

FIG LEAVES

Volume 14 Issue 5

May 2005

May FIG Meeting: Sunday, 22 May 2:00 PM (note Day of the Week)

Mapping Our Tears

At 2 PM on Sunday, May 22, Shawn Jeffers will guide us through *Mapping Our Tears*, a unique Holocaust exhibit at the Hebrew Union College.

In this innovative exhibit, a 1930s European attic setting creates an intimate atmosphere to take you back in time. In the attic, you will find a wedding dress, a radio, a bicycle — together with a yellow star and unanswered letters. Every item in the exhibit is connected to a person from the Cincinnati area who survived to tell their stories to the world.

At the heart of the attic are eyewitnesses from the Holocaust: local survivors, refugees, rescuers, and liberators. Theatrical lighting and other audio-visual multimedia effects underscore the journeys of these courageous people. The multimedia series specifically traces the route of each individual survivor.

We will be guided through this exhibit by Shawn Jeffers, Education Coordinator with The Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education and the lead educator for the Mapping Our Tears exhibit. He is a member of FIG and serves as a staff member and board member for Camp Quest, Inc. Shawn is a 2003 graduate of Miami University, with a degree in Political Science.

The exhibit is located in Mayerson Hall on the campus of Hebrew Union College on Clifton Avenue in Clifton. Mayerson Hall is on your left as you enter the campus. There is plenty of parking in front of the Hall, and just beyond it on the left. Shawn will meet us in the lobby of the Hall.

FIG Friday discussion group

TOPIC: SEX EDUCATION

On Friday, May 27, there will be a FIG Discussion Group meeting to read and comment on a draft paper prepared by the American Humanist Association. This is a one-page paper entitled “A Humanist Statement on Sexuality Education.” This AHA paper presents a rational alternative to the dangerous abstinence-only programs being fostered by the Religious Right and the Republican Administration.

We will meet at 7 PM at the in Cincinnati. Coffee, tea, soft drinks and cookies will be served.

Atheist Meet-up in May

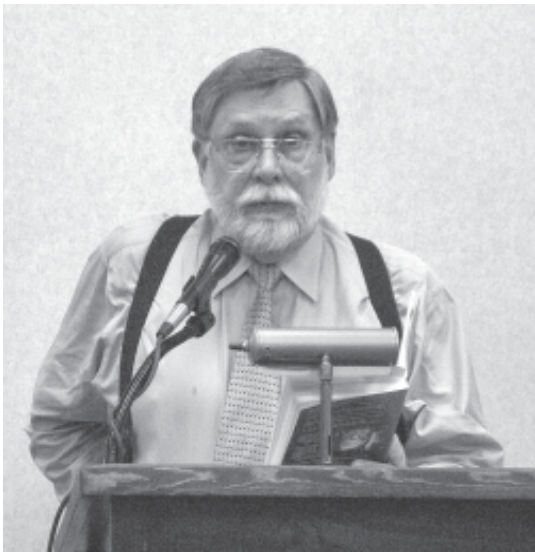
The Cincinnati Atheists May Meetup will meet on Wednesday, May 18 at 7:00PM at Wild Oats Natural Market Place; 2693 Edmondson Rd. ; Rookwood Pavillion; Cincinnati OH 45207 ; For More Information call 513-396-8966. Please let the organizer know if you are coming. Join the group for optional food and definitely good talk.

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Tuesday 28 June 7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor 400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio	



April Meeting

Edwin Kagin on his new book: *Baubles of Blasphemy*



The topic of Edwin Kagin's presentation is, of course, taken from the title of his most recent book. He defines "blasphemy" as "...the crime of making fun of ridiculous beliefs someone else holds sacred."

Edwin started off characteristically by telling a few jokes, which if I repeat them would lose a lot in translation. He wasted no time in getting into a serious mode by referring to the election of the new Pope who as a twelve-year old was inducted into the Hitler Youth. He also noted that our president, George W. had ordered government flags flown at half-staff to honor the demise of the previous pope JP2.

He then shifted to the American Religious Civil War (ARCW). As he noted this first appeared in Kagin's Kolumn in the August 1995 issue of *FIG Leaves*. It displayed a degree of prescience that very few recognized at the time. Here is a quote from that article: "The ARCW has already been started by the superstitious. They call it a "civil war of values." The shooting has already started. They call that "protecting innocent life." The purpose of the war is to overthrow science and constitutional democracy and to replace them with the Bronze Age myths and laws of ancient Iraq that became preserved in a collection of writings known, in translation, as the Holy Bible. They regard this undertaking as "bringing America back to God." Loyal Americans should regard it as treason.

There is a great deal of conversation these days about whether the legislature can overrule the Congress and the Congress can overrule the Supreme Court and just do things the way they want. It's remarkable that these people don't have any better understanding of civics than they do of biology. The same people that think Intelligent Design created all life, believe that if the President and the legislature believe that *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned then it should be because two outvotes one and the legislature should override the Supreme Court. There are very good reasons why this is nonsense.

The basic problem is that our forefathers were a lot smarter than people are today or at least the people who are in power. If you read Thomas Jefferson, the depth and breadth and learning is truly inspirational. One work he recommended was Thomas Jefferson on *Whether the Common Law of England brought Christianity to the United States*. He shows definitively why it did not and why the America is not a Christian nation.

The fanatics have declared war on reason and on human progress. That is because they suffer from fundamental misunderstandings of the nature of American democracy. History tells lies. It is important to understand this in order to understand the ARCW. A particularly harmful lie is that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. The traitors truly believe this because they have been taught this since they colored Pilgrims with crayons in church nursery school while their parents were in the sanctuary learning to be more judgmental. As



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to:

figleaves@fuse.net;

or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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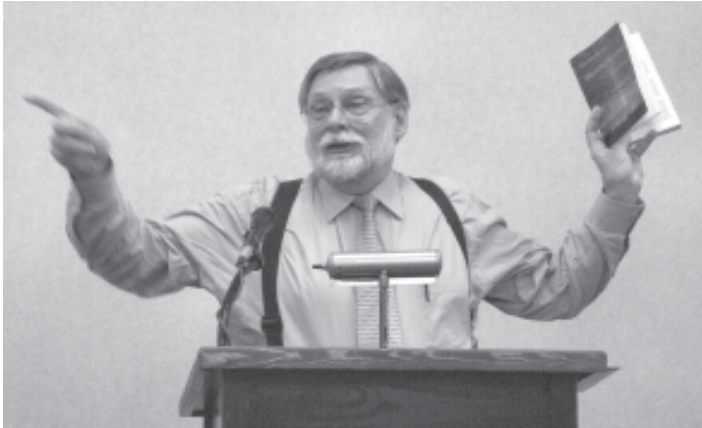
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the young bigots grew into “adultery,” they accepted this teaching uncritically just as they accept the Bible as true and science is wrong if not evil when it proves that humans have evolved from non-human life forms. The traitors should, in fairness, be entitled to prove the intensity of their mental abuse in their defense at the *ARC War crimes trial*.



We are really at a frightening crossroads because they outnumber us extensively. The American Atheists have at most 2200 to 2300 members. There are mega-churches in Ohio that have more members than that. Why are they so afraid of us? We have an idea afoot now that is not new. They believe only Christians are good people and are the only ones to rightly make the law. And their idea of “people of faith” is those who agree with them. They believe the Bible should be used as the basis for our law. The question remains who will decide or define in questionable cases. They will, of course.

I think the most effective way to deal with these people is humor. It has been said that a dictator is more afraid of a joke than he is of an army coming after him. If you can start laughing and driving the whole thing to ridicule, that might be the best cure of all. That is what I have tried to do in this collection of *Baubles*. They have, for example, the idea that human life begins at conception, that is the union of a spermatozoon and an ovum. We are having fetal life acts passed all over the place. Instead of trying to argue with them, we should try to follow their line of thought. It was with this in mind that I wrote the poem,

The Rights of the Unconceived

Let’s add to irrationality
 To nonsense unbelieved
 And urge, against free human choice,
 The rights of the unconceived

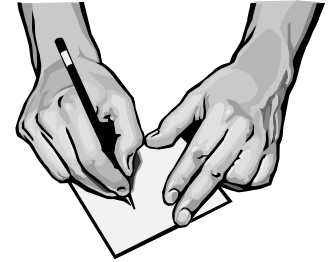
The unborn, however unwanted,
 Have protestors who defend
 Who will not take their misery home
 But make sure their paths begin
 The maimed, the pained, the hopeless
 Have rights of tragedy unrelieved
 Yet we ignore a great moral sore
 The plight of the unconceived
 We must have laws with iron-braced jaws
 To insure new lives are received
 It should be a crime at any time
 To deny life to the unconceived
 Should fertile lad and fertile lass
 Henceforth with any passion pass
 Consummation must be achieved
 To insure the rights of the unconceived.
 Conceived Again
 I understood I was conceived
 And born, in original sin
 As preachers said and I believed,
 I must be born again.
 But I really sought to know,
 And hoped to clarify,
 Just what I must do to go
 To Heaven when I die.
 I’d heard baptism and rebirth
 Would start my life anew,
 So when I left this sinful earth
 I’d join the righteous few.
 But knowing all of that, from God
 There came unto me this perception:
 Being born again is very odd
 If life starts at conception.
 If I became me when conceived,
 I was already me at birth;
 So what has any second birth achieved?
 What can being born again be worth?
 We sinners all must be reconceived,
 So Heaven we can win!
 This is the great truth I have received
 We must be conceived again!
 I know not just how this can be done—
 Our creeds will need revision
 But there’s a Heaven to be won,
 So make a reconceived decision!





Come ye all, and be again conceived;
 Be conceived to be reprieved;
 Don't be born again deceived;
 Second birth has not thy sin relieved;
 Ye must be reconceived!
 So consider theology as a whole
 And make thee thy selection—
 To elevate thy immortal soul
 By election to erection.

Letters To The Editor



A Fundamentalist in the Sunday Comics.

This last Sunday, the first of May, edition of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* ran one of the dumbest comic strips of all times; *B.C.* by Johnny Hart. The drawing is rather uninteresting, showing the poet sitting and writing under the spreading limbs of a chestnut tree. Here is the text. We invite our readers to respond.

There once was a preacher named Charles D,
 Whose degree was in Christianity,
 But he chose to take up botany.
 So he sailed aboard the HMS B, (Beagle that is)
 A fox of a man, on a dog of a ship,
 Allowed his Christianity to slip,
 And concocted a "theory" while at sea,
 Designed to make monkeys of you and me. (And that he did)

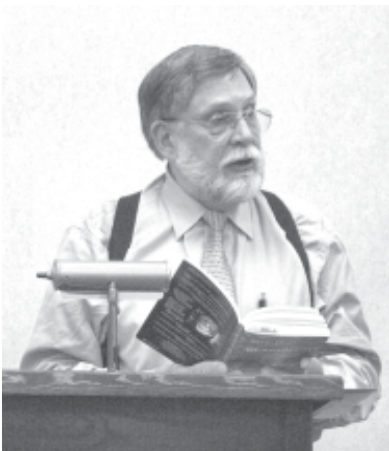
I wrote to the cartoon creator, Johnny Hart at:
[//www.creators.com/comics_WriteTheAuthorAction.cfm](http://www.creators.com/comics_WriteTheAuthorAction.cfm)
 I e-mailed him;

Dear Johnny Hart, I am writing you to register my dismay at the content of your Sunday, May 1, 2005 edition of *B.C.* published in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. To be so flippantly dismissive of evolution; a thoroughly established, mainstream scientific body of knowledge is very disturbing to me.

I am also registered my concern with Bill Cieslewicz, the Assistant Managing Editor of the Tempo Section. His e-mail address is bcieslewicz@enquirer.com.

Sincerely, Margaret O'Kain

Quote.....
 • After a recommendation by a panel of 15 "eminent theologians and linguists" chaired by Biblical translator Ronald Youngblood, the International Bible Society has reworded its *Today's New International Version of the Bible* to make it clear that being "stoned" means being beaten to death with rocks. "We wanted to keep it from being confused with drug addiction," Youngblood explained.
 -- London *Guardian* newspaper
**Unquote!**



Edwin went on to give dramatic readings of several other poems from the book. These included: "To Lesser Breeds;" "Dear Intelligent Designer;" "The Case of the Frozen Embryo;" "On Prayer Pour Petri;" "Kentucky Ham Group;" "Pity Little Jack and Jill" and "The Butterfly Mind." Unfortunately we have run out of space and cannot quote them here, but those of you who have bought the book can find them in *Baubles of Blasphemy*.

— Reported by George Maurer

Heaven.
 An older couple made a deal that whoever died first would come back and inform the other one of the afterlife. Their greatest fear was that there is no afterlife. After a long life, the husband was the first to go, and true to his word, he made contact: "Mary, Mary ..."
 "Is that you Fred?"
 "Yes, I've come back like we agreed."
 "What is it like?"
 "Well, I get up in the morning, I have sex. I have breakfast, off to the golf course, I have sex. I bathe in the sun, then I have sex twice. I have lunch, another romp around the golf course, then sex pretty much all afternoon. After supper the golf course again. Then I have sex until late at night. The next day it starts again."
 "Oh, Fred, you surely must be in heaven."
 "Not exactly, I'm a rabbit on a golf course in Des Moines."



From website <www.nationaldayofreason.com

Why a “National Day of Reason?”

Many who value the separation of religion and government have sought an appropriate response to the federally-supported National Day of Prayer, an annual abuse of the constitution. Nontheistic Americans (including freethinkers, humanists, atheists, agnostics, and deists), along with many traditionally religious allies, view such government-sanctioned sectarianism as unduly exclusionary.

A consortium of leaders from within the community of reason endorsed the idea of a National Day of Reason. This observance is held in parallel with the National Day of Prayer, on the first Thursday in May (5 May 2005). The goal of this effort is to celebrate reason - a concept all Americans can support - and to raise public awareness about the persistent threat to religious liberty posed by government intrusion into the private sphere of worship.

To facilitate the commemoration of the National Day of Reason by individuals and organizations throughout the U.S., the American Humanist Association and the Washington Area Secular Humanists have joined in launching this National Day of Reason web site. This web site is designed to serve as the focal point for an effort to recognize the National Day of Reason, and as a platform to offer a criticism of the federally-sponsored National Day of Prayer. We hope that it will be a resource to the community of reason, the press, and the general public.

Look to this site for facts and statistics regarding the National Day of Prayer, essays on church-state separation from noted authorities in the field, sample proclamations and press releases, and a host of other resources. The focus of the site will be the many National Day of Reason events taking place in cities and towns across the nation.

We invite individuals and organizations to endorse this campaign, and to submit information about their plans to commemorate the National Day of Reason and their efforts to educate the public about the important underlying issues. Those organizations conducting events, activism or outreach in their communities will be featured on the site so that activists can readily identify opportunities to organize and participate in local events.

There is great potential this year to give voice to our shared concerns about the serious threats to the wall separating religion and government. We hope that you will

visit our site again, and we look forward to hearing about your plans to observe the National Day of Reason.

Now, more than ever, America needs
a Day of Reason! ☘

Quote
• **Faith**, n. Belief without evidence in what is told by one who
• speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel.
• --Ambrose Bierce (1942-1914?), *The Devil's Dictionary* (1906)
.....*Unquote*

Scopes II: Evolution isn't on trial, civilization is on trial.

State Board of Education Hearings on teaching evolution in Kansas schools began yesterday in Topeka. A string of PhD witnesses proved that a PhD is not an inoculation against foolishness. One of the first was Jonathan Wells, a senior fellow of the Discovery Institute. A graduate of Unification Theological Seminary, Wells was “chosen” by Sun Myung Moon to enter a PhD program. He was inspired to, “devote my life to destroying Darwinism.” Wells went on to earn a PhD in Theology from Yale and a PhD in Biology from UC Berkeley. Another witness against evolution is Mustafa Akyol, the spokesman for a fundamentalist Muslim organization in Istanbul that intimidates teachers into giving the Genesis account of creation. Jack Krebs, vice president of Kansas Citizens for Science, one of the science organizations boycotting the hearings, complained that, “they are trying to make science stand for atheism.” Of course that’s what they’re trying to do, but it’s also true that many scientists are atheists. After all, we assume that events have natural causes. As we learn more about causes, God’s domain keeps shrinking, or at least moving, like God’s Little Acre in the Erskine Caldwell novel. I leave the extrapolation to the reader.

Meanwhile President Bush invokes Intelligent Design. Yesterday was also the 54th annual National Day of Prayer. In an East Room ceremony, President Bush said, “Freedom is our birthright because the Creator wrote it into our common human nature.” Sigh. He went on to say “we celebrate the freedom to pray as you wish, or not at all.” Oh good. On Capitol Hill, Tom DeLay (R-TX), speaking from his soapbox in the Cannon House Office Building, called for spending, “less time on our soap boxes and more time on our knees.”

— *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 6 May 2005



Atheists and Agnostics: Do they Differ?

The concept of agnosticism literally means “not knowing” from the classical Greek *gnosis* meaning knowledge. The simple answer to the agnostic, then is, “if you don’t know, go learn and study.” All agnostics I know about do not rest on that simple idea, but would insist that not only do they “not know” about gods or the supernatural, but that others do not know either, and that the divine is unknowable and probably does not exist at all.

Atheists, in contrast, assert the absence or more precisely the non-existence of god. It has often been pointed out to atheists and others, that the evidence or proof for a negative is difficult to bring. It is impossible in some ultimate, philosophical sense to prove that there is no being we might have to concede is a god curled up in one of the surplus dimensions of string theory, or that some improbable supernatural force existed before the Big Bang. We can not even prove that an invisible, imperceptible pink unicorn does not wander about Camp Quest. Which leads to the claim that atheism is a faith, every bit as unproven as any belief in god or the soul or life after death.

The disproof of such abstruse philosophical ideas is not really the point of atheism. It is the disproof and denial of whatever gods and faiths are on offer. Showing that the Christian—or Muslim, or Jewish, or Hindu, or whatever—gods do not and can not exist is about as easy and as pleasant as picking fleas of a mangy dog. In fact, we need not even marshal these sources of evidence ourselves. For Christianity the writings showing their god does not and cannot exist are legion. The earliest such writings go back to the first centuries of the Jesus religion and are ascribed to Marcion, to Celsus, and later to the Emperor Julian the Christians are pleased to call the Apostate. Modern critical examination of the Jesus myths began in the late eighteenth century and are associated with the names of Reimarus, Tom Paine, and Jefferson. Early unbelievers, who could not avoid the problem of a creator, called themselves deists. Most works denying the Jesus God were in fact produced by persons raised in this faith, and include Albert Schweitzer’s *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1905). For most major religions we can find rational refutations written by dissidents of their own. If we are dissatisfied with proofs provided by disaffected believers, a turn to the enemies of any religion will provide all the disproofs anyone could ask for.

Atheists in other words have ample evidence to reject almost any and all religions which are on offer. No

supernatural belief is convincing on rational examination. Agnostics as well would most likely agree to reject all religions on offer. That leaves relatively little to differentiate between the two philosophical stances. It is simple to characterize atheists as wishing to be definite, while agnostics are leaving some space for doubt—or saying the same thing in other words, atheists are “in your face” and agnostics merely “wishy-washy.”

My ultimate understanding then is this, for most practical purposes in every day life and discussions with the people of faith the unbeliever can call himself an atheist. None of the gods on offer in the marketplace of religions can bear rational scrutiny—all would have to be rejected on the basis of logical and factual inquiry. In a philosophical discussion of ultimate truths, the question which asks for some ultimate reality beyond the Big Bang which began the universe, or which asks for why is there reality at all, has no answer. At this time nobody, no scientist, no philosopher, and most of all no religious speaker knows the nature of ultimate reality. Even whether the question makes any sense is not known. In this ultimate sense, I think a man would be a fool to claim atheism for himself. In this ultimate philosophical discussion we are all agnostics.

— Wolf Roder

Quote.....
If the majority had its way, i.e., if the Constitution’s first and fourteenth amendments weren’t stubbornly obstructing their path, Americans wouldn’t hesitate to crown Christianity the established religion of the republic, joining the English, Danes, Scots, Spanish, Norwegians, Greeks, and Finns, as “advanced” nations with official Christian religions. Indeed, until the mid-19th century the first amendment was understood to allow states to create established churches, and most heartily did so. As late as 1775, no fewer than nine colonies boasted state religions. Massachusetts didn’t abolish its established church until 1833. New Jersey kept Catholics out of office until 1844. And New Hampshire didn’t give up its requirement that one had to be a Protestant to serve in its legislature until 1877. Then came the Fourteenth Amendment and its prohibition on state-supported religion. Not surprisingly, many Christians continue to regard this amendment as downright blasphemous.
— Christopher Orlet

.....**Unquote**



Sponge Bob, the SPLC, Tolerance, and James Dobson

First off, here is the famous *Tolerance Pledge* from the Southern Poverty Law Center, a part of its *Teaching Tolerance* program. This is a very useful instructional packet distributed free to any or all schools in the US.

Tolerance Pledge

Tolerance is a personal decision that comes from a belief that every person is a treasure. I believe that America's diversity is its strength. I also recognize that ignorance, insensitivity and bigotry can turn that diversity into a source of prejudice and discrimination.

To help keep diversity a wellspring of strength and make America a better place for all, I pledge to have respect for people whose abilities, beliefs, culture, race, sexual identity, or other characteristics are different from my own.

To fulfill my pledge, I will:

- examine my own biases and work to overcome them
- set a positive example for my family and friends
- work for tolerance in my own community
- speak out against hate and injustice

The SPLC is a non-profit organization dedicated to (1) helping mistreated and discriminated against poor persons with legal aid, (2) promoting tolerance, and (3) to keeping an eye on racist and other discriminatory organizations. For the last purpose it publishes the very useful quarterly magazine, *Intelligence Report*.

The *New York Times* commented editorially on the Tolerance Pledge on 22 January 2005: "How could anyone be against that?" The Pledge is currently available in the booklet *101 Tools for Tolerance* which can be downloaded from the Center's website, <www.tolerance.org>.

James Dobson is the head of a right wing, fundamentalist, religious, media organization: *Focus on the Family*. He has commented on radio extensively on the Tolerance Pledge, and on an associated instructional cartoon which features "Sponge Bob, Square Pants." His key complaint, taken from his website, <www.family.org> states:

While some of the goals associated with this organization are noble in nature, their inclusion of the reference to "sexual identity" within their "tolerance pledge" is not only unnecessary, but crosses a moral line.

Dobson vehemently objects to "the acceptance of homosexuality among our nation's youth." He considers it morally offensive to teach tolerance of gay and lesbian life styles. ☘

Pick a God, any God

Is life enough time
 To finally figure it out
 What makes the world turn,
 What life is all about?
 I have studied Zen,
 Been a Christian too --
 Catholicism's dull . . .
 I'd even tried Voodoo.
 Satanism's weird
 The Red Road's kinda cool,
 I guess what I want to know,
 Isn't taught in school.
 After death, maybe,
 Is when we finally learn,
 But the problem is --
 We also just might burn.
 Luck of the draw,
 Turn the wheel and pick,
 And hope the one you choose —
 Isn't just a trick.
 Put your hands on the screen --
 Or do a little dance --
 And pray to that God,
 The rest is left to chance.

Jeremy Mitchell in *Freethought Perspective* (Apr. '03) p. 19

Quote

● Human beings seldom do things they believe to be wrong. ●
 ● They do wrong things because they believe them to be right. ●
 ● But what was honourable to a Homeric hero is not ●
 ● necessarily honourable to modern people. To understand ●
 ● an alien or historical code of honour is a challenge to ●
 ● imagination. The first step is to suspend one's own value ●
 ● system.' — John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* ●

.....**Unquote**



A fundamentalist of a different stripe . . .

Until he was elected, the new Pope officiated for some decades as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is the institutional successor to the medieval and modern Inquisition. In the recent past this organization has lost the power to torture its victims, but retains the ability to censure theology professors and vet religious statements for doctrinal orthodoxy. Ratzinger wielded those powers to enforce conformity and a rigid interpretation of doctrine.

Last summer, Ratzinger entered an argument among U.S. bishops about whether Catholic politicians—such as Democratic Sen. John F. Kerry of Massachusetts, then running for president—should be denied Holy Communion because of their support for abortion rights. “Consistently campaigning and voting for permissive abortion and euthanasia laws” was a “grave sin” that must disqualify a Catholic from receiving the sacrament, Ratzinger wrote, and so is voting for such a politician out of support for abortion rights. (*Wash. Post Natl. Weekly Ed.* 25 Apr. '05, p. 7)

His election as Benedict XVI has provoked strong reactions among liberals in the church who had hoped for a conciliatory hand to women and gays, and for a more rational approach to birth control, AIDS, and the celibacy of clergy. Because of his past crack downs on dissent, because as enforcer he has stifled even discussion about celibacy and a purely male priesthood, the new pope will begin with an exceedingly large collection of enemies.

On the other side, he was supported from the outset, and in the conclave by a substantial group of traditionalists. These cardinals believe with him that the key to survival of the Church lies in following an uncompromising direction against all inroads from modern secularism. In the mid-nineteen eighties he offered this response to the *New York Times Magazine* to a question about his stern image: (*Wash. Post Nat'l Weekly Ed.* 25 Apr. '05, p. 26)

If it is true that Christian faith taken seriously means nonconformity with a not inconsiderable number of contemporary social standards, then a more-or-less negative image is unavoidable. Nonconformists, after all, who enjoy general applause, are somewhat ridiculous figures, or at least unconvincing.

What we have seen under the last pope has been a slow erosion of all the liberal promises and progressive hopes

stimulated by the Second Vatican Council of Pope John XXIII. With the coming of Benedict XVI any last lingering expectations that the Church may adjust to modernity has been finally quashed. As one of the victims of his censorship, the theologian Hans Küng said in 1985 about the Cardinal: “Joseph Ratzinger is afraid, and just like Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, he fears nothing more than freedom.” (*Ibid.*) Catholics have no need, or right, to decide for themselves what is right or wrong, true or false. The Church has decided for them, and Pope Benedict XVI will see that they know what they are to believe.

The first public speeches of the new pope have been devoted to outreach to other Christian denominations, and even to other religions. But the people of other faiths and convictions tolerated will not include secular humanists. On the contrary, he seems to see the task before him as returning Europe back to faith, recall its people to the Church, and place them again under the yoke of religion. Last year he wrote: (*Newsweek*, 2 May '05, p. 45)

. . . secularism is beginning to transform itself into an ideology that imposes itself through politics and that doesn't concede a public space to the Catholic or Christian vision, which risks becoming purely private.

Leaving the “Christian vision” in the purely private sphere sounds very much like that famous “wall of separation between church and state” of another era and greater thinker. Pope Benedict XVI promises to do his damndest to see that American political figures like Senator John Kerry are made to ignore this wall. — Wolf Roder

Trotter Prize: an award for overlapping the magisteria:

In February *What's New* commented on a session at this year's AAAS meeting devoted to the proposition that science and religion are “non-overlapping magisteria” [in the words of Stephen Jay Gould.] But at Texas A&M they see it a little differently: the Trotter Prize is awarded for “illuminating the connection between science and religion.” How better to illustrate the overlap than to give the award this year to one of the nation's top pseudoscientists, Dr. William Demski, a senior fellow of the Discovery Institute, often regarded as the leading intelligent-design theorist. The Intelligent Design movement seeks to portray intelligent-design as science. However, by resorting to a supernatural explanation it clearly belongs in some other magisteria.

-- *What's New*, Robert L. Park (8 April 2005)



Habemus Papam!

Massimo Pigliucci (May 2005)

Or, rather, they, the roughly one billion Catholics on this planet, have a new Pope, former German cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now known as Benedict XVI. As a former Catholic and an Italian who grew up not far from the Vatican, I followed the American media frenzy over the death of John Paul II with much interest, although the whole coverage by CNN and company struck me as rather odd. It is true that Catholics still make up a large fraction of Americans; and they vote based on some – but apparently not others – of their beliefs, as John Kerry discovered when it turned out that abortion is a moral issue, but war somehow isn't. Still, only twenty percent of

American Catholics actually claim to closely follow the dictates of any Pope, and the US media usually pay little or no attention to what the self-described infallible sage from Rome says or does. No, the media frenzy was really just another example of celebrity worship, no different from the coverage of Michael Jackson's trial or the ever-fascinating saga of who Brad Pitt really goes to bed with.

That said, what ought we to think about the just departed Pope, Carol Wojtyla? As a scientist, I can't really complain that much about him. He managed to officially pardon Galileo, almost four centuries late, but hey, better than never, though he refused to apologize for burning Giordano Bruno at the stake. John Paul II also wrote a letter to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 1997 advising Vatican scientists and Catholics at large that the Church doesn't have a problem with the scientific theory of evolution. That didn't help me much when I was living in Tennessee, since most of the local creationists would simply retort that the Pope was wrong and sure to go to Hell, which I'm confident would have come as shocking news to the man from Poland!

On the other hand, Wojtyla was certainly a very conservative Pope, even by the standards of the Catholic Church as they had evolved since the Second Vatican Council. John Paul II refused to consider a larger role of women in the Church, actively campaigned against the use of contraceptives worldwide, not to mention of course his opposition to gay rights and abortion. Church officials on the ground in Africa have been accused of lying about the effectiveness of condoms to prevent AIDS, just to promote their senseless "abstinence only" policy. While one can surely expect the two thousand year old institution based in Rome to fight a rear-guard war against

human progress, it seems to me that a man indirectly responsible for the death and suffering of millions around the globe should hardly be considered for a fast-track to sainthood. Indeed, there have been many dissenting Catholic voices, even within the Roman Curia, against the strictness of Wojtyla's views.

Which brings us to Benedict XVI. Benedict the XV inherited a highly divided Church at the beginning of the twentieth century, with progressives pitted against conservatives, and did his best to bring about a reconciliation. Although Ratzinger chose his name with the intent of being equally conciliatory, he isn't exactly known as a moderate within the Vatican. On the contrary, Ratzinger served under John Paul II as head of the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, a position that allowed him to punish a score of "liberals" within the Church. According to the New York Times, one of Ratzinger's comments on his role as defender of Catholic orthodoxy was that "The Pope told me that it is my biggest religious obligation not to have my opinions." How sad. And yet, how remarkably apt to capture not just Ratzinger's position, but the whole idea of the Catholic Church: not only is there is one invariable truth, but nobody else can access it other than the highest ranks of the Church itself. It is precisely this sort of attitude, of course, that started the Protestant Reformation and brought about a major schism among

Christians, a schism that Benedict XVI is highly unlikely to help heal.

There are good reasons to think that Ratzinger has been chosen to succeed John Paul II because the august cardinals debating inside the Sistine Chapel had no idea of where the Church should go, and just wanted to buy some time. They are supposed to be inspired directly by God, but it seems that even the Almighty needed five rounds of voting to make up his mind. On the one hand, Americans and Europeans, have been abandoning the Church precisely on the grounds of orthodoxy strictly enforced by John Paul II and by Cardinal Ratzinger. Most Catholics in Western countries seem to feel an increasing distance between the realities of a complex multi-cultural society and a set of teachings that has hardened over two millennia. Then again, the Church has been growing especially in South America and Africa, where evangelical Christians and ultra-orthodox Catholics have been making the fastest gains of converts. Torn between choosing a liberal Pope to recoup some of the losses in Europe and the US, and an even more conservative one to help the expansion in the new territories, the college of cardinals went for the safest choice: an old Pope (Ratzinger is 78), who will maintain the course established by John Paul II for a few more years. After that, god will provide. Or will she?





Camp Quest: A Decade of Success.

By Edwin & Helen Kagin

Camp Quest lives.

In the summer of 1996, at a camp in Northern Kentucky, twenty remarkable kids and a few adult volunteers made history. Camp Quest, the first residential summer camp for the children of atheists and unbelievers in the history of the United States, opened for its first year at a camp facility rented from the Southern Baptists.

June 18 to June 25, 2005 will be the **tenth year** of continuous operation of this unique happening which has spawned clones in Tennessee, Minnesota and Canada, with plans in the making to open additional Camp Quests in Michigan and California.

The camp was started, acting on a concept developed by Edwin Kagin, an Eagle Scout who was outraged that the Boy Scouts had started discriminating against those who did not affirm a belief in a god. The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, an affiliate of the Council for Secular Humanism, operated the camp during its early years. In 2001, FIG permitted Camp Quest to become its own national organization, and in 2002 Camp Quest, Inc., a non-profit corporation with a board of directors drawn from many major freethought organizations in the United States and Canada, assumed the management of Camp Quest.

Camp Quest provides the usual activities of summer camp fun, including campfires, swimming, crafts, archery, and smores. Games developing confidence and cooperation are combined with participatory activities led by nationally recognized experts. Campers learn about evolution, play chess, and practice critical thinking skills, while being exposed to both the beliefs of various religions and to the history and heroes of freethought.

Two invisible unicorns are "known" (or believed) to prance around at Camp Quest. And there is a prize, as yet unclaimed, of a godless \$100 bill for any camper who can prove they aren't there.


The Kagins have served as Camp Directors for the past ten years. At the end of Camp Quest 2005, they will retire from the board of Camp Quest, Inc. and from further active involvement in this adventure. Younger leaders are being trained in the many details of running Camp Quest, which has drawn campers and unpaid volunteer staff from many states and several countries.

For a decade, Camp Quest has been a nightlight in a dark

and scary room for the children of atheists, secular humanists, humanists, and other non-believers, by whatever name they may be called. Without our children, we have no future.

Yes, we are still accepting campers for this tenth year. For more information, see <www.camp-quest.com>.

Keep Camp Quest alive. ⌘

 In 1714 the Roman Catholic Church did away with the requirement that men confessing to fornication must name their partners. Evidence had come to light that too many priests had been making improper use of the information.
—Gyles Brandreth, 1984



The Science Book Club schedule for 2005

We will continue to meet in room 3A at the Cincinnati downtown library at 2:30 on the 4th Sunday of each month except where noted.

- Sunday May 22** - *Opening Skinner's Box : Great Psychological Experiments of the Twentieth Century* by Lauren Slater, 2004
- Sunday June 26** - *Prime Obsession : Bernhard Riemann and the Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics* by John Derbyshire, 2003
- Sunday July 24** - *The Ancestor's Tale: a Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution* by Richard Dawkins, 2004
(Note change of Title)
- Sunday Aug 28** - *Godel, Escher, and Bach* by Douglas Hofstadter, 1979
- Sunday Sept 25** - *The Electric Meme : a New Theory of How We Think* by Robert Aunger, 2002
- Sunday Oct 23** - *Where Mathematics Comes From* by George Lakoff and Rafael Nunez, 2000
- Sunday Nov 20 (3rd Sunday)** - *Eyes on the Universe : a History of the Telescope* by Isaac Asimov, 1975
- Sunday Dec 18 (3rd Sunday)** - *The Science of Good and Evil : Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule* by Michael Shermer, 2004



BOOK REVIEW

Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies
by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit
(New York: Penguin Press, 2004)

Another book on why “they” hate us. They being the Islamic world today, but in the past Japan, Germany, the Soviet Union, and the whole of the “backward” third world. All following the same dynamic.

Western thought since the eighteenth century Enlightenment has built a rich industrial society on scientific discovery with liberal democracy and civil rights for all. This civilization is based on rational thinking in which traditional and religious ideas have been pushed aside, but they often remain in remote regions and become identified with rural backwaters. In the same period, the western powers have occupied, colonized, or otherwise dominated the rest of the world —seen as a backward periphery, benighted people without rational and intellectual understanding. These barbarians were to be pulled and pushed into the modern world of enlightened rationalism and scientific knowledge.

Modern western civilization can also be seen as a poisonous materialist world, built by finance capitalism. A world of mechanical individualism with shallow and rootless people lacking organic tradition, and destructive of creative power. America especially is seen as rootless, cosmopolitan, superficial, trivial, materialistic, racially and culturally mixed, fashion-addicted, and entirely without either a national or religious tradition.

The West, so the story goes, went through an industrial revolution that made it dramatically richer than other parts of the world, but also cut it off from its roots in the traditional agrarian society of the past. Industrialization involved constant application of science and technology, and this was bound to lead to secularization, since rational production in an industrial society called for inquiry into the way things work, into cause and effect. (p. 112)

It created, in short, a disenchantment by technology, a removal of religion, and traditional relationships to the land. In its place the West got superficial entertainment by TV and movies, more food and toys than are needed or good for us, booze and other drugs to numb the pain of anomie, and

pornography and women’s emancipation into near nakedness and equality with men.

Hatred of the West is hatred of this modern, rationalist world. It is hatred of domination over local culture by Hollywood products and ideas, introduction of Christian missionary zeal, of overbearing tourists, of trade globalization, and all western impacts. In short, it is hatred of idolatry, the worship of money and matter over the spirit and over national unity and culture.

Buruma and Margalit insist the opponents of the West take their very prejudices and solutions from the West. They point particularly to German romanticism, the wish to return to a more organic, united, homogenous national community in touch with nature, the soil, and based on rural life of the past. These ideas of course found their most destructive application by the Nazis. The authors understand the intention of Marxist and socialist ideas, whether Soviet, Baathist, or Zionist as a dream of constructing a more lovingly united, just, and equal society. In the name of building the ideal society many atrocities can and were committed, often in the name of ends justifying means.

A third way of opposition to the modern, rationalist society can be found in a return to the ancient and traditional verities of the true religion. This applies in the US as much as in the middle east. “For political Islamists, the West is the main enemy, because it supports oppressive, idolatrous regimes, and stands in the way of creating Islamic states. Puritans hate the Western way of life, because it offends their moral sensibilities, especially when it comes to the treatment of women.” (p. 129) Sayyid Qutb, a well known Egyptian thinker who studied in America, saw the United States, “as a gigantic brothel, steeped in animal lust, greed, and selfishness.” (p. 117) These people preferred human rationality over the word of god. Political oppression in the Middle East will only end when the world is ruled by god, and people return to the moral laws of the Koran. This liberation will be accomplished by the overthrow of the westernized rulers of the Muslim countries. If the West stands in the way of revolution and reform, then western intrusions and globalization will have to go.

— Wolf Roder

Quote
• The invisible and the non-existent look very much alike. •
• Try reality. •
.....
Unquote



June Potluck: Tuesday, 14th 6:30 PM

May Meeting: Sunday, 22nd 2:00 PM



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

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 figinfo@gofigger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.