

FIG LEAVES

Volume 15 Issue 5

May 2006

May FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 23 May 7:00 PM

Defending the Wall of Separation against the Battering Rams of Fundangelicalism.

Edwin Kagin, one of the founding members of FIG, and National Legal Director for American Atheists, will be the speaker at FIG's May meeting, 7:00 pm, May 23, 2006, at the Vernon Manor, Cincinnati, Ohio. Our May speaker has appeared frequently on national live radio call-in talk shows, where he has discussed Atheism and the Constitutional issues involved in interpretation of the First Amendment. He is to engage in a live Debate on the existence of god on Easter Sunday, 2006, at the American Atheists National Convention in San Antonio, Texas. He, and his wife, and FIG board member, Helen Kagin, were the directors of FIG's unique "Camp Quest" for its first ten years of operation.

Our May speaker is co-author of the book "The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America," edited by Kimberly Blaker and published by New Boston Books, of Plymouth, Michigan (and recently made available in Arabic by Shorouk International). He is the author of a collection of his writings, edited by Edward Buckner and published by the Freethought Press of Atlanta, Georgia, "Baubles of Blasphemy." Both books should be available for purchase at the meeting.

Edwin will provide some background on the legal basis for litigation of Church/State separation issues and review some of the history of this type of legal activity in Kentucky, Ohio, and nationally. He will also discuss some actual ongoing cases in which he is currently involved, including a possible lawsuit for defamation against Atheists in Pennsylvania, a Federal lawsuit on behalf of the Smalkowski family in Oklahoma related to their daughter's expulsion from public school for refusing to join in a hand holding prayer circle, on the gym floor before a basketball game, where the Lord's Prayer was recited by the team, and an action he has filed in Federal Court in Covington, Kentucky against Boone County, Kentucky for giving tax exemptions to ordained ministers.

Edwin will also discuss the current climate in the United States regarding what Thomas Jefferson called the "Wall of Separation between Church and State."

The public is invited to attend.

Membership!

We would like to thank of the old and new members of FIG who have renewed their membership in the group. Special thanks go to all and any who have made a donation in addition to their membership. And, please, would all others renew for 2006 immediately, forthwith, instantly, presto and right away, in other words soon. Thanks.

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Events (Watch the dates!)

May Meeting

Tuesday, 23 May 2006
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

June Potluck

Sunday 11 June, 2006
2:00 PM at the home of

June Meeting

Tuesday, 23 June 2006
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio



April Meeting...

Yom Hashoah, Day of Remembrance and America's role in the Holocaust

Henry Blumenstein, a Holocaust survivor

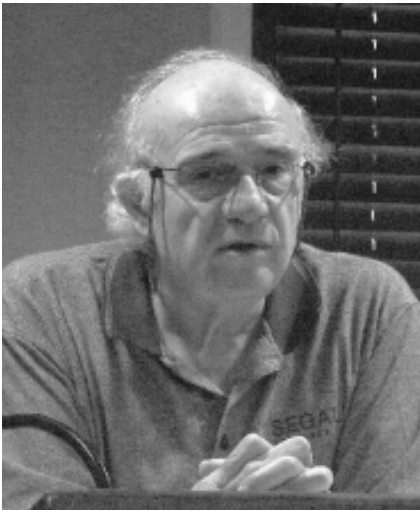


Fig members who visited the Hebrew Union College's Holocaust Museum on 22 May 2005 as our monthly meeting may remember the video show in *The Attic* that featured Henry Blumenstein recalling how he survived the Nazis.

For many years Holocaust survivors, himself included, have been reluctant to talk about their experiences in surviving. For one thing, it was a viciously painful experience and for another many of them suffered from Survival Guilt, an experience common to many who survived while others did not. The realization came to him as well as other survivors that if *they* did not speak out, what had happened would be lost to history. As matters now stand about

half of the persons between the ages of 18 and 24 are ignorant of the Holocaust.

From the time that Hitler came to power in 1933 to the *Kristallnacht* pogrom on 9 November 1938, Germany enacted increasingly severe legislation against the Jews, later this repression was extended to all areas controlled by the Nazis. The world was aware of what was happening. In late 1938 a conference was convened at Evian in France to find places of refuge for Jews attempting to flee Germany. In all 32 countries participated at Evian but only one offered to accept up to five thousand Jewish refugees on reasonable terms and promised one a hundred thousand acres of farm land. This country was the Dominican Republic, then run by the dictator Rafael Trujillo. One stipulation with this offer was that the refugees engage in agriculture.

Henry Blumenstein shared a little of what happened to him and his family during the Holocaust. The first family member to be dragged to a concentration camp was his father who was taken to Dachau. He was later released from this camp on the condition that he leave the country immediately. He managed to be admitted first to Venezuela and subsequently to Cuba. There he could only anxiously wait and hope his family might be able to join him.

In 1939 Henry, his mother and grandmother managed to be included among the 967 passengers sailing on the steamer Saint Louis from Hamburg to Havana. Virtually every one of the passengers was a Jew fleeing the persecution meted out by Germany. The refugees had been able to buy Cuban landing permits by bribing a consular official, the going rate was \$250. By the date the ship arrived in Havana, the official responsible for issuing the landing permits had been fired, the landing permits had declared invalid and had been canceled. Cuban authorities flatly refused to permit any of the refugees entry into the country. Desperate relatives, such as Henry's father, could see their loved ones crowding the railing of the ship, but none were able to embrace them.

The ship then proceeded to Miami and a request was made of US immigration →



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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FIG LEAVES



authorities to allow the passengers to disembark as a humanitarian gesture. For several days the St. Louis sailed up



and down the US east coast to allow time for the President to make an affirmative decision. Eventually Roosevelt denied the request. Reason given cited immigration quotas, isolationist temperature of the country, a struggling economy and probably unadmitted

anti-Semitism, especially in the Foreign Service. The passenger liner was forced to return to Europe.

Instead of proceeding directly to Germany, the ship docked at Antwerp in Belgium. After some back and forth among the assembled European powers, the passengers were parceled out to England, Belgium, the Netherlands and others. The ones who went to England fared the best in the sense they were finally out of the clutches of the Nazis. More than half of the rest eventually died in the camps after the German Army conquered their countries of refuge..

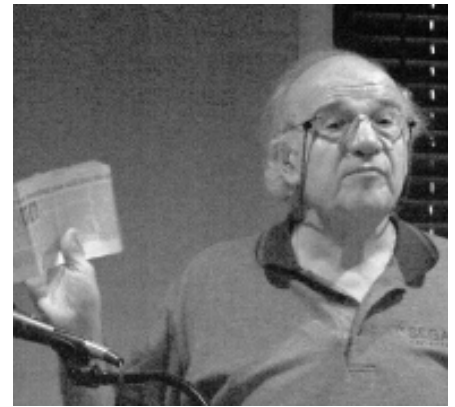
The Blumensteins landed in the Netherlands. When the German Army invaded in 1940, they were forced to go into hiding. They lived for a time near where Anne Frank and her family were concealed. The grandmother was the first to be caught. When the Germans came for her, Henry said she picked up little Heinz and literally threw him into a closet, at the same time making a sign to keep quiet and absolutely not make any noise. After that experience Henry and his mother had to split up for safety. He was hidden by a farm family, which succeeded for three years until the war ended. His mother was not so fortunate, but was caught and taken. She perished in Auschwitz. When the war was over, Henry was finally reunited with his father in New York.

After surviving the Holocaust, Harry said that he wandered for along time “with a big piece of my life missing.” He has also been quoted as



saying, “What this was was self-esteem, and it came out in anger and bitterness. I was angry, short-tempered. In some ways I was very abusive.”

He changed when he read some letters that had been exchanged between his mother and father when they were exploring various avenues to flee the Nazis. He talks about this reading experience: “I became restored, I found that I was very much loved. It gave me a whole new lease on life. It gave me more compassion and helped me love myself more. I can thank this country for coming in touch with that.”



Even though the US had turned down the request for asylum on behalf of Henry and the other passengers on the St. Louis, despite his bitterness, he managed to pursue a career as a social worker. He remains active as a marriage counselor, and speaking to schools and other groups to ensure that the Holocaust is not forgotten by future generations. So now he can say, “It’s been a pretty good life.”

– Reported by George Maurer

Quote.....

Concerns of the Hierarchy

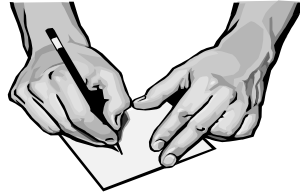
Nudism was much in the Holy Office’s thoughts during the early 1930s. Days before his death on February 26, 1930, Rafael Merry Del Val had begun to fume against “one of the most detestable and pernicious aberrations of our times.” The cardinal-secretary of the Holy Office did not mean National Socialism, Fascism, or Communism. He referred, with violent hostility, to naked bathing and other practices that represented, in his opinion, “an attack on Christian morality.” Nudism, in the view of this modern inquisitor, amounted to a doctrine – a doctrine that was contrary to the faith. Thousands of nudists, with their “magnificently illustrated” publications, were encouraging “materialism and bestiality.” They denied the shame that ought to have been felt at the naked body ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s commandments at the fall.

– Peter Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican* (2004) pp. 40-41

.....Unquote



Letters To The Editor



NBC: *Today* with Katie Couric
22 April 2006

In the fairness of presenting a well-rounded journalistic piece and in including decent representatives of varied groups I would love to see a quality program on atheists in America. I have been an atheist since I was seven years old and realized that the concept of “God” did not make sense, at least not to me. I am a good person, a mother a grandmother and quite humanistic in my perception of life.

I have no problem with people believing in God, if they like, however those of us who do not believe also deserve the courtesy of being allowed our non-belief. A person’s personal religious belief is just that...personal. Unless actions spill over and harm others let’s us just believe as we like, individually.

No atheists in foxholes? Wrong. We who are atheists out of foxholes do not recant atheism when faced with a crisis. It is time that people understand the sheer number of non-believers in our world, and how we differ just as believers differ, and let us atheists have a little respect as okay people.

None of us can actually really prove or disprove our religious positions. I can’t prove that something invisible does not exist. Conversely having something written in a book, i.e. the Bible does not make what is printed accurate or true.

Ms. Couric owes all atheists an apology for implying that there are no atheists in foxholes and the fact that our politicians and the White House turn to God quite frankly scares me a bit.

Inez Klein
Cincinnati Ohio
513-521-8195

An editorial and response from the April 2006 issue of *Scientific American*:

The Church of Darwin

I would appreciate it if Steve Mirsky did not jam his religion of evolution down our throats. He just cannot get off touting his religion as the only true religion, repeating his mantra again in the “Trials of Life” [Anti Gravity]. Thank you for reprimanding Mirsky about proselytizing his personal religion, instead of reporting on science.

Bob Langenbach
SeaTac, Wash.

Mirsky Replies:

Langenbach’s faith in his conclusion that I have been reprimanded is unfounded. He causes one to ponder, however, the benefits of decreeing evolution to be a religion. Biologists could tap the vast amount of research funding suddenly available through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and academic departments would receive tax-exempt status. Alas, evolution remains science.

Science Book Club - Schedule for 2006

Science book club as in past years plans on meeting at the Cincinnati Downtown Library on the 4th Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in Room 3A, except on the 3rd Sunday where conflicts with holidays occur as noted below and in May in Room 3B because of a room schedule conflict.

May 21 (third Sunday in Room 3B) - *Fly: The Unsung Hero of Twentieth Century Science*: Martin Brookes

June 25 - *Silent Sky: the incredible extinction of the passenger pigeon*: Allan Eckert

July 23 - *Ohio Archaeology an illustrated chronicle of Ohio’s ancient American Indian cultures*: Bradley T. Lepper

Aug 27 - *On Intelligence* Jeff Hawkins

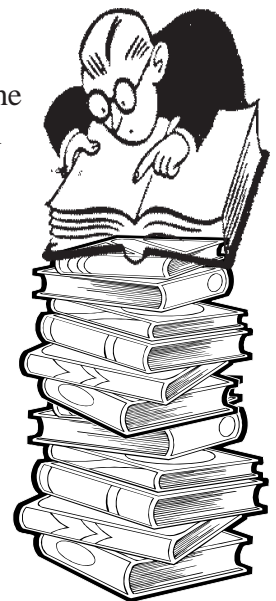
Sept 24 - *Economics in Perspective, A Critical History*: John Kenneth Galbraith

Oct 22 - *The “God” Part of the Brain*: Matthew Alper

Nov 19 (third Sunday)- *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein’s outrageous legacy*: Kip Thorne

Dec 17 (third Sunday) - *Science of Aliens*: Clifford Pickover

– Bryan Sellers





Council for Secular Humanism
Coming Together to Celebrate the Values that Unite
Americans!

Why Should We Celebrate - and Defend the Ten Amendments?

“Because it is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties.” -James Madison, 1785

Powerful forces are working to undermine the principles that have kept Americans free for 215 years. Free speech is confined to fenced-in zones. Privacy is invaded without warrant. Citizens are held without formal charges and without legal counsel.

Most threatening, religious activists are seeking to install God in our government. **On May 7th, a Ten Commandments Day Commission and millions of followers are lobbying to replace the Ten Amendments with the Ten Commandments**, replacing our civil rights with their religious preferences. This attempt to align the power of government with the authority of God challenges the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and endangers the rights protected by the other Nine.

Visit the Ten Amendments Day website at <http://www.tenamendmentsday.org> to learn about the Bill of Rights, the debates that went into the creation of our secular Constitution, and what you can do to preserve this heritage. You'll also find articles about the Ten Commandments and the current court cases attempting to force religion into the government. Our Constitution is under attack, now is the time to take alarm and take action.

It is proper to take alarm and take action.

Here you will find the resources you need to learn about the Bill of Rights and the debates that went into the creation of our secular Constitution. You'll find articles about the Ten Commandments and the current court cases attempting to force religion into the government.

Most of all, we hope you will find the inspiration, the knowledge, and the materials you need to organize your own Ten Amendments Day celebration. We have created brochures, and a press release that you can personalize to fit your own event. More materials will be posted here in the coming weeks leading up to Ten Amendments Day.

While some would divide the nation along religious lines, we seek to honor the values that unite all Americans.

With the Ten Amendments Day Project, we come together across the country on May 7th in support of our Constitution, the freedoms it preserves, and the rights it protects.

Quote.....

Shermer on ID

I would like to address the underlying problem with the theory. “Intelligent Design” is nothing more than a linguistic place filler for something unexplained by science. It is saying, in essence, that if there is no natural explanation for X, then the explanation must be a supernatural one. IDers cannot imagine, for example, how the bacterial flagellum (the little tail that propels sperm cells) could have evolved; ergo, they conclude, it was intelligently designed. But saying “ID did it” does not explain anything. Scientists would want to know how and when ID did it, and what forces ID used. Invoking ID as God’s place filler can only result in the naturalization of the deity. God would simply become another part of the natural world, and thereby lose all of the transcendent mystery and numinous praxis that delimits religion and science.

-- Michael Shermer, (5 April 2005)

.....Unquote!

A question of moral choices.

Consider the following brief scenarios. For each decide in the blank space whether the action is *obligatory*, *permissible*, or *forbidden*. These are the only responses possible which you may use.

(1) A runaway boxcar is about to run over five people walking along the tracks. A railroad worker is standing at a switch that can turn the boxcar onto a side track, killing only one person, but allowing five to survive. Flipping the switch is _____.

(2) You pass by a small child drowning in a shallow pond, and you are the only one around. If you jump in and pick up the child, she will survive, but your good suit will be ruined. Picking up the child is _____.

(3) Five people have just been rushed into a hospital in critical condition, each requiring a different organ to survive. There is no time to obtain organs from outside the hospital, but there is a healthy person in the hospital waiting room. If the surgeons take this person’s organs, he will die, but the five in critical condition will live. Taking the healthy person’s organs is _____.

Choose your responses before reading further on page 8.



Atheists identified as America's most distrusted minority

Mark Cassutt, University News Service, (612) 624-8038

MINNEAPOLIS / ST. PAUL (3/20/2006) -- Americans' increasing acceptance of religious diversity doesn't extend to those who don't believe in a god, according to a national survey by researchers in the University of Minnesota's department of sociology.

From a telephone sampling of more than 2,000 households, university researchers found that Americans rate atheists below Muslims, recent immigrants, gays and lesbians and other minority groups in "sharing their vision of American society." Atheists are also the minority group most Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry.

Even though atheists are few in number, not formally organized and relatively hard to publicly identify, they are seen as a threat to the American way of life by a large portion of the American public. "Atheists, who account for about three percent of the U.S. population, offer a glaring exception to the rule of increasing social tolerance over the last thirty years," says Penny Edgell, associate sociology professor and the study's lead researcher.

Edgell also argues that today's atheists play the role that Catholics, Jews and communists have played in the past—they offer a symbolic moral boundary to membership in American society. "It seems most Americans believe that diversity is fine, as long as every one shares a common 'core' of values that make them trustworthy—and in America, that 'core' has historically been religious," says Edgell. Many of the study's respondents associated atheism with an array of moral indiscretions ranging from criminal behavior to rampant materialism and cultural elitism.

Edgell believes a fear of moral decline and resulting social disorder is behind the findings. "Americans believe they share more than rules and procedures with their fellow citizens—they share an understanding of right and wrong," she said. "Our findings seem to rest on a view of atheists as self-interested individuals who are not concerned with the common good."

The researchers also found acceptance or rejection of atheists is related not only to personal religiosity, but also to one's exposure to diversity, education and political orientation—with more educated, East and West Coast Americans more accepting of atheists than their Midwestern

counterparts.

The study is co-authored by assistant professor Joseph Gerteis and associate professor Doug Hartmann. It's the first in a series of national studies conducted by the American Mosaic Project, a three-year project funded by the Minneapolis-based David Edelstein Family Foundation that looks at race, religion and cultural diversity in the contemporary United States. The study will appear in the April issue of the *American Sociological Review*. ☚

Quote

• How Ralph Reed saw God. •

• Six months after being fired from *The Red and Black*, Reed was at the trendy Bullfeathers drinking and eating hang-out favored by many Washington insiders and wanna'bees when, like Paul on the road to Damascus, he reportedly underwent a profound religious experience. The story has become legendary in the beltway gossip circuit. Reed later remarked that "The Holy Sprit simply demanded me to come to Jesus," and that he trekked out of the bar, found the nearest phone booth and eagerly began walking his fingers through the Yellow Pages directory under the heading of "churches." The following morning, according to the script, he visited the Evangel Assembly of God in Camp Springs, Maryland and began his new life as a born-again Christian.

• — Conrad Goeringer in *Am. Atheist Newsletter* (Feb. 2006) p. 10

Unquote

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group has an event:
What: The Cincinnati Atheists May Meetup
When: Tuesday, May 16 at 8:00PM
Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers; 2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion; Cincinnati OH 45207; 513-396-8966



Father Brian O'Donovan of Cork in Ireland tells what he professes to be the true story of a young girl who went to confession full of apprehension and too embarrassed to put into words what was troubling her conscience.

"Oh, Father, I don't know how to tell you, sure," she stammered.

"Come, come, my daughter," replied the priest, "let me help you. Now, was it a sin of the flesh?"

"It was, Father," said the girl.

"And was it with a man?" asked the priest.

"It was, Father."

"And tell me, daughter, was it against your will?"

"Oh no, Father, it was against the kitchen cupboard. And sure it would have done yer heart good to hear the dishes a-rattlin'."



The Price of Progress.

Malaysia, a well run Muslim country in southeast Asia, thinks of itself as promoting “civilized Islam;” which means encouraging people to embrace education, science, and technology. So next year they are planning to send an astronaut to the International Space Station with the Russian space program. Which has raised the

question – what does it mean to be a Muslim in Orbit? A serious follower of god is expected to pray five times a day, including at sun-rise, at noon, and in the evening. And in each prayer he is expected to face towards Mecca.

With the space station orbiting the Earth in about ninety minutes, which way is Mecca, and what time is it? There will be a dozen sun rises in each 24 hour period, and the direction to Mecca will change by the second. And, Muslims always ritually wash before praying. This will be difficult in space where water is precious and tends to spread all over under weightlessness.

Bob Park informs us that a computer program has been developed to answer these questions. Facing Mecca will be tough in zero gravity as the faithful tries to point toward a rapidly moving target.

Yet the whole issue must have been solved, since the Malaysian will not be the first Muslim in orbit. In April-June 1985 an Arab prince, Sultan ibn Salman ibn Abd al-‘aziz al Saud, was a member of the American space program working as a load specialist.

– Source: JREF, *Swift* newsletter (28 April 2006) and Bob Park, *What’s New* (28 April 2006)

Will the “Intelligent Designer” be revealed?

Our story opens with the grisly defeat of the eight members of the Dover Area School Board who were up for re-election. Behind their demise, we now learn, is a shadowy organization called the Discovery Institute, which is sworn to suppress the secret identity of the “Intelligent Designer.” Just “teach the controversy,” warns the founder of the Discovery Institute, Bruce Chapman. Otherwise people might think the argument has something to do with religion instead of pure science. He blames the Dover School Board for its loss. To convince others not to reveal the identity of the designer, the Discovery Institute has rushed into print with a new book *Traipsing Into Evolution*, in which their legal experts analyze the impact of *Kitzmiller v. Dover*.

-- *What’s New* Robert L. Park, 5 May 2006

U.S. religious leaders seek God’s help -- to reduce the spiraling cost of gas

Religious leaders were to meet in Washington today to pray publicly for gasoline prices to ease, organizers with the group Pray Live said: “It is our hope that seeing and hearing some of the nation’s most powerful preachers gathered around a gas station and the United States capital as a backdrop, will remind everyone who is really in charge of our world -- God,” said Wenda Royster, founder of Pray Live, a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week live prayer line, e-worship center, and Internet radio station.

Several leaders of Protestant organizations from Washington plan to participate in the event. The rise in prices at gasoline stations has raised concerns in the United States, leading President George W. Bush to demand a federal inquiry to ensure Americans are not being swindled at the pump. (AFP, 27 April 2006)

Will going to church help you live longer? *The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine* published a study by Dr. Daniel Hall of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center who found that people who attend weekly religious services live longer. Dr. Hall, who is also an Episcopal priest, compared average church contributions to the cost of membership in Bally’s or to taking Lipitor to lower cholesterol, and concludes religion is more cost effective. Everybody pays the same for Lipitor, but they put different amounts in the collection plate. What is the correlation between money individuals put in the plate and their longevity?

Dr. Richard Sloan of Columbia University Medical Center, author of a forthcoming book, *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine*, called the study “silly.” The most obvious confounder is that as their health fails people are able to attend church less. The obvious solution is to take money out of the plate to pay for membership in a gym.

And praying that your health insurance will cover your illness doesn’t work either.

What’s New Robert L. Park, 14 April 2006

Secretary of Energy Bodman disbands his Science Advisory Board. He has never met with the SAB. A DOE spokesman explained that the Secretary, is a chemical engineer, who has “a science background,” and so doesn’t need advice. Besides, President Bush doesn’t have a science





advisor, and look at how well things are going. When Ronald Regan became President, he initially declined to name a Science Advisor. He explained that he knew an engineer back in California he could call if anything ever came up.



What's New Robert L. Park, 14 April 2006

Appropriate for Good Friday

Normally the Scranton, Pa, station WNEP televises the season opener for the Scranton- Wilkes-Barre Red Barons minor league baseball team. But this year it refused to televise the game because it was scheduled on the Friday before Easter. "Good Friday is not an appropriate day for us to do that," explained C. Lou Kirchen, WNEP's president and general manager. So what aired in its place? Local news, the tabloid show "Inside Edition," "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," and "Primetime," featuring a story about children being abducted and forced into prostitution. (*Allentown Morning Call*)



Something's Amiss

George Barna, who directed the tracking study of religious beliefs and practices, noted that the relationship between people's perception of their religious commitment and their reticence to make faith their top priority points to a significant disconnect.

"Spirituality is in vogue in our society today," he commented. "It is popular to claim to be part of a 'faith community' or to have a spiritual commitment. But what do Americans mean when they claim to be 'spiritual'?" The recent Grammy awards were perhaps indicative of this breakdown between self-perception and reality. The members of the group that won the award for best song thanked God for the victory then immediately followed with profanities that had to be bleeped from the broadcast. It seems as if God is in, but living for God is not. Many Americans are living a dual life – one filled with good feelings about God and faith, corroborated by some simple religious practices, and another in which they believe they are in control of their own destiny and operate apart from Him."

Citing further evidence of this dualistic perspective, the author stated, "The survey also noted that among those who say their faith has 'greatly transformed' their life, just one out of four positioned their faith practices and pursuits as their highest life priority. It certainly seems that millions of Americans are fooling themselves into thinking that they have found the appropriate balance between God and lifestyle."

- © www.barna.org

Moral Sense, (continued from page 5).

If you judged case (1) as permissible, (2) as obligatory, and (3) as forbidden, you are like 1500 subjects around the world who responded to these dilemmas on a web-based moral sense test <http://moral.wjh.harvard.edu>. If morality were god's word, atheists would judge these cases differently from religious people, and their responses would rely on different justifications.

For example, because atheists are supposed to lack a moral compass, they should be guided by pure self-interest and walk by the drowning child. If religious people truly believe life and the soul begin at conception, if forced to choose in a fire, would they rescue a two-year old child or five embryos in a petri dish?

There were no statistically significant differences between subjects with or without religious background, with approximately 90 percent of subjects saying it is permissible to flip the switch on the boxcar, 97 percent saying it is obligatory to rescue the child in the pond, and it is forbidden to remove the healthy man's organs.

When asked to justify why some cases are permissible and others forbidden, subjects are either clueless or offer explanations that cannot account for the relevant differences. Importantly, those with a religious background are as clueless or incoherent as the unbelievers.

Studies like this provide empirical support for the idea that, like other psychological faculties of the mind, including language and mathematics, we are endowed with a moral faculty that guides our intuitive judgements of right and wrong. These intuitions reflect the outcome of millions of years of evolution in which our ancestors developed as social mammals. They are part of the common human inheritance.

Our evolved intuitions do not necessarily give us correct or consistent answers to all moral problems. What was good for our ancestors may not be good today. But insights into the changing moral landscape, in which issues such as animal rights, abortion, euthanasia, and international aid have come to the fore, have not come from religion, but from careful reflections on humanity and what we consider a life well lived.

It is important for us to be aware of an universal set of moral concepts so that we can reflect on them, and if we choose, act contrary to or with them. We can do this without fearing blasphemy, because it is our own nature, not god, that is the source of our morality.

Quote
• No man with any sense of humor ever founded a religion. •
•
• Robert G. Ingersoll •
..... **Unquote**



From the Los Angeles Times

Christians Sue for Right Not to Tolerate Policies

Many codes intended to protect gays from harassment are illegal, conservatives argue.

By Stephanie Simon, Times Staff Writer

April 10, 2006

ATLANTA — Ruth Malhotra went to court last month for the right to be intolerant. Malhotra says her Christian faith compels her to speak out against homosexuality. But the Georgia Institute of Technology, where she's a senior, bans speech that puts down others because of their sexual orientation. Malhotra sees that as an unacceptable infringement on her right to religious expression. So she's demanding that Georgia Tech revoke its tolerance policy.

With her lawsuit, the 22-year-old student joins a growing campaign to force public schools, state colleges and private workplaces to eliminate policies protecting gays and lesbians from harassment. The religious right aims to overturn a broad range of common tolerance programs: diversity training that promotes acceptance of gays and lesbians, speech codes that ban harsh words against homosexuality, anti-discrimination policies that require college clubs to open their membership to all.

The Rev. Rick Scarborough, a leading evangelical, frames the movement as the civil rights struggle of the 21st century. "Christians," he said, "are going to have to take a stand for the right to be Christian. In that spirit, the Christian Legal Society, an association of judges and lawyers, has formed a national group to challenge tolerance policies in federal court. Several nonprofit law firms — backed by major ministries such as Focus on the Family and Campus Crusade for Christ — already take on such cases for free. The legal argument is straightforward: Policies intended to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination end up discriminating against conservative Christians. Evangelicals have been suspended for wearing anti-gay T-shirts to high school, fired for denouncing Gay Pride Month at work, reprimanded for refusing to attend diversity training. When they protest tolerance codes, they're labeled intolerant.

A recent survey by the Anti-Defamation League found that 64% of American adults — including 80% of evangelical Christians — agreed with the statement "Religion is under attack in this country." "The message is, you're free to worship as you like, but don't you dare talk about it outside the four walls of your church," said Stephen Crampton, chief counsel for the American Family Assn. Center for Law and Policy, which represents Christians who feel harassed.

Critics dismiss such talk as a right-wing fund raising ploy. "They're trying to

develop a persecution complex," said Jeremy Gunn, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. Others fear the banner of religious liberty could be used to justify all manner of harassment. "What if a person felt their religious view was that African Americans shouldn't mingle with Caucasians, or that women shouldn't work?" asked Jon Davidson, legal director of the gay rights group Lambda Legal.

Christian activist Gregory S. Baylor responds to such criticism angrily. He says he supports policies that protect people from discrimination based on race and gender. But he draws a distinction that infuriates gay rights activists when he argues that sexual orientation is different — a lifestyle choice, not an inborn trait. By equating homosexuality with race, Baylor said, tolerance policies put conservative evangelicals in the same category as racists. He predicts the government will one day revoke the tax-exempt status of churches that preach homosexuality is sinful or that refuse to hire gays and lesbians. "Think how marginalized racists are," said Baylor, who directs the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom. "If we don't address this now, it will only get worse."

Christians are fighting back in a case involving Every Nation Campus Ministries at California State University. Student members of the ministry on the Long Beach and San Diego campuses say their mission is to model a virtuous lifestyle for their

peers. They will not accept as members gays, lesbians or anyone who considers homosexuality "a natural part of God's created order." Legal analysts agree that the ministry, as a private organization, has every right to exclude gays; the Supreme Court affirmed that principle in a case involving the Boy Scouts in 2000. At issue is whether the university must grant official recognition to a student group that discriminates. The students say denying them recognition — and its attendant benefits, such as funding — violates their free-speech rights and discriminates against their conservative theology. Christian groups at public colleges in other states have sued using similar arguments. Several of those lawsuits were settled out of court, with the groups prevailing.

In California, however, the university may have a strong defense in court. The California Supreme Court recently ruled that the city of Berkeley was justified in denying subsidies to the Boy Scouts because of that group's exclusionary policies. Eddie L. Washington, the lawyer representing Cal State, argues the same standard should apply to the university. "We're certainly not going to fund discrimination," Washington said.

As they step up their legal campaign, conservative Christians face uncertain prospects. The 1st Amendment guarantees Americans "free exercise" of religion. In practice, though, the ground rules shift depending on the situation. In a 2004 case, for instance, an AT&T Broadband em-



ployee won the right to express his religious convictions by refusing to sign a pledge to “respect and value the differences among us.” As long as the employee wasn’t harassing co-workers, the company had to make accommodations for his faith, a federal judge in Colorado ruled. That same year, however, a federal judge in Idaho ruled that Hewlett-Packard Co. was justified in firing an employee who posted Bible verses condemning homosexuality on his cubicle. The verses, clearly visible from the hall, harassed gay employees and made it difficult for the company to meet its goal of attracting a diverse workforce, the judge ruled.

In the public schools, an Ohio middle school student last year won the right to wear a T-shirt that proclaimed: “Homosexuality is a sin! Islam is a lie! Abortion is murder!” But a teen-ager in Kentucky lost in federal court when he tried to exempt himself from a school program on gay tolerance on the grounds that it violated his religious beliefs.

In their lawsuit against Georgia Tech, Malhotra and her co-plaintiff, a devout Jewish student named Orit Sklar, request unspecified damages. But they say their main goal is to force the university to be more tolerant of religious viewpoints. The

lawsuit was filed by the Alliance Defense Fund, a nonprofit law firm that focuses on religious liberty cases. Malhotra said she had been reprimanded by college deans several times in the last few years for expressing conservative religious and political views. When she protested a campus production of “The Vagina Monologues” with a display condemning feminism, the administration asked her to paint over part of it.

She caused another stir with a letter to the gay activists who organized an event known as Coming Out Week in the fall of 2004. Malhotra sent the letter on behalf of the Georgia Tech College Republicans, which she chairs; she said several members of the executive board helped write it. The letter referred to the campus gay rights group Pride Alliance as a “sex club ... that can’t even manage to be tasteful.” It went on to say that it was “ludicrous” for Georgia Tech to help fund the Pride Alliance. The letter berated students who come out publicly as gay, saying they subject others on campus to “a constant barrage of homosexuality.” “If gays want to be tolerated, they should knock off the political propaganda,” the letter said.

The student activist who received the letter, Felix Hu, described it as “rude, unfair,

presumptuous” — and disturbing enough that Pride Alliance forwarded it to a college administrator. Soon after, Malhotra said, she was called in to a dean’s office. Students can be expelled for intolerant speech, but she said she was only reprimanded. Still, she said, the incident has left her afraid to speak freely. She’s even reluctant to aggressively advertise the campus lectures she arranges on living by the Bible. “Whenever I’ve spoken out against a certain lifestyle, the first thing I’m told is ‘You’re being intolerant, you’re being negative, you’re creating a hostile campus environment,’” Malhotra said.

A Georgia Tech spokeswoman would not comment on the lawsuit or on Malhotra’s disciplinary record, but she said the university encouraged students to debate freely, “as long as they’re not promoting violence or harassing anyone.” The open question is what constitutes harassment, what’s a sincere expression of faith — and what to do when they overlap. “There really is confusion out there,” said Charles C. Haynes, a senior scholar at the First Amendment Center, which is affiliated with Vanderbilt University. “Finding common ground sounds good. But the reality is, a lot of people on all sides have a stake in the fight.”



A Bridge to Cross

A bridge to be crossed in this forest fair,
 Bird calls surge through fragrant air.
 Dappled spring sun shines down on my head,
 Through newly green leaves yet to be shed.
 As I stand and gaze at the path to the bridge,
 A second path beckons up to a ridge.
 I contemplate what is before me,
 A question to answer as it must be.

Do I cross the bridge....Or take to the ridge?

Regardless of which path I take,
 My life will be just what **I** make.
 For all our lives do end the same,
 And death will take us despite their claim.
 But if we are then born in life anew?
 Let’s leave that for someone else to stew!

By Aunt Sue Loughry





Why Geography Matters:
three challenges facing America:
climate change, the rise of China, and global terrorism
by Harm J. de Blij
(Oxford University Press, 2005)

Most scientific experts are apt to think their discipline and specialty is more important to the world of knowledge and action than it probably actually is. De Blij is no exception; in this tour de horizon of the world and all that is in it he never hesitates to comment on any topic. The book ranges from considerations for the environment, through the mesh of civilizations, China's geopolitical gauntlet, the trouble with Russia, to terrorism's widening circle. His writing and reasoning is logical, and he makes his conclusions exceptionally clear. We learn about the concerns of the discipline of geography and what it may teach us.

Geography, in fact, is not a discipline, but an interdisciplinary subject concerned with where things are and events take place. It is a subject which draws together the physical environment, the nature of place with the human social and political events there. So geography asks not only where things are, but why they are there and not elsewhere. As in all sciences, the aim is to explain human and physical processes, but with specific attention to where.

To ask, why here, forces the scholar to compare places in explaining their differences. That and the need to understand the world's climates, and the consequent biogeography, leads geographers into a global outlook. De Blij's "world tour" is to be expected in a discipline which considers every location on earth both unique and of interest. The military and the intelligence services are among the major users of geographic knowledge.

We may joke that only geographers would know the difference between Slovakia, Slovenia, Slavonia, and Serbia, and not all of these are countries. De Blij explains the difference between state, country and nation, which inevitably gets him into history. At the present time the entire land area of the world, with the exception of Antarctica, is divided among states. These states are separated by boundaries, which are defined, delimited, but not all are demarcated. Among the states only the United States, China,

and perhaps India can play major adversary roles. China's rising tide of nationalism is driven by (p. 130)

The perceived superpower arrogance of the United States, its omnipresence in the region, its role involving Taiwan, criticism of China's human rights practices, refuge given to dissidents, and other irritations drive nationalist sentiments expressed in newspaper editorials, letters to editors, public reactions to perceived slights, and in virulently anti-American and nationalistic best-selling books.

In consequence, China is seen throughout much of Asia as "a potential bulwark against an America whose actions and motives are troubling." (p. 147) None of this -yet, adds up to a cold war.

Terror in contrast is not an adversary, but a method used by any belligerent. Terror is also difficult to define. Whom I consider terrorists, my enemy is likely to label freedom fighters. This applies to Africans rising against the colonial occupation, or the IRA intending to liberate Northern Ireland. These labels have been applied to Chechnyans by Russia, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Corsicans in France, Basques in Spain, or Uighurs and Tibetans in China. Israelis consider Palestinian partisans terrorists, and Palestinians return the label to the Israeli military.

Whom then are we fighting in Bush's so called "war on terror?" De Blij's answer is clear, we are fighting Islam. The Koran makes discouraging reading, not unlike the Bible. It does say, "There shall be no compulsion in religion." (Sura 2:256) But the Koran is full of contradictions, often directed against non-Muslim. The Koran instructs to despise nonbelievers, to kill apostates, and that infidels will burn in hell forever. Some mullahs constantly instruct the faithful to convert, fight, and subjugate the non-Muslim and eventually conquer the world. There is little or no instruction towards moderation or compromise.

- Wolf Roder

Quote.....
In 2005 Americans had to face the sad realization that the Bush Administration's "pro-life" stance appears to be limited to the unborn and the brain-dead. Despite being panned by critics everywhere, the Iraqi Horror Picture Show continued its run, as thousands and thousands of born fetuses- ours and theirs- lost their right to life.
-Swami Beyondananda (Steve Bhaerman, wakeuplaughing.com)
.....Unquote:



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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.