

# FIG Leaves

# June 2000

## June Meeting

**THOUGHTS ON ARISTOTLE AND GOD**  
Professor Lawrence Jost

Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher, not only made many contributions to strengthen the life of reason but was also a naturalist and the founder of science as a discipline. He is therefore a key person in the development of humanistic thought. Nevertheless, he also used supernatural ideas and developed the concept of God in an abstract way - the Prime Mover. His approach made it easier for the Catholic Church to incorporate his thought into its theology.

Jost is in a unique position to clarify Aristotle's ideas of God for us and to explain how he went wrong in this area of his thought. In his position as professor of philosophy at the University of Cincinnati, one of his specialties is classical Greek philosophy. He is also a humanist and so shares many of the basic views of FIG members.

Jost spoke recently to the UC Skeptics on the subject of ethics. In a lively presentation, he noted that Plato raised the issue of whether an act was good because it pleased the gods or whether it pleased the gods because it was good.

Joe Levee

## Tim Madigan to Speak July 9

**NEW DILEMMAS IN MEDICAL ETHICS**

With such rapid developments as the mapping of the human genome, the reality of xenotransplantation (putting animal organs into humans) and the possibility of human cloning, the challenges faced by bioethics is greater than ever. Humanism has much to offer in this public debate, for humanist philosophers (such as the late Joseph Fletcher) have been exploring these challenges long before they became public issues. Tim Madigan will examine some of these modern challenges, and speculate on how humanism can address potential upcoming bioethical dilemmas as well.

Tim Madigan is editorial director of the University of Rochester Press, and chair of the FREE INQUIRY magazine editorial board. Tim has a Ph.D. in philosophy and has specialized in ethics. He has also participated in groups studying medical ethics. Tim is an old friend of our group, having spoken at our first public meeting in 1991. He is always welcomed by FIG audiences because he manages to talk about important subjects with verve and humor.

Joe Levee

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Jesus: The Epic Story of the  
Tragedy and Triumph of the  
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### Events

**June 20 Meeting**  
Thoughts on Aristotle and God  
Larry Jost  
Tuesday, June 20,  
at 7:00 p.m.  
Geier Center,  
corner Gilbert and  
Elsinore Avenues



**Potluck Dinner, Tuesday,**  
July 11, at 6:30 PM



**July 9 Meeting**  
Medical Ethics  
Tim Madigan  
Sunday, July 9,  
at 7:00 p.m.  
at the Geier Center

## Daniel L. Kline, 82, taught at UC College of Medicine

### Physiologist also studied Egyptology

By Betsy Kirkpatrick  
*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 21, 2000

Daniel L. Kline was a modest man with a sense of humor. He was a writer and scientist, but according to his wife, he always retained his humility.

Mr. Kline died Friday of heart failure at Christ Hospital after a long career as a researcher and chairman at various medical schools. The Paddock Hills resident was 82.

"He was beloved at the hospital," Vivian Kline said. "The nurses and doctors loved him. Most people aren't able to maintain a good sense of humor in their sickness."

After graduating from Purdue University in 1943 with a bachelor's degree in physiology, Mr. Kline attended Columbia University in New York City, where he received his doctorate in physiology.

He taught briefly at Long Island Medical College before receiving one of the first five-year fellowships at Yale University Medical School in New Haven, Conn. There, he taught physiology to nurses, first-year medical students and graduate students for 19 years.

In 1966, Mr. Kline left Yale for the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine.

Dr. Dick Bozian, retired professor of medicine at UC and a colleague, said: "He was always for the underdog. He had a tremendous feeling for causes in people. He was a humanist to the core. His consuming passion was for understanding the workings of the mind, for understanding consciousness."

Mr. Kline was constantly doing research in the area of the clot-dissolving systems of the body. In 1954, he received worldwide recognition when he purified plasminogen, which has since been used as a blood thinner.

The medical community around the world applauded his accomplishment, but Mr. Kline maintained his usual modesty, his wife said.

"He was so surprised (by the attention)," Mrs. Kline said. "He described it as 'AP (the Associated Press news service) must have had a slow day.'"

Mr. Kline retired from UC's medical school in 1987. He pursued his interest in Egyptology by writing a layman's

biography of Thomas Young, the scientist who deciphered the Rosetta Stone.

Another interest that Mr. Kline followed after his retirement was a group called ROMEOS (Retired Old Men Eating Out), which he founded. The members of the group - friends and colleagues - dined every two weeks at Mecklenberg Gardens in Corryville and discussed everything from politics to education. The group meant so much to Mr. Kline, his wife said, that all the members made constant visits during his 10-month illness.

Other survivors include three daughters, Emily Marks of Kensington, Calif., Kathy Kline of Cambridge, Mass., and Elizabeth Kline of New York City; three brothers, Jerry Kline of New York City, Chuck Kline of La Jolla, Calif., and Steve Kline of Philadelphia; one sister, Ruth Kline of Philadelphia; and six grandchildren.

Friends and family may visit 7 p.m. Tuesday at the home of Mr. Kline. A memorial service at the UC College of Medicine auditorium will be announced later. Mr. Kline donated his body to the medical school.

Memorials: Friends of the Library, UC, 231 Albert Sabin Way, Cincinnati 45267.

### DAN KLINE, IN MEMORIAM

We were proud to have had Dan Kline as a member of FIG, even before we read the above account of his life.

We knew that he was a scientist and a professor, but we didn't know the extent of his contributions until we read his obituary. We did know of his personal warmth and the breadth of his interests since he and Vivian invited us into their home a couple of times a year for pot luck dinners.

He had a serious hearing loss in the years we knew him, but that did not deter him from his avid delight in discussing all kinds of subjects. He even kidded that by leaving one of his hearing aids on the table, he could still follow the conversation when he went into another room.

His research and teaching never stopped. Just a couple of years ago, in UC's Institute for Learning in Retirement he and Vern Uchtman taught a very informative eight-week course on the latest research and theories on how the brain works.

He lives on in his scholarly contributions and in the memories of his family and those of us who knew him.

**Joe Levee**

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# May Speaker Review

Edwin Kagin, director of Camp Quest, spoke to the Free Inquiry Group on May 16, 2000. The 'Titanium-Throated Orator' offered to sell video copies of his recent surgery, entitled 'Cutting Edwin's Throat'. There were no takers. The audience was more interested in his presentation entitled 'Religious Wars in the Commonwealth of Kentucky'.

Edwin cited passages from both the U.S. and the Kentucky constitutions that prohibit favoritism toward religion. Yet the Kentucky legislature passed House Bill 70 over Governor Patton's veto. The inconsistent and convoluted language of the bill lets churches use a religious test to decide who may be denied use of their publicly-offered facilities.

Helen Kagin related the story of her fortuitous presence at the introduction of HB70. She was in Frankfort last January to lobby for reproductive freedom, and just happened to be in the meeting of the House Judiciary Committee when Representative Thomas Kerr presented the legislation. Mr. Kerr was joined by the Reverend Wayne Lipscomb, representing the aggrieved members of the Northern Kentucky Baptist Association. This group wanted to ensure that they would never have to rent their camp to atheists again.

By an unlikely set of circumstances Camp Quest was the inspiration for HB70. The members of FIG chose to start Camp Quest in 1996. In the spring of that year that

were notified that the camp they had reserved was not going to open for the summer. In desperation they turned to the Yellow Pages and found an advertisement for the Bullitsburg Baptist Assembly Camp. Camp Quest committee members drove immediately to the camp and met with the director. The camp was found to be suitable and available, so a contract was signed for that summer.

The 1996 camp went very well, and a contract was signed for the next year. During the intervening period, however, FIG came out in opposition to the creationism museum proposed by Answers in Genesis. When Camp Quest returned to the camp in the summer of 1997 they were greeted by stacks of creationist literature and 'Jesus is Lord' written on the mirrors. Nevertheless, the camp went smoothly and relations with the staff were excellent.

During that camp FIG was informed that non-church groups would not be allowed to reserve the camp more than six months in advance. Camp Quest could not work with this restriction, so they proceeded to contract with Camp Kern for the next year and have been there ever since.

There is little doubt that HB70 will be tested shortly after it takes effect in July. Some church will have to decide whether atheists, or homosexuals, or Hindus, or Jews are so morally repugnant that they should not be allowed to violate their premises. Then a judge will decide whether

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## May 30th Discussion Group

The FIG Discussion Group attracted 27 participants to Lenhardt's restaurant on May 30, 2000. The capacity crowd engaged in a lively discussion on the topic of Atheism and Agnosticism. It was quickly noted that the commonly accepted definitions of these terms do not necessarily agree with their historical derivation. Several cases were cited where the term atheist is used to refer to any unorthodox, heretical, or evil person. In this way religionists can portray atheists as inherently immoral, by definition. In proper usage, however, an atheist is someone without a belief in one or more gods. This in turns begs for a definition of 'god', but this should be left up to the theists, since it is their belief after all.

Agnosticism does not seem to have the same degree of negative connotation in common usage. The excerpt from George H. Smith's 'Atheism: The Case Against God' defined agnosticism as the belief that it is impossible to know about the existence or characteristics of god (or any other supernatural being). A theistic agnostic believes that there is a god, but also believes that the nature of that god is unknowable. The atheist agnostic does not believe that there is a god, but also does not believe that the existence of god can be denied with certainty. In short, they do not know and feel that they cannot know.

The group participants were not eager to label themselves as either atheistic or agnostic in light

of the multiple interpretations given to those labels. In fact, several individuals wanted to pick new labels or to dispense with them altogether. Why should an atheist identify themselves with what they do not believe in? By that logic it would be just as sensible to call oneself an anti-leprechaunist. The terms Humanist and Rationalist were perceived as having more potential for the promotion of positive values.

This led into a discussion of the term 'Spiritual Atheist', which was described as a way to keep the enjoyable aspects of religion without the supernatural. Religious gatherings allow people to share joyful emotions. Many atheists want this sense of community without the authoritarian and illogical baggage. Other atheists are wary of anything that looks or sounds too much like religion. And yet for any movement to succeed, it must offer benefits for all of its members.

It was noted that religion is marketed very well, with effective advertising in the form of awe-inspiring cathedrals and miraculous healings. In addition to this positive reinforcement, the group discussed the possibility of a genetic predisposition to religion. Anything that contributes to the reproductive success of a population will tend to be passed from one generation to the next. Perhaps we could say that the anti-evolutionists are driven to their irrationality by evolution itself. Bertrand Russell would appreciate the irony.

Philip Ferguson

**June 2000**



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## THE NEED TO COME OUT OF THE CLOSET

(A forthcoming editorial by Paul Kurtz)

As the last repressed minority in America, religious dissenters need to stand up and be counted. We need to wage a campaign to defend our rights. And we need to persuade our fellow citizens that equal protection of the laws should apply to all citizens, believers and unbelievers alike.

There are millions of Americans who do not profess a belief in God. We are a significant minority. Yet our voice is all too rarely heard in the public square. Intolerant attitudes and prejudice against us continue to fester. Heretics and iconoclasts are often considered the pariahs of society.

Who are we? We are your children and your parents, your sisters and your brothers, your friends and your relatives. We are your students and your teachers, your artists and your scientists, your politicians and corporate leaders, your workers and your housewives, your computer experts and your neighbors. We represent all walks of life. We are everywhere. We are an integral part of society. We only ask that we be allowed to proclaim and practice our convictions openly, without fear or recrimination. The ultimate test of a democratic society is: that it will respect and honor honest dissent.

According to various polls, some eight to eleven percent of the American population do not believe in God. Moreover, 39 percent are not members of any church, synagogue, or mosque, and many who belong to religious denominations do so only nominally. Unbelievers exist throughout the world. A recent poll indicates that 14 percent of the Canadian population does not believe in God. In Norway, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany, France, and other Western European countries, the percentages of nonbelief are significantly higher. Indeed, in many European countries the state provides funding for both religious and nonreligious organizations alike. Billions of people on the planet do not profess Christian, Jewish, or Muslim belief systems - yet they have created enduring civilizations and high moral principles, such as Confucianism in China, Buddhism in Asia, and humanism in the democratic world. This is surprising to many religious dogmatists who are convinced that unless you believe in a monotheistic religion you cannot be moral.

Fortunately, the American Constitution includes the First Amendment, which defends the separation of church and state, prohibits the establishment of a religion, guarantees freedom of conscience and the free exercise of religious beliefs or none. Though often quoted in principle the First Amendment is often violated in practice. For example, the Constitution explicitly prohibits any religious test for public office. Yet few candidates are courageous enough to admit that they are religious nonconformists. A quasi-official doctrine of religious piety pervades public life; and most candidates feel it necessary to profess a religious creed and to "God bless" America

repeatedly.

Secular humanists - atheists and agnostics - have deep convictions; yet they are often afraid to express them publicly. They are good citizens, many lead exemplary moral lives, and many have contributed significantly to society. Many famous men and women - philosophers and poets, scientists and artists - were freethinkers: Socrates, Epicurus, Hypatia, Spinoza, Voltaire, Jefferson, Madison, Lincoln, Hume, Kant, Shakespeare, Shelly, Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Simone de Beauvoir, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Robert Ingersoll, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Clarence Darrow, Margaret Sanger, John Dewey, and others. And many ordinary men and women have shared their convictions.

In the major institutions of American society - the corporations and unions, the universities and foundations - few leaders will admit to their religious skepticism. In organizations as diverse as the Boy Scouts atheists are explicitly denied membership; they are not considered of sufficient "moral fiber." High school atheist groups need to fight for the right to exist, though there are thousands of Bible clubs. Public meetings, high school and college graduation ceremonies, official breakfast meetings, quasi-public gatherings, and sports contests begin and end with prayers and invocations - without any hesitation of offending nonbelievers in their midst. This occurs, even though we are a Secular Republic and the government is supposed to be neutral about religion, neither favoring nor disfavoring one or another. Moreover, the laws often discriminate against secular humanists. For example, in most of the states of the Union, humanist leaders are not allowed to officiate at marriage ceremonies; whereas religious clergy have the unquestioned right to do so. The media very rarely if ever will portray secular humanists or atheists in positive terms; yet religious leaders from John Paul to Billy Graham are lionized, with nary a word of criticism.

The democratic movement for equal rights has made enormous progress in recent years. It has been made more and more inclusive, applying to racial and religious minorities, feminists, the handicapped, the aged, abused children, and gay people. Is it not time that the rights of religious dissenters also be appreciated. If society deplores anti-Black, anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, or anti-gay talk, why should it not also deplore anti-atheist vilification? Is it not time that we fight back? Let us declare: "We are secular humanists, atheists, and agnostics and proud of it! We demand equal access and equal rights."

from the "Council for Secular Humanism,  
Electronic Newsletter"

Voltaire (1694-1778) often said religion began when the first rogue encountered the first fool. He thought religion was a necessary superstition. In a famous letter to King Fredrick William of Prussia, he commented: "Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer."



# FIG Leaflets

A federal judge on Friday ordered that the Ten Commandments be removed from the courthouses in Pulaski and McCreary counties and classrooms in the Harlan County schools. But McCreary County Judge-Executive Jimmie Greene said he would go to jail before removing the plaques.

"This is one order I will not obey," he said. U.S. District Judge Jennifer B. Coffman ruled that, even though the commandments are surrounded by other historical documents, they are religious in nature and serve no secular purpose. "No reasonable observer of the displays could conclude otherwise," Judge Coffman said in her ruling.

"Judge Bans Biblical Displays",  
Kimberly Hefling, Associated Press

## The Value of Skepticism

During the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, one morning's executions began with three men: a rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a rationalist skeptic.

The rabbi was marched up onto the platform first. There, facing the guillotine, he was asked if he had any last words. And the rabbi cried out, "I believe in the one and only true God, and He shall save me." The executioner then positioned the rabbi below the blade, set the block above his neck, and pulled the cord to set the terrible instrument in motion. The heavy cleaver plunged downward, searing the air. But then, abruptly, it stopped with a crack just a few inches above the would-be victim's neck. To which the rabbi said, "I told you so."

"It's a miracle!" gasped the crowd. And the executioner had to agree, letting the rabbi go.

Next in line was the priest. Asked for his final words, he declared, "I believe in Jesus Christ -- the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost -- who will rescue me in my hour of need." The executioner then positioned this man beneath the blade. And he pulled the cord. Again the blade flew downward -- thump! creak! -- stopping just short of its mark once more.

"Another miracle!" sighed the disappointed crowd. And the executioner for the second time had no

choice but to let the condemned go free. Now it was the skeptic's turn. "What final words have you to say?" he was asked. But the skeptic didn't hear. Staring intently at the ominous engine of death, he seemed lost. Not until the executioner poked him in the ribs and the question was asked again did he reply. "Oh, I see your problem," the skeptic said pointing. "You've got a blockage in the gear assembly, right there!"

from The Enlightened Despot  
<http://www.cyberdespot.com/>

A truck driver used to amuse himself by running over lawyers he would see walking down the side of the road. Every time he would see a lawyer walking along the road, he would swerve to hit him, and there would be a loud "THUMP" and then he would swerve back on the road. One day, as the truck driver was driving along he saw a priest hitch hiking. He thought he would do a good turn and pulled the truck over.

He asked the priest, "Where are you going, Father?". "I'm going to the church 5 miles down the road!", replied the priest. "No problem, Father! I'll give you a lift. Climb in the truck". The happy priest climbed into the passenger seat and the truck driver continued down the road.

Suddenly the truck driver saw a lawyer walking down the road and instinctively he swerved to hit him. But then he remembered there was a priest in the truck with him, so at the last minute he swerved back to the road, narrowly missing the lawyer. However even though he was certain he missed the lawyer, he still heard a loud "THUD". Not understanding where the noise came from he glanced in his mirrors and when he didn't see anything, he turned to the priest and said, "I'm sorry Father. I almost hit that lawyer". "That's okay", replied the priest. "I got him with the door!"

from The Enlightened Despot  
<http://www.cyberdespot.com/>

## World Wide Web

The growing menace of the arkonuts, by Eugenie C. Scott, of the National Center for Science Education, in the May 5th number of Science magazine:  
<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/288/5467/813>

Agnosticism/Atheism - Home Page  
<http://atheism.miningco.com/>



# More Leaflets...

Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from you, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

a. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (Lev. 1:9). The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. How should I deal with this?

b. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as it suggests in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

c. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev. 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

d. Lev. 25:44 states that I may buy slaves from the nations that are around us. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify?

e. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

f. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an Abomination (Lev. 10:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

g. Lev. 20:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

V. H. Jergens  
vhj@one.net

## The Secular Family

My husband is on a mission. He is determined to eradicate words from his everyday language that have a religious reference. There are numerous offending words and phrases: heaven, hell, Satan, Jesus, damn it, Christ, thank God, . . . . You may have noticed that many of the suspect words and phrases might happen to come out in the heat of the moment. So it takes unusual self control when he smashes his finger and carefully edits his comments. Unfortunately, Philip has just such self control. I don't. And even more unfortunately, I agreed with him that his project was very logical and that I too would attempt to avoid their usage.

There are a whole list of words and phrases that we can use in place of the forbidden ones. It seems the ones that come more readily to mind deal with bodily functions. Society usually frowns on their frequent usage, in Cincinnati, anyway. So it seems as though those are out too. That makes us a very G-rated family. Ironically this is just another aspect of the way we choose to live our lives that many will mistake for religious conviction. Of course, we are carefully editing "bless you" and "thank God" as well, so as to minimize that confusing impression.

Philip even would prefer that we eliminate "good luck" alluding as it does to the superstitious idea of luck. I think he's gone too far. The next think I know he'll be yelling "Macbeth" in theaters, walking under ladders, and seeking out black cats just to prove a point.

Geeze. Nope...that one's got to go too...a derivation of Jesus.

Martha Ferguson

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## Sophia Riehemann Receives Award

Katie Kratz Stine, KY Senator from Campbell County, gave atheist Sophia Riehemann, aged 9, a student of the month award at the Board of Education meeting today, in Bellevue KY. When giving the award Stine showed no evidence of being able to distinguish the atheist from any child adhering to an acceptable Christian view.

However, when functioning in the senate, Ms. Stine has no difficulty distinguishing those to whom second class citizenship belongs based on religious belief. The hypocritical Stine offered neither comments or apologies to Ms. Riehemann in the matter of trampling atheist rights through HB 70.

Ms. Riehemann will be attending Camp Quest 2000 in the summer, the secular humanist camp which unintentionally started the NKY Baptist push to pass HB 70. She stated this about Ms. Stine: "She seemed nice enough, but just because we don't believe in God doesn't mean that we don't get as many rights as other people." This reporter gladly acknowledges the wisdom of Ms. Riehemann's remarks.

## Will rote prayer make us behave?

To the Editor:

I've followed the ongoing debate about prayer in the schools with some interest. Perhaps I can offer a different perspective. According to a survey I recently saw, about 85 percent of Americans believe in God, much higher than in most countries. According to a 1997 study, more Americans attend church at least once a week (44 percent) than attend in any other industrial country in the world. We also have the highest violence and murder rates. Britain (25 percent church attendance), France (21 percent) and Germany (14 percent) have much lower crime rates and microscopic violence and murder rates compared to the United States.

Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden have international reputations as law-abiding and peaceful countries, yet their church attendance rates are around 5 percent.

I don't believe that church attendance increases violence and crime. But those figures indicate that we don't seem to relate our religious beliefs to our conduct.

I don't know what these other countries have (or don't have) that makes them less violent, but I'm uncomfortable that we have high church attendance urging us to be good, and we have the highest incarceration rate in the world urging us not to be bad, and we still have the highest violence and murder rates in the world.

I fail to see how a rote recitation of a prayer in school will lessen violence or promote morality in our kids when the adult population doesn't seem much improved by more church attendance and prayer.

Thad McManus - Hansville

"...with God all things are possible."

Motto of the State of Ohio

While it may be possible for time or for gravity to reverse itself, no matter how unlikely, it will always be impossible to draw a plane map of the spherical earth to scale. With or without god, some things are impossible.

a geographer

## WANTED!

Your Favorite Superstitions!!!!

Collecting Superstitions for a  
Superstition Bash Party

Friday, October 13, 2000 at 7:30 p.m.

Send your favorites to: ART-Superstitions, P.O. Box 12896, Cincinnati, OH 45212 or e-mail me at [dloughry@fuse.net](mailto:dloughry@fuse.net) (Donna Loughry).

## Inherit the Wind

Bob Riehemann is organizing a FIG fieldtrip to attend Playhouse in the Park's production of *Inherit the Wind*, Friday, September 8, 2000 at 8:00 PM. As a non-profit organization, we qualify for a 20% discount, if we have at least 10 people in our group. The base price is \$37.00 and we will get them for \$29.60. Students and Senior Citizens (62+ years old) get in for \$15.00. Reservation of parking on the premises is \$4.00 prepaid. Parking is \$5.00 the night of the show but is almost never available. If you are interested, please contact Bob Brieheeman by phone (859) 491-7219 or e-mail ([brieheema@cinternet.net](mailto:brieheema@cinternet.net)) so that he can estimate the number of seats to reserve. If more persons want to go at show time, he will try to get more seats but they will probably not be available. So if someone is remotely interested, they should contact him. Cancellations can be done in August. A notice will be sent out in August as a payment reminder. Payments not received by the due date, Monday, 21 August, will result in canceled reservations for that person.

## Science Book Club

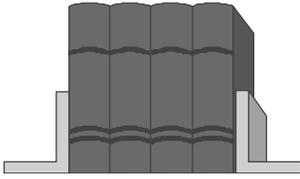
The June meeting of the Science Book Club will be in the downtown Public Library, 8th and Vine, from 2:30 until 3:30, third floor, room 6A, on the 4th Sunday of the month, June 25th. If you need assistance finding us, ask at the information desk when you walk in. The reading for this month will be *Between Inner Space and Outer Space* by John D. Barrow (500 B278 1999). Bob Streifthau will be leading the discussion.

The July meeting will discuss *The Elegant Universe* by Brian Greene (539.7258 G799 1999). Bob Riehemann will be leading that discussion.

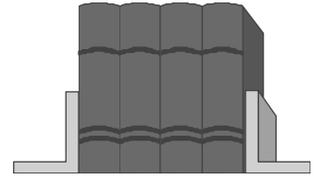
June 2000



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# Book Reviews



## **God's Funeral**

by A. N. Wilson

(New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1999)

If you are interested in the history of unbelief, this book is for you. An intellectual history of the growth of atheism and agnosticism in the Victorian age, that is throughout the nineteenth century. The author considers the insights and influences of German and French theologians, philosophers, and other thinkers, but the relentless focus is on Britain, at that time the leading nation of the world. Wilson starts with forerunners, the ideas which undermined religion which took shape in the previous century and are generally ascribed to the enlightenment. He discusses in particular two books. Edward Gibbons' *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* published between the American and the French Revolutions, examined for the first time the Christian Religion with all its warts, absurd and contemptible. The other was David Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779) which has not been surpassed to this day as a philosophical examination of matters of faith.

By 1883 unbelief had become sufficiently commonplace for an atheist MP to be elected, and for the Prime Minister, himself a full believer, to defend his right to sit in Parliament without swearing an oath by god. Wilson ends with the American philosopher William James. His psychological lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* affirm the importance of faith. Religion, he recognized, is like every other impulse, like hope, love, anger, and jealousy, an important emotion which adds to life's enchantment. It is of course "not logically or rationally deducible from anything else," (p. 329).

Much of Wilson's narrative turns on who said what, who influenced or taught whom, and how far did they go towards denying god in their writing. His examination is not so much of philosophers, as of historians and literary figures, of Carlyle and George Eliot, of the poet Swinburne, of Arnold and Ruskin. Even Marx and Engels come in for consideration. The book's title in fact is from the Thomas Hardy poem by the same heading.

Wilson does not omit the role of science in the growth of unbelief. This was the age of Charles Lyell, Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Huxley. It was also the period of thorough critical and historical examination of the Bible. According to Wilson, these scientific and scholarly insights were as much made possible by the growing lack of faith, as they gave religion the death blow. The Victorian age built on the age of Enlightenment, on the philosophy of Hume, Kant, and Hegel. These philosophers examined religion rationally and found it unsupportable. After that

reason could no longer be satisfied with the mysticism and magic of religion. The thinking classes rejected the Enlightenment religion of deism.

By the turn of the century no rational way to accept the Christian religion remained. Thomas Aquinas' contention that faith and reason can never be in conflict stood refuted. The Pope, Leo XIII, condemned the French and English "modernizers" who tried to reconcile the Church to the developing science and the insights of the historical Bible research. His successor, Pius X, excommunicated them. He died at the outbreak of World War I "convinced that atheism, mayhem, and nihilism would engulf the world, and he was, of course, absolutely right." (P. 352)

It seemed there were no good arguments left for religion. But people went right on praying, for faith is indifferent to reason. Many chose the side of religion for emotional needs, because they felt it was necessary as a cement for society, or because much of music and art is incomprehensible without Christianity. Many wished to preserve the forms of religion, the ritual, the pomp, and the ceremony, and willing to do so at the expense of the intellect. What did it matter if Jesus really was a first century rabbi, or whether the Eucharist or the Church was established by the Nazarene or arose as a cult after his death or without his existence at all. The Victorians killed the god of reason, but the god of faith and emotion marches on.

**Wolf Roder**

## ***Jesus: The Epic Story of the Tragedy and Triumph of the most Controversial Life in Human History!***

**A video produced by John Heyman**

**(San Bernardino: distributed by**

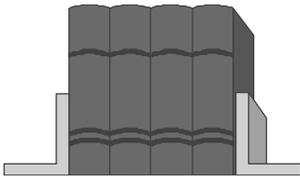
**The Jesus Project, 1979)**

An unsolicited copy of this full length video cassette was sent to me in the mail. Long before it arrived, it was announced, not by the Archangel Gabriel, but by a mailing credited to several churches in the neighborhood. I can't follow up on that invitation since I threw it away. The video itself was addressed to "Neighbor" and sent by the Campus Crusade for Christ International. Released by Warner Brothers.

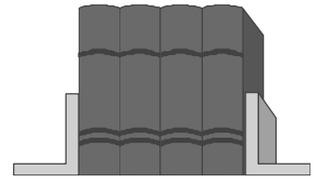
The cover hype informs me this is a "masterpiece" which was researched for five years and shot in over 200 locations in the Holy Land. What is more is has been translated in 425 languages and shown in more than 225 countries. While there is some dispute about whether some places are or are not countries, e.g. the Vatican, Western Sahara, or Puerto Rico, the UN, the World Bank,

*(Continued on page 9)*





# Book Reviews



(Continued from page 8)

and the Population Reference Bureau count no more than two hundred in this world.

On the same video cover the Reverend Billy Graham is quoted as saying: "Fascinating... a vivid portrayal" and Bishop Fulton Sheen pronounced it "A Masterpiece... in color, motion and speech..." What is more, Time Magazine is down for: "...Meticulous attention to authenticity..." With these eminent authorities supporting the effort I could not but take a look myself.

This video is not the same Jesus movie as the one shown on CBS television (Cincinnati channel 12) on Sunday, 14 May 2000. The CBS version has Jeremy Sisto playing Jesus, the video has Brian Deacon in the title role. The television gospel departs widely from the Bible by inventing not only scenes, but entire events never recorded elsewhere.

My first expectation concerned the extensive contradictions in the reported activities of the various Gospels, what compromise would the film team create? That issue was answered up front, the film credits announce that only the Gospel of Luke would be followed. In fact, the viewer can open the Bible to the third gospel and follow the action and words in a rough fashion. Although 83 minutes is insufficient to present every word and action of Jesus, the video follows the Gospel rather slavishly. The result is a poor show.

In form the Gospels are prose narrative histories, essentially biographies of Jesus. As such their report concentrates on the words of the founder, but does not repeat all the ancillary talk of others. It is not really good practice to translate prose narrative into drama, even if it does have many quotations. To create a drama requires writing dialog and continuity. In the video as a result Jesus does all the talking. I continually found myself waiting for someone, anyone, a follower, an adversary, a bystander to answer, to dispute, to comment, merely to say something, anything. People other than Jesus in the movie behave in an unprecedented, unique fashion, they are silent. At best the many characters in the film act as straight men, asking a question so Jesus can expound. There is a little more back and forth talk when the scene moves to the High Priests' court, to Pilate and to King Herod. But even then the talk is artificial, stilted, and confined to the major words. It sounds like the reading of a precis, report, or the minutes of the meeting, not like the dialog recorded by a court stenographer. By sticking close to the gospel narrative the authors of the video forego showing lively or dramatic dialog.

There are some striking scenes. Jesus stopping the

storm on Lake Galilee.

The meeting with the blind man whom he heals. And, the crucifixion itself, which is shown in painful detail. But the video is well short of what we might expect from a modern "action movie."

At the end of the tape we are asked to say a prayer. That is all well and good for believers, but there is nothing in the film that would persuade a non-Christian to take the miracle stories, the magic feats, and the sayings of Jesus seriously.

**Wolf Roder**

## CP

We happily note a report from Associated Press from West Palm Beach, Florida titled "Unsolicited Jesus Videos Angriely Returned." Seems that the Campus Crusade for Christ based in Orlando, FL squandered nearly \$1.2 million flooding the local mails with unsolicited video tapes on the life of the supposed Jesus. Postal authorities report that they were shocked by the volume of returns from furious recipients. "We've never had so many people call or as many returns in the 22 years I've worked here," declared one Post Office exec.

"Some residents -- many of them Jewish -- were so angry about the unsolicited mailing that they bundled bricks with the tapes to increase the return shipping charges..." added AP.

About 400,000 of the unsolicited videos were sent out, scheduled to arrive during the week of Passover and Easter. Rabbis and other Jewish leaders condemned the unsolicited, bulk mailing as "offensive and disrespectful."

Unsolicited spam and other junk e-mail -- whatever the source -- is bad enough. Returning unsolicited religious propaganda makes good sense, although in the case of a video tape, well, why let the mylar go to waste? Erase the video Jesus, and you have a perfectly usable blank tape to do with as you choose...

Charlotte's Web

## Letters to the Editor

We welcome comments.

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