Times, op-ed, November 4, 2004

The Day the Enlightenment Went Out

By GARRY WILLS

Evanston, Ill.

This election confirms the brilliance of Karl Rove as a political strategist. He calculated that the religious conservatives, if they could be turned out, would be the deciding factor. The success of the plan was registered not only in the presidential results but also in all 11 of the state votes to ban same-sex marriage. Mr. Rove understands what surveys have shown, that many more Americans believe in the Virgin Birth than in Darwin's theory of evolution.

This might be called Bryan's revenge for the Scopes trial of 1925, in which William Jennings Bryan's fundamentalist assault on the concept of evolution was discredited. Disillusionment with that decision led many evangelicals to withdraw from direct engagement in politics. But they came roaring back into the arena out of anger at other court decisions - on prayer in school, abortion, protection of the flag and, now, gay marriage. Mr. Rove felt that the appeal to this large bloc was worth getting President Bush to endorse a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage (though he had opposed it earlier).

The results bring to mind a visit the Dalai Lama made to Chicago not long ago. I was one of the people deputized to ask him questions on the stage at the Field Museum. He met with the interrogators beforehand and asked us to give him challenging questions, since he is too often greeted with deference or flattery.

The only one I could think of was: "If you could return to your country, what would you do to change it?" He said that he would disestablish his religion, since "America is the proper model." I later asked him if a pluralist society were possible without the Enlightenment. "Ah," he said. "That's the problem." He seemed to envy America its Enlightenment heritage.

Which raises the question: Can a people that believes more fervently in the Virgin Birth than in evolution still be called an Enlightened nation?

America, the first real democracy in history, was a product of Enlightenment values - critical intelligence, tolerance, respect for evidence, a regard for the secular sciences. Though the founders differed on many things, they shared these values of what was then modernity. They addressed "a candid world," as they wrote in the Declaration of Independence, out of "a decent respect for the opinions of

mankind." Respect for evidence seems not to pertain any more, when a poll taken just before the elections showed that 75 percent of Mr. Bush's supporters believe Iraq either worked closely with Al Qaeda or was directly involved in the attacks of 9/11.

The secular states of modern Europe do not understand the fundamentalism of the American electorate. It is not what they had experienced from this country in the past. In fact, we now resemble those nations less than we do our putative enemies.

Where else do we find fundamentalist zeal, a rage at secularity, religious intolerance, fear of and hatred for modernity? Not in France or Britain or Germany or Italy or Spain. We find it in the Muslim world, in Al Qaeda, in Saddam Hussein's Sunni loyalists. Americans wonder that the rest of the world thinks us so dangerous, so single-minded, so impervious to international appeals. They fear jihad, no matter whose zeal is being expressed.

It is often observed that enemies come to resemble each other. We torture the torturers, we call our God better than theirs - as one American general put it, in words that the president has not repudiated.

President Bush promised in 2000 that he would lead a humble country, be a uniter not a divider, that he would make conservatism compassionate. He did not need to make such false promises this time. He was re-elected precisely by being a divider, pitting the reddest aspects of the red states against the blue nearly half of the nation. In this, he is very far from Ronald Reagan, who was amiably and ecumenically pious. He could address more secular audiences, here and abroad, with real respect.

In his victory speech yesterday, President Bush indicated that he would "reach out to the whole nation," including those who voted for John Kerry. But even if he wanted to be more conciliatory now, the constituency to which he owes his victory is not a yielding one. He must give them what they want on things like judicial appointments. His helpers are also his keepers.

The moral zealots will, I predict, give some cause for dismay even to nonfundamentalist Republicans. Jihads are scary things. It is not too early to start yearning back toward the Enlightenment.

Garry Wills, an adjunct professor of history at Northwestern University, is the author of *St. Augustine's Conversion*.



Political Islam vs. Secularism

By Azar Majedi

(A speech by Azar Majedi at a Paris conference entitled *Islam against Islam* on 30 October 2004. Azar Majedi is the head of the Organization for Women's Liberation.)

Islam against Islam is an interesting topic. The irony of a believer criticizing the beliefs is provocative. I am not a Moslem; I am an atheist. However, I have lived Islam; I have firsthand experience of Islam. I was born within a religious conflict: a religious mother and an atheist father. From childhood, I began to see the flaws, the restrictions, the misogyny, the backwardness, the dogma, the superstition, and uncritical nature of Islam vis-à-vis the enlightenment, the freethinking spirit of atheist thinking.

I became an atheist at the age of 12.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran after a failed revolution laid bare many other appalling and cruel dimensions of Islam, which we later came to label political Islam. It was not only dogma or superstition anymore. It was torture, summary executions, stonings, amputations, and the rape of nine-year-olds in the name of marriage. Another face of Islam? Perhaps. But a real one. Millions in Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Nigeria, and Iraq are experiencing this true face of Islam daily.

With the coming to power of the Islamic Republic in Iran, we began to witness a revival of the Islamic movement as a political movement, i.e. the emergence of political Islam. I prefer not to talk about this movement as fundamentalism, but rather political Islam. We are talking here about a contemporary political movement which refers to Islam as its ideological framework and vision. It is not necessarily a doctrinaire and scholastic movement, but it embodies different and varied trends of Islamic tendencies. It is a political movement seeking hegemony and a share of power in the Middle East, North Africa and in Islamist communities. This movement embodies Islamists who hypocritically defend freedom of clothing, so as to oppose the banning of veils in schools and for under-aged girls in their fight against the secularization of society in the West, and those in Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Algeria who throw acid at unveiled women, slash them with knives and razors, and who flog them for not observing veiling. They are part and parcel of one movement. This movement is a threat to humankind. It is a movement, against which all freedom loving, equality seeking human beings must take a firm and uncompromising position.

Islam against Islam may imply finding ways and means to reform Islam, to resort to so-called more moderate interpretations of Islam. As a personal, private belief this may be possible, but as a political movement it is not. The movement which has terrorized the world, we are experiencing today, and which we have become firsthand victims of, is incapable of reform. We are dealing with a political movement which resorts to terror as the main means of achieving power. My experience in Iran explicitly shows that the only way to deal with this movement is to relegate it into the private spheres, eradicate it from the state, education and societal sphere. To do this, we need to build a strong movement both in the region and worldwide.

In my opinion, there are a number of points which can be the basis for an international united front against political Islam in order to make the world a better, more humane and safer place. Defense of secularization and de-religionization of society is one of them. This banner has historically proven successful in the fight against the church and now against the gains of political Islam. The voice for secularism has become loud and clear in Iran. There is a strong movement for the secularization of society in a country under the siege of political Islam for 25 years. We should unequivocally raise this banner in the West and in the East. We should recreate the spirit of the 18th century, of the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, in a contemporary manner.

The fight for universality of human rights and women's rights is another important cause. In the past two decades the Islamists were largely aided by the proponents of cultural relativism. By defending this racist concept, the Western academia, media and governments turned a

blind eye to the atrocities committed by this misogynist and reactionary movement, not only in the so-called "Moslem world", but in Islamic communities in the West. Apparently, according to this concept, there are some rights that are suitable for Western women and not appropriate for women like me, who are born in the other part of the world.

The veil, sexual apartheid, and second class citizenship were justified by reverting to this arbitrary concept of "their culture". A violation that felt appalling if committed against a Western woman, was a justifiable action committed against a woman born under Islam. This double standard, this sheer violation of humane principles must be stopped. I must admit that it has been pushed back a great deal. We have fought hard against it for more than a decade.

Defense of children's rights is another fight which must be extended to areas where so-called religious beliefs are concerned. The veiling of under-aged girls must be banned, not only in schools, but altogether. The veiling of children is a clear violation of their universal rights. Just as we fight for obligatory education for children, abolition of child labor, banning of corporal punishment, we should fight for the banning of veiling of under-aged girls. This has the same significance as other basic children's rights. The veil deprives a child of a happy normal life, and healthy physical and mental development; it brands their life as different by segregating them. It defines two sets of gender roles and imposes it upon children who have no way of protecting themselves and demanding equality and freedom. Children have no religion; they are only by accident born into a religious family. Society has a duty to protect them and uphold their rights as equal human beings.

Abolition of religious schools is another important arena. This is also an important principle of a secular state, and



for the protection of children's rights. Children must be free from official religious teachings and dogmas. Religion's hands must be eradicated from children's lives. The new legislation in France regarding banning of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools and institutions, is an important step but insufficient. In order to safeguard children's rights, religious schools must be abolished. Otherwise, we create religious ghettos, segregate children living in religious families from the society, and condemn them to a life in isolation. The new legislation is the easiest way out for the state. But we cannot remain indifferent to these children's lives. The society and the state have the duty to protect their rights. They should be allowed to integrate in the society, to go to school like any other child, and to be free from the meddling of religion in their lives, at least as long as they are still children.

The recognition of the right to unconditional freedom of expression and criticism is one of the important pillars of a free society and free thinking. The right to criticize Islam is another important means of fighting religious dominance in society. We need to and must criticize Islam relentlessly, without the fear of being beheaded in countries under the siege of Islam, or of being called racist in the West. Islamophobia is a new term created by Islamists or their apologists in order to stop a growing critical movement against Islam and Islamic movements. This is as hypocritical as it is regressive.

I call upon all of you here to recognize the importance and the urgency of demanding secularization and the de-religionization of the state and society, unconditional freedom of expression and criticism, recognition of women's equality and the universality of their rights, the banning of child veiling, and the abolition of religious schools. In order to build a better, safer, freer and a more egalitarian world, we must unequivocally raise this banner.

End of Life Choices meeting, 3 PM, Sunday, 9 January 2005

Richard MacDonald, M.D., Medical Director of End of Life Choices and the Caring Friends Program, will speak at the EOLC meeting on January 9. We are sure he can give us a wonderful assessment of the current status of end of life issues around the country.

We are not yet sure of the subject of his talk. It is likely that he will speak on either "Methods of hastening dying within the law" or "Where in the world can one die with dignity?"

The meeting will be at the Roselawn Lutheran Church at 1608 Summit Road.

To find out the subject he will talk on or for directions, contact <Joeleeve@aol.com> or 513-321-4824.



A cabbie picks up a Nun. She gets into the cab, and the cab driver won't stop staring at her. She asks him why is he staring. He replies, "I have a question to ask you, but I don't want to offend you." She answers, "My son, you cannot offend me. When you are as old as I am and have been a Nun

as long as I have, you get a chance to see and hear just about everything. I'm sure that there's nothing you could say or ask that I would find offensive." "Well, I've always had a fantasy to have a nun kiss me." She responds, "Well, let's see what we can do about that: first, you have to be single, and second, you must be Catholic." The cab driver is very excited and says, "Yes, I'm single; and I'm Catholic too!"

"OK" the Nun says, "Pull into the next alley." He does so and the Nun fulfills his fantasy with a kiss that would make a hooker blush. But when they get back on the road, the cab driver starts crying. "My dear child, said the nun, why are you crying?"

"Forgive me Sister, but I have sinned. I lied. I must confess, I'm married and I'm Jewish." The nun says, "That's OK, my name is Kevin and I'm on my way to a Halloween party."

Quote

We believe in Dog

- On the first day God created the dog.
- On the second day God created man to serve the dog.
- On the third day God created all the animals to serve as food for the dog.
- On the fourth day God created honest toil so that man could labor for the good of the dog.
- On the fifth day God created the tennis ball so that the dog might or might not retrieve it.
- On the sixth day God created veterinary science to keep the dog healthy and the man broke.
- On the seventh day God wanted to rest, but He had to walk the dog.

— anonymous from Church of Religious Science, Los Angeles, *Voice of Reason*

Unquote



BOOK REVIEW

Reporting the Universe

by E. L. Doctorow

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003)

These are the Wm. E. Massey lectures in the history of American civilization presented by the noted novelist E. L. Doctorow at Harvard in 2000. He talked about his childhood, growing up without religion, how he became a writer, and the entire Universe. He reports on the role of religion in American civilization and why we are infidels. In short, it is a secular humanist rant. It is so well and tightly written that I will neither describe nor summarize it. Instead, I decided to give you a long quote from the chapter on:

The Politics of God

We do not necessarily have to embrace the secular glories of modernism—which include nuclear weapons, environmental ruin, and relentlessly impersonal economic structures that have produced mass poverty in many parts of the world—to see that, for the religious extremists, the idea of the sacred is implanted in the same antediluvian circuits of the brain where reside our tribal fears and hatreds. How, given the increasingly warlike pietism around the world since the end of the Cold War, can we avoid concluding that fundamentalism is the truest expression of the religious sensibility? Compared to the self-sacrifice of religiously inspired suicide bombers, what shall we say of the drift away from literalism in contemporary Christianity and Judaism and Islam, the acceptance of the concept of scriptural events as having metaphorical rather than literal truth, for example, or the opening up of the liturgical privilege to women and gays, or the renunciation of female drapery, or the sociological emphasis on community welfare, or the reengineering of the religious words by theologians to accommodate everything the secular intellect has taught us? What can we say of such enlightened developments in the past hundred years or so except that they are condemned by literalists, with some justice, as dilutions, as enervations, as *not religious enough*? The religious modality may now be declaring itself tenable only in its simple, atavistic readings of the ancient texts. So that, finally, true fulfillment of the prophecies is not possible except in the pure form of the theocratic state.

We must honor the achievements of religious inspiration in human history. Withal, there has always been something about the organized attention to God that is wrongly proprietary, with a sharp murderous edge to it. It is as if piety itself has a flawed circuit that tends to blow, and the devotion to God becomes the will to power. Nietzsche so characterized Christianity, recognizing that reactive humility of turning the other cheek, for example, as one of the most powerful political acts imaginable. If we look at the beginnings of Christianity, the dispute between those gospelers who, somewhat mystical or gnostic in nature, rejected the idea of an authoritarian priesthood (and were ultimately heretical), and the synoptic gospelers (ultimately canonical), whose principle of apostolic succession was their chosen means of assuring the survival of the faith in the Roman world . . . it was a politicized Jesus created from that conflict, and it has been a politicized Jesus ever since, from the time of the Roman emperor Constantine's conversion in the fourth century through the long history of European Christianity, with its crusades, its inquisitions, its demonization of Jews, its contests and/or alliances with kings and emperors, and, with the rise of the Reformation, its active participation in all its forms in the wars among states and the rule of populations.

We don't have to resort to the long historical view—the biblical disputes between Pharisees and Essenes of ancient Israel—in order to note that in Israel today small parties of the super orthodox have cited their biblical right to establish settlements in the West Bank, and in fact, continue to deem it God's will to install their own religious practices as laws for all Israelis. Perhaps in this context too we're justified in recalling the pious Jewish fundamentalism of the assassin of the Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The late Taliban rulers of Afghanistan controlled all private life in that country—banning education for female children, issuing edicts concerning dress, reading material, dancing, laying down a whole blanket of prohibitions on the private lives of the population according to their religious ideals which, not incidentally, they had affirmed with their assault rifles and rocket launchers.

I'm aware this is a secular humanist canticle I'm singing, and perhaps of no real relevance to the person of faith whose life shines with decent and well-meant conduct and whose being is healthy with joyous conviction.

This is a very good secular humanist book by an author who has a number of excellent novels to his credit. But if you want to know more, you will just have to read it yourself.

– Wolf Roder



BOOK REVIEW II

The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

By Israel Knohl, trans. David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)

This is a short book on an obscure topic. It has only 74 pages of text, and again as many pages of appendices and foot notes. The author is the chairman of the Bible Department of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. To appreciate what Knohl is getting at, we need to understand how historical scholars of the New Testament interpret the "self understanding" of the Jesus character. It is generally accepted by historians (not theologians, or religious conservatives) that Jesus did not think of himself as the "messiah" or as the "son of God" who would be co-ruler of the Universe and "sit at the right hand of God." These ideas about Jesus were introduced later by the Apostle Paul and by the non-Jewish Christians of the second century who shaped the Gospels, and the other scriptures we collectively call the New Testament.

The actual Jesus person, who lived sometime between 6 BCE and about 33 CE was a Jewish rabbi, a Pharisee, and a radical or reformer of the period, which saw several other sages and agitators among the Jewish population. It was a period of disturbance after the death of Herod the Great, who had rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. Jews considered themselves oppressed under the colonial rule of the Roman Empire. Generally, they expected or hoped for the coming of a powerful King, a descendant of David, in short a "messiah" who would forcefully deliver them from the rule of Rome. There was not, according to the historians, any precedent or expectation of a suffering, dying, and resurrected messiah in Judaism. The account, in the Gospel of John, of Jesus foretelling his rejection and death has no historical basis at all. Knohl disagrees with that interpretation.

Knohl finds a precedent for a suffering and rejected messiah among the Qumran documents. These documents, however, can not refer to Jesus himself, since they all date at least a half century before the Jesus time. The focus is first on two hymns or prayers of self-praise and suffering of a leader of the Qumran community which are very much out of the character of the other Qumran writings. Knohl also considers that the New Testament Book of Revelation is based on

older Jewish documents, which have been lost. This material can be reconstructed to show how some pagan ideas had infiltrated the understandings of the Essene leadership of the Qumran community.

The hymns are translated in full in an appendix. They show how one Menahem, presumably the leader of the Essene community saw himself as the "suffering servant" of god, and as a rejected messiah. And, this messiah was slain in Jerusalem, during the revolt and unrest which followed the death of Herod in 4 BCE..

Thus, for the first time in the history of Judaism, a conception emerged of 'catastrophic' messianism in which the humiliation, rejection, and death of the Messiah were regarded as an inseparable part of the redemptive process. (p. 3)

Thus it would not be unprecedented for Jesus to see himself as a rejected messiah, rather he may have known and followed the model of the Essene "suffering servant."

Jesus' messianic mission was therefore a journey towards a known suffering and death. According to the idea received from the Qumranic Messiah's disciples, the suffering and death of the Messiah formed an inseparable part of the messianic destiny. For someone to take such a mission upon himself was naturally very difficult, and it would seem that Jesus' way of speaking about himself in the third person as the "son of man" reflected that fact. (p. 49)

Finally, Knohl suggests there may have been Roman influence, certainly on Herod, but also on the Menahem messiah. Specifically, he sees the emperor Augustus proclaiming himself as the "son of God;" -- his "father" Ceasar having been proclaimed "divine"-- as blasphemy. Yet, it may have lead to the idea of Menahem's thinking himself the "suffering servant" and the "son of God," which in turn gave Jesus his ideas.

Now, why would anyone believe this Jesus was "god"? -- Wolf Roder

Quote We were quite happy at the center of Aristotle's and Ptolemy's world: "Personally I preferred it. Fifty-five crystal spheres geared to God's crankshaft is my idea of a satisfying universe." -- a character in Arcadia, a play by John Stoppard Unquote



December Meeting Sunday, 12th 7:00 PM

January Potluck: Tuesday, 4th 6:30 PM



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

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. 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. Our members are mostly secular humanists. However, 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 figleaves@fuse.net, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org