

# FIG LEAVES

Volume 20 Issue 7

July 2011

## July FIG Meeting:

Tuesday, July 26 at 7:00 pm  
Hannaford Suites in Kenwood

## FIG Goes to the Movies: The Ledge

For our July meeting, we will transform the Hannaford Suites into a movie theater for a showing of the movie, *The Ledge*. The Ledge is “a thriller in which a battle of philosophies between a fundamentalist Christian and an atheist escalates into a lethal battle of wills. Ultimately, as a test of faith, or lack of it, the believer forces the non-believer onto the ledge of a tall building. He then has one hour to make a choice between his own life and someone else’s. Without faith in an afterlife, will he be capable of such a sacrifice?”(IMDb).

The movie is one of the first movies to feature an atheist protagonist and is directed by Matthew Chapman, who is the great-great grandson of Charles Darwin. The film features Charlie Hunnam, Terrence Howard, Liv Tyler and Patrick Wilson. The film premiered in the U.S. Dramatic Competition at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. The movie was scheduled for a theatrical release of July 8, 2011, but there are no plans for it to be shown in the Cincinnati area, so we will stage our own showing of the film.

FIG will provide popcorn and snacks, and feel free to bring your own drinks and snacks as well! The movie is 101 minutes, so we will be done by 9pm.

## August Potluck:

**Saturday, August 13, 5:00 pm** at Bryan Seller’s home in his back yard  
A Potluck Meal and Discussion for All. Politics and Religion are allowed.

Brian’s home is located at 8895 Wuest Road, Cincinnati, OH 45251

Drive North on Colerain past Reagan Cross County Highway, go to the third light, then turn left onto Poole Road. The third street on left (after Cheviot and Woodthrush) is Wuest (no light) - Brian is on right side a few houses down the street. His house has lots of pine trees in front.

## August Canoe/Kayak Trip: Sunday, August 28, 1 pm

**Canoeing and Kayaking on a River of Hellfire (Whitewater).** Meet at the Green Acres Canoeing Rental (10465 Suspension Bridge Road in Harrison, 45030), followed by

**FIG Dinner - 4pm at El Mariachi’s** in Harrison, OH (10513 Harrison Ave , Harrison, OH 45030)

Join us on **Sunday, August 28** for the first ever FIG Canoe/Kayaking trip at 1pm. We will be doing a canoe/kayak trip down the Whitewater River. Check out Green Acres website for directions: [www.greenacrescanoe.com](http://www.greenacrescanoe.com) Thanks to Randy Gudvangen and Brett Siereveld for their help in coordinating our trip.

If Canoeing or Kayaking isn’t your thing, feel free to join us at El Mariachi’s at 4pm for drinks and dinner and to hear the stories of any FIG members who were baptized, capsized.

If you would like to join us for either Canoeing or Dinner, please contact Shawn Jeffers at [figcincinnati@gmail.com](mailto:figcincinnati@gmail.com) or 513.404.8191.

## Inside

## Page

June Meeting .....	2
June Science Cafe .....	4
Things To Do, Things To See....	5
Science Book Club.....	5
Contradiction Corner .....	6
In The News .....	7
The Physics of Atheism (A Discussion with Victor Stenger) Book Review by Andrew Zak Willams .....	10

## Events

### July Meeting

Tuesday, July 26 at 7:00 pm  
Hannaford Suites in Kenwood  
5900 East Galbraith Rd.  
(for directions see page 6.)

### August Picnic Potluck

Sat. Aug. 13, at 4 PM  
At the home of Bryan Sellers  
8895 West Rd, Cincinnati, OH 45251.

### August Canoe Trip

Sun. Aug. 28 - Canoe & Kayak  
Trip on the White Water River.  
Fig Dinner afterwards at  
El Mariachi’s 10513 Harrison Ave.  
Harrison, OH 45030.

**Save this Date -**

**October 15-16, 2011**

**FIG 20th Anniversary  
Celebration**

(see page 5 for details)



June Meeting

## Beyond The Black Church Understanding Trinity Broadcasting Network And The Word Of Faith Movement

Katie Hladky started doing ethnographic work at the Solid Rock Church in Mason, Ohio. This church featured the kind of prosperity theology that is prevalent in the mega churches that appear on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). As an atheist, Katie was fascinated, amused and horrified by the programs shown on TBN. Since her academic background was in African-American studies, she began to study the network through the lens of race.



Katie Hladky

Many of the mega churches are very well integrated. After the 1960's young people of all races found that they were attracted to these mega churches because they were integrated and because of the prosperity driven aspect of their message. These churches expound the virtues of capitalism and "the American Way" internationally. They downplay racial differences while touting conservative viewpoints. A married couple instead of the traditional charismatic male heads many of them. This emphasizes the importance they place on family and draws women to the church. The church buildings are huge and opulent palaces. The leaders often dress flamboyantly and travel in limos and their own private jets. This lends credence to the illusion that anyone who worships their way will also become prosperous and wealthy. Middle class and poor people are drawn to these churches that promise a prosperous and integrated American utopia.

The concept of "positive confession" is the idea that nothing affects you but what you think and speak and is a big part of the ideology at TBN. Katie illustrated this idea with a technique from the book *"The Secret."* This book states that if you want to be slim you should not look at fat people. You can eat what you want but looking at fat people will put you in a fat frame of mind so that you also become fat. Another idea is the "blank check from the universe." If you make out a large check (available on the TBN web site) for the amount you want to receive and put it where you can look at it often the universe will "cash" that check and you will receive that money. If it doesn't work the blame lies with you, the worshiper. What they are saying is that God will provide if you are faithful. Your troubles do not come from racism, social standing or an indifferent universe. They come from you.

TBN started in 1973 and the leader of TBN claimed that a vision appeared to him and God told him to use satellites to purify the air with TBN to facilitate Jesus' return. He interprets Bible passages as describing and suggesting the use of satellites. TBN uses a variety of translations (more than twenty) of the Bible to back their claims. The most popular version is written for a third grade reading level. Bible verses ➔



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

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

### FIG Board of Directors:

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



### Memberships run from:

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

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

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



are interpreted as saying that satellites will be essential features of the end times that will lead to the return of Jesus. Satellites are very important to TBN as vehicles to spread their dogma worldwide. They especially want to convert those in Muslim countries where missionaries are prohibited. Each satellite is equipped with a Bible chip. They believe that using this chip will increase the power of the satellite to spread their message.

There is a movement in this country called Christian Zionism that is supported by TBN. It is the belief of evangelical Christians that the Bible predicts that the Jews will return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem as a prequel to the apocalypse. The establishment of Israel as a sovereign nation after WWII strengthened this belief. The rebuilding of the Temple is seen as an event that precedes the second coming of Christ. In spite of past antagonism towards Jews, evangelical Christians are working with Jews because they believe that it is helping Jesus to come back. American evangelicals are donating more money to this goal than are American Jews. An example of their zeal is the upcoming rally in Israel planned for next year by Mormon Glen Beck.

Katie visited the TBN studios to view a taping and visited many TBN viewers in their homes as part of her studies. While she tried to maintain the objective stance of the observer, she could not help but be saddened by some of the things that she witnessed. By broadcasting constantly, offering church membership and a 24-hour prayer partner helpline for support, TBN targets the elderly who may have been avid churchgoers but are unable to get out to church due to physical problems and restrictions. Many eke out an existence with the help of Social Security and their pensions. Despite their fixed incomes, many give a substantial portion of their money to TBN because they feel that this gives them credit for every soul saved by TBN. Some refuse to take their medications saying, "Jesus will cure me" through TBN. Doing the demographic work in these people's homes emphasized what a dangerous and crippling worldview this is.

Despite the fact that the leaders of these mega

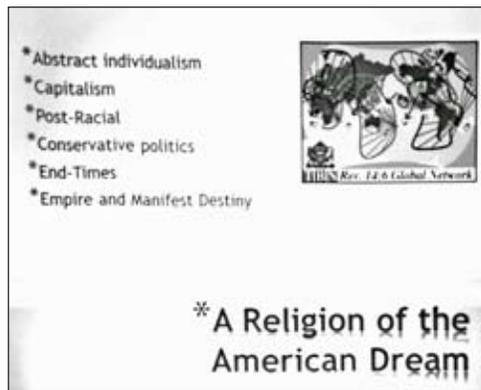
churches live lives of luxury and comfort tax free, their followers are often elderly, sick and poor. These vulnerable people are being exploited by these churches that have no evidence for the claims they make. They use anecdotes and testimonials as "proof" that their ideas are valid. They take advantage of basic human characteristics such as optimism and the desire to do good to perpetuate and spread their particular form of dogma. They have influenced their viewers politically, often causing them to vote against their own best interests. An illustration of this would be voting to support tax breaks for the rich while cutting social programs.

The majority of people belonging to these churches are middle class. They feel that they are just one step away from true financial success and that Jesus, through TBN, is the final piece that will bring about their financial security. In these cases, Katie determined that TBN is taking advantage of the overly optimistic nature of Americans. Pulling yourself up "by your bootstraps" is an American concept that some think is easier to achieve with the help of supernatural powers and big-haired TV preachers and their wives.

Despite the irrational and illogical claims and ideas of these TV preachers, many otherwise rational people become gullible victims of their ideologies. Katie's research has led her to the conclusion that these people desperately want to believe that these ideologies are valid in order to improve their lives and so close their thinking off to the irrational and illogical aspects they contain. Her description of this phenomenon is one of the best definitions you will hear for faith. "That's what faith is, it's the space in between what makes sense and what doesn't and you still believe it."

A few days after Katie Hladky spoke to the Free Inquiry Group she successfully defended her dissertation and became Dr. Katie Hladky. She has secured a position at The College of Charleston in the African-American Studies and Religion Department. FIG wishes her the best in this new post and thanks her for an illuminating and entertaining presentation. We are also looking forward the publishing of her book on this topic.

– reported by John Welte





June Science Café

## The Past And Future Of American Spaceflight



Bev Ketron

On the evening of the last scheduled launch of the space shuttle program, the Science Café welcomed Bev Ketron, Education Director of iSpace Learning Center. Her presentation described the activities and goals of the iSpace Center and addressed the past and future of the American space program.

iSpace is a non-profit organization that has served the Greater Cincinnati area since 2001. The iSpace acronym is interactive Space Programs And Career Education. Scarlet Oaks Vocational School has donated classroom and office space to house this program. iSpace starts at the pre-school age with interactive projects to get kids interested in science. Their goal is to increase the number of mathematicians and scientists in the United States and improve the knowledge of the public concerning science. In order to gain ground worldwide in the science gap that the US has recently experienced iSpace is teaching children to work creatively and co-operatively using space as their theme. They serve over 12,000 students a year. They do field trips for schools, after school programs and day camps to teach science. They also hold workshops for educators.

The space shuttle program was conceived and started before the Apollo program ended. The first flight was thirty years ago. Its mission was to carry supplies into orbit that would be needed to build the International Space Station (ISS). Now that the ISS is completed, the shuttle missions are ending. Bev showed many great photos of the shuttle and the ISS in space to illustrate the testing, building and utilization of the space shuttles. She also discussed the disasters that befell two of the shuttles and the resulting changes that were made to ensure that

those problems were solved. As a tribute to the Challenger crew, the Challenger Center was built, featuring a mock-up of the shuttle and programs for kids to learn problem solving and team building skills.

Many products that we use today were first developed as a part of the shuttle program. If you have a smoke detector in your house, and hopefully you do, you are using a device developed for the space shuttle. Cordless drills were invented for use on the shuttle. Non-invasive diagnostics, advanced plastics, super-insulating materials and structural fabrics are products that resulted from NASA's research and development for the shuttle program.

NASA now plans to use something similar to the technology of the Apollo era for future manned space missions. This involves two types of powerful rockets to launch payloads. One is the Aries 1, which will transport persons into space, and the other is the Aries 5, which will launch the heavy payloads into orbit. Together they are known as the Constellation Project. One of NASA's goals is to send humans to Mars. It's primary goal is to develop new technologies and turn them over to private companies to utilize. Communication satellites are results of this process. Much of the future of space flight will rely on private companies, including possible mining exploration and even space tourism. Someone has already paid a deposit on a 20 million dollar tourist trip to the moon.

The iSpace program is a volunteer driven organization. If you would be willing to volunteer to help children learn using the wonders of space or if you would like to learn more about iSpace please go to <http://www.ispac-science.org/>.

- reported by John Welte





**THINGS TO DO....**

**THINGS TO SEE...**



Announcement Of The Next

## Cincinnati Science Cafe

**When:** Monday, July 18th

**What:** Dinner at 6:00 PM, talk begins at 7:00 PM:

Lee Dugatkin, author of *Mr. Jefferson and the Giant Moose*, will speak about Thomas Jefferson's contributions to natural science and skepticism. He'll be coming all the way from Louisville, KY just to speak to our group!

**Where:** Dave and Buster's; 11775 Commons Dr.; Springdale, OH 45246

Cincinnati Science Cafe - for more information:  
<http://research.uc.edu/Sigma/News/sciencecafes.aspx>

## Science Book Club

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

June 26 on the 4th Sunday  
in Room 3A.

### Schedule for 2011:

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Announcing a new Meetup

for The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group!

**What:** \*NEW\* First Thursday at The Hofbräuhaus

**When:** Thursday, August 4, 2011, 7:00 PM

**Where:** Hofbrauhaus; 200 East 3rd Street  
Newport, KY 41071

## Save this Date -

**October 15-16, 2011**

## FIG 20th Anniversary Celebration

On October 15-16, 2011, FIG will celebrate 20 years with two days of national and local speakers. The event will be held at the Doubletree Hotel at the Cincinnati Airport. Tentative speakers include Tom Flynn and Tim Madigan - the first two speakers to speak at FIG in 1991, Dave Silverman, President of American Atheists, Greta Christina, Atheist blogger, JT Eberhart, organizer of Skepticon, Jamila Bay, journalist, Dr. Darrell Ray, author of the God Virus and PZ Myers. Founders of FIG - Joe Levee, Edwin Kagin and George Maurer are also expected to be in attendance.

To help us pull off this 20th birthday party for FIG, Joe Levee has issued a \$2500 challenge grant, so between now and October donations for the 20th Anniversary Event will be doubled by Joe Levee. Donations can be made by mailing to our PO Box - FIG 20th, P.O. Box 53174, Cincinnati, OH 45253 or online at Paypal. The PayPal link is on our website - [www.gofigger.org](http://www.gofigger.org) and on our facebook page - [www.facebook.com/gofigger](http://www.facebook.com/gofigger).



## FIG Accepting Credit Card/PayPal Donations

FIG now can accept donations online through PayPal - pay with your credit card or PayPal account. All donations will support the FIG 20th Anniversary Conference in October and are currently being doubled due to a challenge grant provided by Joe Levee. PayPal donation information will be available soon on [www.gofigger.org](http://www.gofigger.org) soon. You can also donate online by using this web address - <http://tinyurl.com/3dtvpp4> or also find the information on our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/gofigger](http://www.facebook.com/gofigger).





## Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



This month we will examine contradictions of doctrine found within the Bible. Traditionally these contradictions are the cause of denominational splits within the Christian community, just as often they are ignored as though they don't exist. In some instances the simplest questions of faith are virtually impossible to answer using the Bible. For example, what must one do to be saved?

Deuteronomy 30:16 says "In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it." In other words, if you obey a set of rules, then you will be blessed.

Acts 2:21 says that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." According to this verse, it doesn't matter how I behave as long as I call on God for forgiveness.

Yet Acts 16:31 says that you only have to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Wow! According to this, you are saved if anyone in your house believes in Jesus whether you do or not.

But wait... Mark 16:16 says "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." I guess it isn't good enough to live with a believer after all, now you have to not only believe, but be baptized as well.

Wrong again! Romans 10:9 says "if thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Forget the baptism or just believing in Jesus as your savior, you have to believe he rose from the dead and publically confess it. This is confusing.

Still wrong! Matthew says "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." So even if I did everything all the other verses said, I could still miss being saved by not enduring over a long time. Obviously, none of the biblical authors had any idea how to be saved.

This is most visible in the conflict between faith and works. The author of the book of Romans argues extensively that good works cannot save anyone, this culminates in verse 1:17 with "the just shall live by faith." But

another author disagreed completely, James 2:17 "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

We have a similar contradiction in that the Bible isn't even consistent as to whom God wants to save. 2 Peter 3:9 says the God "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" implying that all who are lost do so of their own choosing; however, Proverbs 16:4 says "The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Apparently the author of Proverbs is saying that God predetermined (perhaps even created with the intent) that some would be evil doers bound for punishment.

Let us imagine that we could do whatever is necessary to be saved, what does the Bible tell us about our security? In other words, can we feel safe once we are saved? John 10:27 says that once we become Jesus' follower, "no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." But 1 Timothy 4:1 says "in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." Apparently, Jesus' assurance is of little value because it is seducing spirits and devils are the problem, not other men.

As you can see, the Bible is a virtual potpourri of doctrine where any unscrupulous leader can find anything they want. There are so many contradictions of doctrine contained in the Bible that I could write several books. No wonder we have more than two hundred denominations in America alone according to the Hartford Institute for Religious Research. Next month I will continue with more contradiction in doctrine. ☘



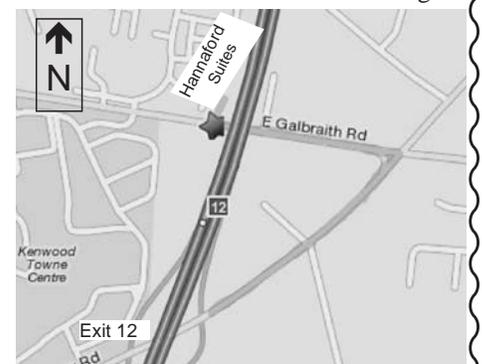
### Directions to The Hannaford Suites Hotel,

5900 East Galbraith Rd.

- 1) Take Exit 12 onto Montgomery Rd.
- 2) From the off Ramp at Exit 12:  
*From the North - Turn Left OR From the South - Turn Right*

- 3) Continue on Montgomery Rd. to East Galbraith Rd. Turn Left.

- 4) After you go under I-71, turn right into the driveway of the Hotel.





## Left Behind; Wait, We Forgot Something!

Don't worry, that's just the international space station. It isn't "our" space station of course; its operation is overseen by five separate space agencies. Nevertheless we bear a major responsibility for this \$160 billion monument to the age of manned space flight. Left alone, it's a 417 ton missile that will return to Earth traveling at 17,000 mph. I leave it to students to calculate the energy. I raised this point in 1998 when ISS assembly began and was told it would be disassembled and the parts returned to Earth on the shuttle. President Obama might prefer to see this done with commercial space vehicles, except they don't exist yet. Controlled or uncontrolled, the ISS will return to Earth.

## The Final Mission Of A Public Relations Program..

The space race with the Soviet Union ended with Apollo-17. Both countries explored the Moon, brought back piles of moon rocks, and took astounding photographs, but today few even remember that the USSR had a Moon program. They had chosen to do it with robots; more technologically advanced than Apollo perhaps, but it counted for little in the hearts and minds of the public. You can't give robots tickertape parades down Broadway. Apollo was followed by the Space Shuttle. For a time, every space mission had to begin with a shuttle launch, guaranteeing a constant supply of heroes but the shuttle could not keep up with the demand for launches. Atlantis is now being prepared for a July launch. A prosaic 12-day "UPS" flight to deliver supplies and equipment to the International Space Station, it will be the final mission in the 30-year-old shuttle program. Sold to Congress as a cost-effective way to get into space, the shuttle will be remembered as the most expensive launch system ever devised.

## The Other NASA Is Headed Back To Mars..

This, of course, is the NASA that does science. A new species of NASA rover has evolved named "Curiosity." It will resume exploration of the Martian surface begun by little Sojourner, which landed on Mars on July 4, 1997. The new rover is bigger and faster with a far more sophisticated laboratory than previous rovers.

Yesterday's issue of *Nature* identifies the Gale Crater, a 100-mile wide depression, as the destination preferred by mission scientists.

## Plutonium-238 For Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generators. .

Curiosity will be powered by the heat given off by the natural decay of Pu-238, a non-fissile isotope of plutonium with a half-life of 87.7 years. An alpha emitter, it is easily shielded. Pu-238 RTGs are essential to a number of spacecraft missions, particularly those bound for the outer solar system. United States currently has limited facilities to produce Pu-238. Since 1993, all of the Pu-238 the U.S. has used in space probes has been purchased from Russia. 16.5 kilograms in total have been purchased. The US Department of Energy is requesting funding to restart domestic production, but production of substantial amounts could take 5 years.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 24 Jun 2011

## Real Choices At Life's End

A year ago, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops quietly issued a healthcare directive that could dramatically impact the thirty percent of American families, Catholic or not, who reside in or receive healthcare from Catholic institutions.

A set of rules called Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services governs all institutions having a Catholic charter: hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, etc. Those rules lay out how your health services must conform to Catholic doctrine, as promulgated by the Holy See and enforced by its Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly known as the Holy Office of the Inquisition.)

The latest change to Directive #58 states that individuals who need a feeding tube to stay alive trigger an obligation to have one surgically implanted and kept indefinitely. This includes everyone in a permanent coma from stroke or trauma, in a persistent vegetative state, or with advanced dementia - thus unable to eat. The directive applies regardless of the patients' religious faith, their stated wishes, written advance directives, or the instructions of their families. The rule does not, as stated, apply to patients who are actively dying. (Those are not the usual recipients of feeding tubes anyway.) Rest assured, it applies in all situations where we most cherish our own authority to make healthcare decisions. ⇒



The bishops have put Catholic health centers in a real bind. After Pope Benedict XVI articulated this rule during the Terri Schiavo uproar in Florida, hospital spokespeople balanced a rationale allowing them to honor a person's stated wishes in these matters. Now the bishops have pointedly dismissed the "untenable positions" of "some Catholic ethicists" and made Benedict's rule strict, official, and binding. The Directive's former "presumption" for feeding tubes is now an "obligation." Local Catholic authorities may no longer allow hospital administrators or doctors who wish to honor patients' advance directives and the decisions of grieving families to do so. We may see enormous variation in Catholic institutions across the nation, depending on where a local bishop falls on the conservative- to- liberal continuum.

The bishops of the Catholic Conference consider this edict a small price to pay to maintain "the distinctive Catholic identity of the Church's healthcare ministry." Integral to that ministry is the application of the Church's "moral teaching" to all patients.

The sanctimonious audacity of these bishops takes my breath away.

Barbara Coombs Lee,  
President of Compassion & Choices  
*Common Sense Magazine*  
in *Final Exit Network Newsletter*  
vol 9, no 1, Winter 2011, p.9

## Perry's Prayer-Palooza

by: Jim Hightower, *OtherWords'* 27 June 2011

National radio commentator, writer, public speaker, and author of the book, *Swim Against The Current: Even A Dead Fish Can Go With The Flow*, Jim Hightower has spent three decades battling the Powers That Be on behalf of the Powers That Ought To Be - consumers, working families, environmentalists, small businesses, and just-plain-folks.

When Texas became a republic in 1836, its constitution banned "ministers of the gospel" from holding any political office.

Our problem these days, however, isn't ministers in office, but politicians posing as ministers, seizing the pulpit to preach and proselytize. To see such Elmer Gantryism in action, look no further than the showboating Texas governor, Rick "The Pious" Perry. Embarrassingly inept at governing, he has lately turned to prayer as his official solution for all problems. I don't mean a



quiet, contemplative kind of praying, but garish public displays.

In April, with a Biblical-level drought and some 800 wildfires ravaging the state, Perry's gubernatorial response was to proclaim three "Days of Prayer for Rain." Three days came and went, but no rain. Presumably, Perry the Pious was praying up a storm, but not a drop fell from the heavens.

Undeterred, the gubernatorial padre simply doubled down on prayer politics. Proclaiming August 6 as a "Day of Prayer and Fasting," he invited all other governors to join him in Houston for a seven-hour prayer-palooza, dubbed "The Response."

It's billed as "a nondenominational, apolitical, Christian" event to unify all Americans by calling upon Jesus "to guide us through unprecedented struggles." Wait... What about all those Americans who are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or members of other faiths? No room at the inn for them?

Adding to this fiasco, Perry's co-sponsor for The Response is the American Family Association — a Mississippi-based extremist outfit infamous for bashing gays and Muslims.

The governor's spokeswoman loudly insists that his Prayerfest "doesn't have anything to do with (Perry's presidential ambitions)" — which, of course, means that it does. But I'm fairly certain that God doesn't want anything to do with this goober's show.

## More on this Presidential Candidate!

By Lou Dubose, *The Washington Spectator*, (vol 37, no 12, 1 July 2011, p. 4)

**Jews Need Not Apply** - Governor Rick Perry's press flacks insist that his August 6 prayer and fasting event at the Houston Texans' football stadium is open to individuals of all faiths. But the Website for "The Response" focuses on the God who consistently leads in polling in Texas: "As a nation we must come together, call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles, and thank Him for the blessings of freedom we so richly enjoy through his grace ... "

Perry put to rest the question about who is welcome and who is not by booking the American Family Association to organize the prayer rally. AFA founder Don Wildmon told the *Texas Tribune* that non-Christians,



Jews and Muslims will “go to hell” unless they accept Jesus Christ as their savior.

The Response is also anti-gay and anti-lesbian. San Antonio big-box-church preacher and sponsor John Hagee once told National Public Radio’s Terry Gross that Hurricane Katrina was God settling the score with New Orleans, in particular with the city’s gays who had scheduled a gay pride parade the Monday after the storm hit. Hagee didn’t explain the collateral damage God visited on church-going New Orleanians and innocent children, but that’s a small detail.

And AFA’s Brian Fisher is more rabidly homophobic than Hagee. On Fisher’s AFA television program, he has said: “Hitler discovered that he could not get straight soldiers savage and brutal and vicious enough to carry out his orders. But that homosexual soldiers basically had no limits to the savagery and brutality they were willing to inflict on whoever Hitler sent them after. ... So virtually all of the brownshirts, the storm troopers, were male homosexuals.” And: “I believe that homosexuals are morally disqualified from holding public office. Why “Because they are engaging in sexually aberrant behavior.”

Perry’s event is based on “The Call,” public events organized by Pentecostal preacher Lou Engle, who is part of the International House of Prayer, also a Perry revival sponsor. Engle is known for his anti-gay agenda, and for using Christianity as an organizational tool for right-wing Republicans.

Thus far only the A.D.L. and the Texas Freedom Alliance have protested the religious gathering. And thus far only one governor, Sam Brownback of Kansas, who is loopier than Perry on Evangelical Christianity, has committed to attend.

This is Perry’s second run at divine intervention in problems too big for him to tackle. Three months ago, he issued a day of prayer proclamation to bring rain to Texas. A historic drought persists.

## ----- **And A Further Presidential Candidate.**

Michele Bachmann committed herself to ruling America like a theocracy yesterday. The radical right-wing religious organization in Iowa known as The FAMILY Leader – pressed Republican Presidential candidates to sign a petition rejecting homosexuality and



promoting other things important to religious fanatics. The petition declared homosexuality is a choice – is tantamount to polygamy and adultery – and is a public health risk. Not only that – the petition stated that all forms of pornography should be banned – and Muslim Sharia law should be rejected, while it’s Christian equivalent be embraced. And Michele Bachmann became the first Republican candi-

date to ink her name to the petition. Don’t underestimate the power of Michele Bachmann – she’s in it to win it – and has a lot of money and a lot of support. Goodbye democracy – hello theocracy? Let’s hope not.

– Source: Thom Hartmann, *The Thom Hartmann Program / News Report* (8 July 2011)

Former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum joined U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann in making a commitment to sign a pledge in support of traditional marriage sought by the Family Leader, an Iowa group that backs Christian conservative social values.

– *The DesMoines Register*

## ----- **Ritual Slaughter And Other Cruel Religious Practices.**

Jewish kosher and Muslim halal rules for the preparation of meat, require the throat to be slit while the animal is fully conscious. The Dutch ban on ritual slaughter outrages Jews and Muslims. The Netherlands has long been considered the most culturally tolerant country in Europe and perhaps in the world, but ritual slaughter does seem barbaric, and on Tuesday, the Netherlands Parliament passed a bill proposed by an animal-rights group banning ritual slaughter of animals. Laws prohibiting cruelty to animals as well as cruel religious practices, including polygamy, female genital mutilation, and the burning of witches are enforced in every civilized society. According to the Netherlands chief Rabbi, however, “Those who survived the World War II remember that the very first law made by the Germans in Holland was the banning of *schechita*.” The Muslims, meanwhile, are certain that the law is aimed at them. In any case, both groups are free to practice vegetarianism and would be healthier for it.

– *What’s New* by Robert Park, 1 July 2011





## BOOK REVIEW

### The Physics of Atheism (A Discussion with Victor Stenger) by Andrew Zak Williams

If there's one thing that best-selling author and physicist Victor Stenger loves, it's a good story. That was probably the first thing I noticed when we spoke in his home study on a crisp early summer morning in Lafayette, Colorado.

Stenger is one of the most prominent atheist science writers of the last decade, so I was curious to know where his antipathy toward religion came from. His answer has taken me on a 40-year journey from his student days at UCLA, to meeting his future wife while singing in a Methodist church choir, and on to being a physics professor at the University of Hawaii. After ten minutes, he hasn't even reached the part where he became an atheist so I feel that I have to interrupt him: "You sang in a church choir?"

"Religion and atheism weren't matters which I thought a lot about," he explains. "It wasn't until the eighties that that changed. That's when it really started to annoy me how science, and in particular physics, was being abused by religious people. My concern was that they were misusing science to come to conclusions which they had reached only for religious reasons. That's probably when I realized that I was an atheist."

As he talks, Stenger takes in the impressive view from his study window, albeit one that narrowly misses the nearby mountain range. A pristine copy of his new book, *The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning*—released in April—sits on a shelf behind him. As with his previous works, it's a physics-heavy debunking of theistic claims for the existence of God. And judging by the sales of his recent books, it will soon be adorning plenty more shelves.

It has been his stance against the purported science of Christian apologetics which has made Stenger's name. His first foray into their territory came with the 2003 book *Has Science Found God?* "I felt that I made a contribution to the question of Intelligent Design," he tells me. "I read William Dembski's book *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science & Theology*. He had something in there called the Law of Conservation of Information. He claimed that the amount of information output by a living system could never exceed the amount of information input without the involvement of an intelligent designer. As a physicist I knew that wasn't true because information is linked to entropy, and the entropy of a closed system can increase with time. And so I explained in my book how Dembski had got it wrong."

Clearly Intelligent Design, and its re-

quirement for a divine meddler in the laws of science, irks him. "There is nothing in the realm of human knowledge that requires anything supernatural, anything beyond matter, to describe our observations. I am almost one hundred percent certain that the God of Abraham worshiped by Jews, Christians, and Muslims doesn't exist. This God supposedly plays such an important role in the universe that there should be evidence that he exists. That was the theme of *God: The Failed Hypothesis*."



Victor Stenger

That was the book which, in 2007, granted him best-seller status. According to Stenger, "My publisher was really surprised and wasn't ready for it, never having had a bestseller before." Suddenly, seven years after his supposed retirement, it was his book which arguably set the benchmark for atheistic science writing. It has been so successful that now, in his mid-seventies, he finds himself being frequently invited to address physics conferences where it is hoped that his name will add a certain pizzazz.

But there is a downside to his so-called retirement. "Since I left full-time work, I've spent time with many well-off elders who listen only to Glenn Beck, Rush Lim-

baugh and Fox News, and get a distorted, religion-based view of political reality. They also are tremendously self-centred and lacking in compassion for the needy and lower classes in society."

Perhaps that is why he is inclined to spend so much time locked in his study, penning a steady stream of physics texts all containing a straight-to-your-face atheistic slap. His latest book is dedicated to his friend, Christopher Hitchens. After all, "he is the only one of the 'four horsemen' who regularly credits my work. And his courage is an inspiration."

It was Hitchens who wrote the Forward to *God: The Failed Hypothesis* in which he drew attention to Stenger's passage dealing with the fine-tuning argument. The theistic argument goes like this: if the laws of physics were even slightly different than how they are, none of us would exist; therefore there must be a God who made the laws that way. It is a topic on which Stenger has written numerous times. But why did he dedicate a whole book to it now? "I hear Christians raise the fine-tuning argument so often and I am sufficiently expert to address it," he explained. "I have always been interested in these types of basic questions."

It is an issue about which numerous physicists have reached very different conclusions. The most frequent answer that skeptics raise in response to the fine-tuning argument relies on M-Theory. This developing theory attempts an overarching union of the five versions of string theory. The ten dimensions of space that follow from the mathematics of M-Theory allow for the conclusion that an imponderable number of universes—a Multiverse—have been and are being spontaneously created, all with different laws of physics. And so it is ➔



no surprise that we find ourselves living in the one whose laws of physics allow us to exist. Stephen Hawking made headlines last year when his book *The Grand Design*, co-written with Leonard Mlodinow, lent his support to this theory.

Sir Roger Penrose, an atheist, rejects the fine-tuning argument, but for wholly different reasons. He argues that M-theory is unscientific. According to his theory of Conformal Cyclic Cosmology, the beginning of our universe (or as he prefers to call it, our "eon") was also the end of a previous one. He does not rule out the possibility that his theory could be extended to provide for a process of constantly successive eons, each with different laws of physics. We happen to live in the one with bio-friendly laws.

On the other hand, best-selling science writer Paul Davies largely accepts the fine-tuning argument and believes that the universe must be the product of some kind of intelligence, albeit not a god in the conventional sense.

Yet for Stenger, fine-tuning is a fallacy and so there is no case for atheists to answer. They simply do not need to resort to Multiverses or to cyclical universes. His book discusses each of the usual examples of fine-tuning that Christian apologetics raise. He applies well-established physics, seeking to demonstrate that in each case, "the parameters of physics and cosmology are not particularly fine-tuned for life, especially human life."

For example, Stenger agrees that the ratio of protons and electrons in the universe is sufficiently precise as to enable life to ultimately form. However that does not mean that there was the need for a divine being to intervene to ensure that the ratio was correct. He writes, "The number of electrons in the universe should exactly equal the number of protons because of charge conservation, on the reasonable assumption that the total electric charge of the universe is neutral—as

it should be if the universe came from 'nothing' and charge is conserved."

Similarly, it is true that the universe would have collapsed before it reached its present size if its expansion rate at one second after the Big Bang had been lower by as little as one part in many billions. However he explains that the expansion rate was automatically very close to the critical rate

due to the energy density of the universe.

But I wonder why most writers and academics don't share Stenger's

***My concern was that they were mis-using science to come to conclusions which they had reached only for religious reasons. That's probably when I realized that I was an atheist.***

- Victor Stenger

opinion. He swats away the question, pointing out that he is the first person to systematically go through each of the specific theistic claims of fine-tuning. "Generally speaking, physicists shy away from attacking religious claims directly. They are not under direct attack the way that biologists are. But dealing with these kinds of claims is my niche. And I'm one of only one or two physicists who are confrontationists."

Perhaps his confrontationist personality trait is in his genes. His book tells of the determination of his Lithuanian grandmother who risked catching a terminal disease when she nursed a sick neighbor who would later become her husband. After they married, her husband moved to the U.S. looking for work. When she hadn't heard from him for two years, she took a nightmare journey to America with three children in tow. This was in 1908. Despite not speaking a word of English, somehow she managed to find him. The family then settled down nearby, where their son later met his future wife and had a child, Victor Stenger.

"The point of my little story," he explains, "was to illustrate that simply finding a low probability for something happening doesn't preclude it from happening. You have to compare alterna-

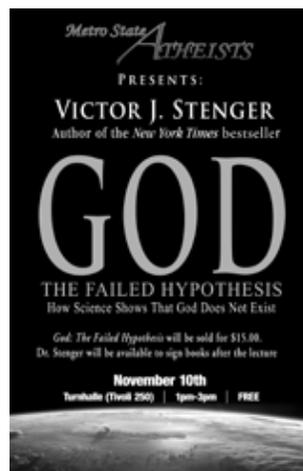
tive probabilities." And for Stenger, it is far more probable that human life evolved in a universe without God twiddling the knobs to set the laws of science than it is that there is such a divine being in the first place.

The book doesn't hold back in its criticisms of leading Christian apologetics such as Hugh Ross and William Lane Craig. Stenger even lists in bullet-form what he considers to be their mistakes. For instance, they "misunderstand and misuse probability theory." They also fail to consider "that with the hundreds of billions of planets that likely exist in the visible universe, and the countless number beyond our horizon, a planet with the properties needed for life is likely to occur many times."

That word "confrontationist" leaps to mind again. But what is it about religion that has him spoiling for a fight? "Religion does not offer comfort," he tells me. "In fact, the opposite is true. I knew several Catholic families, relatives and neighbors, who lost children in childhood. Despite their priests compassionately assuring them that it wasn't their fault but God's will, they never believed it. The rest of their lives they lived in misery, blaming themselves. They figured they must have committed some sin that God was punishing them for."

There are more stories where that came from, and it is apparent that even a cerebral individual like Stenger cannot help but be influenced by what he sees around him. "I'm close to a family who are part of a Protestant cult," he continues. "The wife was mistreated and died young of drug addiction and alcoholism. And even though the husband had a Ph.D., the daughters weren't encouraged to go to college because the cult looked at females as inferior and there to serve men. Unsurprisingly the girls have gone on to have troubled lives."

However, there is a sparkle in his eye. "I won't live to see it," he says, "but someday religion will disappear from the face of the Earth. It has to. It is too evil and too absurd." The disappearance of religion from the face of the Earth? Now, that would be a story worth telling.





**FIG Potluck**  
 Saturday, August 13, 2010, 5:00 PM  
**FIG Canoe/Kayak Trip**  
 Sunday August 28, 2011 1:00 PM



**July Meeting**  
 Tuesday, July 26, 2011, 7:00 PM



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

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

# FIG

## Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail - [figmessage at gofigger dot org](mailto:figmessage@gofigger.org), or visit our web site at [gofigger.org](http://gofigger.org) or [freeinquirygroup.org](http://freeinquirygroup.org).