

FIG LEAVES

Volume 19 Issue 11

November 2010

December FIG Meeting: Sunday, Dec. 19 at 3:00 pm

We shall tour the exhibit at the Cincinnati Museum Center

America I Am: The African American Imprint

Cost: Cost is \$5 for FIG Members, \$11 for Non-Fig Members (\$11 is the standard group rate)

Parking: It is \$6 to park at the Cincinnati Museum Center, so feel free to carpool with others. Another opportunity is to park for free on Hopkins St, which is immediately south of the Museum Center and walk through the parking lot.

RSVP: If you are interested in joining us, please contact Shawn Jeffers at 513-404-8191 or at smj145@gmail.com for tickets. We will need at least 15 people attending to receive the group rate.

About the Exhibit

America I AM provides an opportunity for people from all walks of life to explore this uniquely American story. With the nation's first African American president, **America I AM** endeavors to bring together Americans of all backgrounds to achieve a greater understanding of their shared culture and history.

Scholar W.E.B. Du Bois once wrote, "Would America have been America without her Negro people?" To examine the answer to that question, **America I Am: The African American Imprint** is mounted as the broadest museum exhibition of its kind. An assembly of poignant artifacts representing nearly 500 years of American history, the exhibition will convey and celebrate the undeniable imprint African Americans have had on the country and the world.

This National exhibit is touring American cities and will be in Cincinnati until January 2, 2011. More details on the exhibit can be found at www.americaiam.org.

Solstice Supper

After visiting the Exhibit, we will have a Solstice Supper at Frisch's in Queensgate/West End, which is just down the street from the Museum Center. If you can't make the exhibit, but want to join us for dinner, plan on being at the restaurant at 5:15. The restaurant is the Frisch's at 1001 Gest Street, Cincinnati, OH 45203.

Fig Movie Night: 6 December At 6:15 PM

Join FIG members on Monday, December 6 at 6:15 pm at the Sharonville library. This month's movie will be *Agora*. Despite critical acclaim this movie was limited to 17 theaters when it was released earlier this year. Could that be because of it's subject matter? It is the story of philosopher-mathematician Hypatia, her murder, and the holy war that resulted in the destruction of the library at Alexandria, thus changing the course of history.

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Events

Note Location/Date/Time Changes!

November Meeting:

There will be no November Meeting:
Enjoy your time with family & friends.

FIG Community Dinner:

None for December - *Enjoy the Holidays with family and friends.*

FIG Movie Night:

Monday Dec. 6, 2010, 6:15-8:30 PM
Sharonville Library

December Meeting

Sunday, Dec. 19, 2010, 3:00 PM
Cincinnati Museum Center



Free Inquiry Group Sends A Big Thank You To Marilyn And Giovanni For The Excellent, Wonderful, Amazing Dinner Party In October.

With stimulating conversation at every table, and delicious, authentic Italian food being served, the dinner party invoked the feeling of a fine dining establishment, with



two important exceptions. First, most of us were taught that two topics of conversation (religion and politics) are forbidden in polite company. While the conversations at Marilyn and Giovanni's tables were primarily about religion and politics, they were very civil. That, my friends, is one of the joys of belonging to the Free Inquiry Group.

Second, at a fine dining establishment, one is presented with a (usually large) bill at the end of the meal. We would have been more than happy to chip in for such a lovely evening, but Marilyn and Giovanni would not hear of it. As an alternative way to say, "Thank you!" some members of the group came up with an excellent plan. We will help send a camper to Camp Quest Classic in their name. We will begin taking donations



for that at our regular meeting in January.

Of course, as soon as that plan was announced, we decided that Giovanni should come to camp too. What a treat it would be for the campers to see Giovanni demonstrate his culinary expertise. Perhaps we should clear that plan with Giovanni first?

- reported by Fran Welte

Thank You Marilyn & Giovanni!



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

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Memberships run from:

1 January to 31 December.
One year: \$25
Family: \$35

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

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



October Meeting

Sam “goddamn” Singleton - Atheist Evangelist



It seems that the religious always complain about non-believers ridiculing them. It also seems that if their practices were not so ridiculous they would be undeserving of ridicule. When you drink poison, speak in tongues and handle poisonous snakes in a ceremony designed

to garner the favor of an all-powerful all-knowing entity that has never been proven to exist, you are going beyond ridiculous and should expect ridicule. As Brother Sam says, “Once you take that initial step off the deep end of reason and accept God on nothin’ but faith, you’re down to splittin’ hairs over whether the Sugar Plum Fairy has buckles or bells on her shoes.”

Ridiculous Pentecostal religious ceremonies were the brunt of masterful ridicule from Sam Singleton, Atheist Evangelist, at the October FIG meeting. The one-man play that he performed is entitled, *If The Ocean Was Whiskey And God Was A Duck, (500 Questions God Can’t Answer)*.

As a nine-year-old boy, Sam’s parents provided only two answers to his many questions, “Because I said so,” and “Because God said so.” To his inquiring mind both answers meant, “Shut up and go away.” Therefore, he began a list of questions for God that he wrote in a small notebook while waiting for answers from the almighty. He is still waiting.

The play describes his father’s revelation that God wanted him to have an old-fashioned “brush arbor” revival in the backwoods of the Ozarks where Sam grew up. The lord convinced Sam’s father that people would flock to the revival in order to hear the word of God. It tells of the cobbling together of the “brush arbor” which was used as a venue for the week long evangelical revival. The play follows a colorful cast of characters (most of them related to Sam) and their struggles to co-

operate behind the scenes and to promote and carry out a revival intended to “bring souls to Jesus.” But most of all to make some money for the preacher.

The play was hilariously funny for the most part but was also touching at times. The climax comes when his parents expect young Brother Sam to preach at the last night of the revival. The nine-year-old boy takes the stage and preaches from the Bible while pointing out the acts of hypocrisy that he has witnessed committed by the adults of the church (especially the preachers) over the course of the revival week. The chaotic ending leaves the audience satisfied that the youngster has taken the ridiculous adults to task with his pointed ridicule.

Brother Sam Singleton is the creation of Roger Scott Jackson. According to his website, www.samsingleton.com, the creator shares the following with his creation: “childhood terrors involving bizarre religious practices, the expectation to follow previous generations into the ministry, a period of intense spiritual seeking, recognition that God is fictional, estrangement from family, and finally a rich full life free from fear of the supernatural.” Jackson has worked at many jobs,



including reporter, editor and comedy writer for radio and other media. Over that time, he has obviously honed his skills as a character actor. The accents and mannerisms of his characters made you feel as though you were in the brush arbor about to be “slayed in the spirit.”

Working behind the scenes and doing some of the writing, is Roger’s lovely wife Cary. In addition to important contributions to the scripts, she works hard at setting up, packing up and selling Brother Sam merchandise. FIG thanks both of them for making this a most memorable and enjoyable FIG meeting.

After the FIG meeting, Brother Sam appeared at the Science Café meet up group and performed his first play, *Patriarch’s And Penises*. It was another hilarious



excursion into the world of ridiculous and hypocritical religious practices. If you couldn't make it to this second performance, you should consider purchasing it online. Both of the Sam Singleton plays are available in book and audio book cd from his website. He also has some great videos posted on his website.

Reported by Fran Welte



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Science Book Club 2010 schedule

All meetings on 3rd Sunday of each month at 2:30 in room 3A of downtown Main Public Library unless otherwise noted.

Nov 21- *The Little Green Book of Awakening*; James George

Dec 19 - *Physics For Future Presidents: The Science Behind The Headlines*; Richard A. Muller



The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group!

What: Skepticon III: Annual Skeptic Meeting

When: Friday, November 19, 2010 9:00 AM

Where: Missouri State University

901 South National Avenue

Springfield, MO 65897

Skepticon is an annual skeptics convention held in Springfield, Missouri and taking place from November 19 to November 21st. This event will be featuring a long list of big names from both the skeptic and atheist movements. Already confirmed speakers include James "The Amazing" Randi, Joe Nickell, PZ Myers, D.J. Grothe, Dan Barker, Rebecca Watson, Victor Stenger, Richard Carrier, John Corvino, J.T. Eberhard, David Fitzgerald, Debbie Goddard, Amanda Marcotte, Brother Sam Singleton. More info on speakers can be found here: <http://skepticon.org/speakers/>

Further information about the conference can be found at: <http://www.skepticon.org/>

It is important to register early for this conference if you plan on attending, registration is FREE and can be done here: <http://www.skepticon.org/register.php>. Special hotel pricing can be found here: <http://skepticon.org/about/hotel.php>

This is a rare opportunity to see many of the biggest names in atheism for free and Travis should be able to arrange transportation to and from the airport for those who would like to fly. Please register on the skepticon page now if you are considering attending and Travis will publish further updates about this conference as it is announced. RSVP to this Meetup: <http://www.meetup.com/cincinnatiatheists/calendar/14162825/>

A New Meetup For The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group!

What: Monthly Monday Meetup at The Hofbrauhaus

When: Monday, November 15, 2010 6:30 PM

Where: Hofbrauhaus Newport

200 E 3rd St

Newport, KY 41071

(859) 491-7200

Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists and Freethinkers meet here. Regular monthly gatherings are held on the 3rd Mondays. New people join every month, and we all wear name tags (no quizzes). Check the Message Board for current hot topics.

This is a purely social gathering. No agenda, no speaker, no rules of order. If you'd prefer a bit more structure, please check the calendar for lectures, FIG meetings, and other events.

If the weather is nice we will try to snag an area outside, if not we will sit inside. But either way the Hofbrauhaus is always fun.

RSVP to this Meetup: <http://www.meetup.com/cincinnatiatheists/calendar/15366641/>





Atheists Plan To Challenge The Myth Of Christmas With A Giant Billboard At The Lincoln Tunnel

An atheist group intends to get an early start on the holiday season with plans to erect a huge billboard near the Lincoln Tunnel in New York City inviting people to examine their beliefs about Christmas.

The sign will start catching the attention of motorists on Tuesday, November 23, and remain in place for approximately one month. It will depict the so-called "Christian" nativity and the message:



**You know it's a myth!
This season celebrate reason!**

American Atheists: Reasonable since 1963.
atheists.org

David Silverman, President of American Atheists, said that the billboard will target people who "go through the motions" of celebrating the holiday but don't believe in the Christ myth. "Many people follow religions and observe rituals in which they do not believe," said Mr. Silverman. "They go along to get along, which simply leads to more prejudice and bigotry. Closeted atheists hurt themselves and others like them by remaining silent about what they know to be true." Silverman added. None of the traditional Christmas seasonal practices originated with Christianity. What we call Christmas has its origins in secular events like the Winter Solstice and the change of seasons, as well as Pagan holidays like Yule or the Saturnalia. This season was celebrated long before Christianity usurped it.

The billboard is an invitation to everyone to learn more about the real origins of the so-called "Christmas" season, said Silverman, and to spur discussion of what we know to be true, and what we know to be myth. "We are encouraging everyone to be honest with themselves and each other about what they truly believe, and to

celebrate reason and truth this season. Unlike gods and saviors, reason and truth actually exist."

(AMERICAN ATHEISTS is a nationwide movement that defends civil rights for Atheists, Freethinkers and other nonbelievers; works for the total separation of church, mosque, temple and State; and addresses issues of First Amendment public policy.)

Superstition Hitchhikes On A Mission To Jupiter

I was appalled to read in this week's *Nature* that the Juno mission to study how Jupiter's powerful magnetic field is generated, will carry a fragment of bone from Galileo's earthly remains. Do the instigators of this foolishness imagine that relics of scientific martyrs, like bones of saints, will somehow confer protection on the spacecraft in the harrowing Jovian environment? To compound my irritation, the information was in a *Nature* editorial applauding the plan as, "a gesture that would add emotional energy to the mission and remind the public that science is fundamentally a human endeavor." All too human, it would seem; belief in miraculous cures wrought by fragments of the remains of saints has persisted for 2000 years. The editor's confusion of metaphor and fact continues to the end. "The Juno mission will skim just 4,800 kilometres above Jupiter. Galileo just might enjoy a closer look."

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 5 November 2010

Strip Club Battles With Local Church

Every weekend for the past four years, parishioners from the New Beginnings Ministries church in Warsaw, Ohio, have gathered in front of The Fox Hole strip club in nearby Newcastle and tried to shame customers by photographing them and posting their license plate numbers on the Internet, and brandishing hell fire signs.

Recently, however, Fox Hole strippers joined the duel, congregating on Sundays in front of New Beginnings, wearing bikinis and "see-through" shorts, dancing scandalously, squirting each other with jumbo water guns, and wielding their own Bible quoting signs to greet the day's worshipers.

Putting The "Fun" Back In Funerals.

The city of Providence, R.I., has issued a license for a new Irish pub in town. Such isn't normally big news, except that the license was issued to the Monahan Funeral Home, and the pub will be inside the mortuary. Publican Mark Russell says the mortuary has been in business in Providence since 1876, and promises that "We'd never allow something to develop that would be adverse to the neighborhood." (WPRI-TV; Providence) ...Locals, however, are glad to finally have a place where they can drink in the mourning.





Contradiction Corner

by Dennis Davis



We, as freethinkers, agnostics and atheists have always followed the facts wherever evidence leads us. Such a view has always been anathema to the ultra-religious, however. In the new millennium we find ourselves facing a very old nemesis that has found renewed success in America. Of course, I am referring to Christian fundamentalists who insist on a literal interpretation of the Bible even going so far as demanding it be taught in public schools and its prohibitions be incorporated into federal law. They were soundly beaten a century ago, but have finally made a come back and are hungry for power.

The bedrock of Christian fundamentalist thought is Biblical Inerrancy, the insane belief that every word of the Bible was breathed into existence by God without error. Some pick specific versions such as the King James Version while others claim some theoretical “perfect” version of scripture existed in a past before “translation errors” were added.

Here we will be presenting you with ammunition to confront fundamentalists who insist on teaching the Bible as fact. By pointing out several glaring contradictions, errors and logical inconsistencies in their holy book we hope to give you ammunition that should confound any fundamentalist. Since the cornerstone of Christian fundamentalism the creation as recorded in the book of Genesis we will begin there.

In the Genesis account of creation we find several oddities and contradictions, in fact many biblical scholars and Jewish rabbinical experts recognize that Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are actually two widely different creation myths that contradict each other in several places. Most notable is the fact that man and woman are created at the same time in chapter 1 verse 27, but in the next chapter Adam is made alone and it is not until he gets lonely some time later that Eve is created as an afterthought.

In the first creation myth we are repeatedly told that God viewed everything he did, including man, and that “he considered it very good.” But, as we read on, after the creation we find one disaster after another. First Adam and Eve both succumb to sin and temptation; then Cain kills Abel, followed eventually by the disastrous Tower of Babel confusion of languages. This continues until

mankind becomes so corrupt that, "And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" in Genesis 6:6. This is the lead in for the infamous Noah's Ark story where God decides to commit genocide on the whole human race with the exception of a single extended family.

The question Christians never think to ask is this: If God is all knowing and can see the future, how could he have declared all creation, including man, to be very good, yet a few chapters later discover it had all been a mistake?

Notice that God repented. Repentance is a feeling of remorse for one's own misdeeds, so in chapter 6, God is acknowledging that he made a mistake by making humanity in the first place. How could an absolutely perfect being make such a huge blunder? Why didn't he foresee this disaster before he made man?

Next consider the fall of Adam and Eve in chapter 3. Here we are told of the encounter between God and a sinful Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit. It is obvious that God does not know that Adam and Eve have sinned until he finds them trying to hide from his presence. How could an omnipresent deity not already know what they have done?

When Cain kills Abel the same thing occurs again. In Genesis 4, 9-10 we have God asking Cain where his brother is as though God has no idea what has occurred. Obviously, the God of Genesis is not some all powerful, all knowing being. Instead this creator deity was made in the image of bronze age men who imbued him with all the petty emotions and violence possessed by the very people who created the myth.

Try using these facts the next time you debate Young Earth Creationists. They will serve you standard replies, but perhaps you have started them thinking! ☘



Quote

If you are proposing to commit a sin it is as well to commit it with intelligence. Otherwise you are insulting God as well as defying Him, don't you think?

– P. D. James, *Shroud for a Nightingale* p. 89

Unquote



One

You split the Verse in two
 When everything is One
 You create hard divisions
 When really there are none

You say there was a battle
 And one side lost it all
 You say it was the Devil
 Who away from God did fall

But everything was made
 By One all-holy Word
 From the perfect and sublime
 To the foolish and absurd

The "good" and "bad" alike
 Were made from that first Day
 And not a single element
 Can be taken then away

Every created desire
 Frustrated by another
 Every heavenly power
 Is balanced by its Brother

Transcendent push and pull
 Universal give and take
 The balance of the Cosmos
 And the Forces It does make

Light thus needs the Darkness
 The world is not so random
 It takes both vital forces
 Working well in tandem

You're just a carnal saint
 I'm just a holy sinner
 And when the Day is over
 In the end there is no "winner"

There is no burning Hell
 There is no Judgement Day
 With no fallen Angel
 There is no sin to weigh

The Universe is One
 Both "sides" of it are pure
 So it has always been
 Else Nothing would endure

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 From: *The Dark and the Light:
 Poems from both hands*
 (available at Amazon and at
 Joseph Beth bookstore)

THE DARK & THE LIGHT

Poems From Both Hands



TIM KELLY



A possibly apocryphal story tells
 of a Cree Indian who heard Colin
 Fraser play at Norway House and
 reported to his chief: "One white man
 was dressed like a woman in a skirt
 of funny colours. He had whiskers

growing from his belt and fancy leggings. He carried a black swan which had many legs with ribbons tied to them. The swan's body he put under his arm upside down, then he put its beak in his mouth and bit it. At the same time he pinched its neck with his fingers and squeezed the body under his arm until it made a horrible noise."



The Romanian Senate rejected a proposal by two legislators to regulate, and tax, fortune tellers and witches, even though the government is otherwise desperately seeking new sources of revenue. A prominent witch had complained about potential record keeping burdens on the profession, but one of the bill's sponsors thinks opposition came from lawmakers

who were frightened of having spells and curses placed on them.





Faith in Reason

by Herb Silverman, 25 October 2010

Silverman is Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston

This weekend, Jon Stewart is holding “a rally to restore sanity” on the mall, two months after Glenn Beck’s religion-infused “Restoring Honor” rally. Beck said he was called by God to hold the rally. Now atheist groups are planning to use Stewart’s event to promote “reason.” Are “reason” and “sanity” the opposite of religious belief? Is taking religion out of the political debate the answer for restoring reason? Or do we need more faith?

(Full disclosure: The United Coalition for Reason, sponsor of the godless bus ads, is an endorser of the mission statement of the Secular Coalition for America, www.secular.org, the organization for which I’m president.)

The bus ads simply invite people to come out of the closet to their friends and neighbors about their lack of religious beliefs. Atheists and humanists don’t fear a judging God, but many fear the judgments and the stigma placed on them by a mainly religious society. Some are concerned that their jobs as well as their relationships and good will of neighbors may be at stake, and unfortunately they sometimes are. Much as with the gay rights movement, the more that come out the easier it is for others to come out and find a sense of community. That’s the essence of what these ads are about.

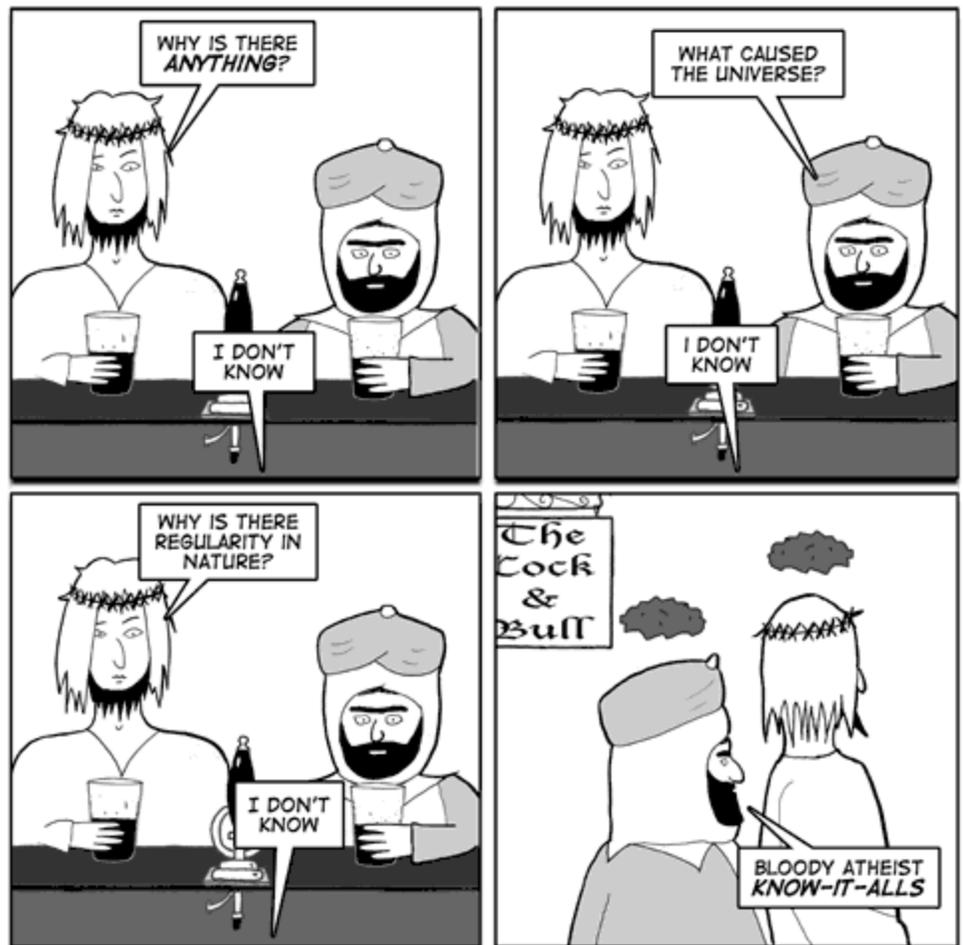
What we nontheists want, consistent with our founders, is freedom of conscience for all. Government should not be in the religion business, even if Glenn Beck believes God told him it should. Government should not favor one religion over another or religion in general over non-religion.

As an example, the legislature in my home state of South Carolina authorized the car license tag

motto, “In God We Trust,” available to all at no extra cost. My local secular humanist group applied for “In Reason We Trust” tags. It carried a fee, but our members and others, too, now have such tags. Frankly, I would rather my state promote reason than God, especially given the dismal state of education here. Individuals should be able to promote the god of their choice, but not the state.

I have trouble understanding why some people think secular Americans are insulting those with religious beliefs when we mention we don’t believe in any gods. A church-sponsored billboard near my house asks, “Got religion?” It certainly doesn’t offend me to see this by the highway. Are Methodists insulted when Presbyterians promote their theological views?

We may have different views on religion, but I hope we can at least agree on one fundamental good--the marketplace of ideas. Some may think reason and sanity are the opposite of religion, and some may not. Let arguments be heard, not stifled. That, to me, is the most sane and reasonable way to act.



©jesusandmo.net



Political Popery A Bad Idea

by Herb Silverman, 1 November 2010

Silverman is Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston

Pope Benedict XVI and Catholic Cardinal-designate Raymond Burke both recently characterized voting as a moral act with spiritual consequences.

The pope said that “decriminalizing abortion is a betrayal to democracy,” since he believes the procedure denies rights to the unborn. Burke called voting a “serious moral obligation” and added that Catholics “can never vote for someone who favors absolutely what’s called the ‘right to choice.’”

If Catholics largely disregard the church’s teaching (the 2008 Catholic vote for president went to pro-choice Obama), does what the pope says matter? Is voting a religious act or purely political?

If I had absolute power and wanted to increase the number of abortions worldwide, here’s the strategy I would employ: Forbid masturbation; forbid condoms; spread false claims about condoms being ineffective; forbid evidence-based sex education; allow advice on sexual matters only from appointed “experts” who, as a requirement for employment, took vows of celibacy. You may recognize this as Catholic Church dogma, while they still insist that their top moral priority is to prevent abortions.

Consistent with the “stopped-clock” theory, I do occasionally agree with the pope (though not as frequently as twice a day). We would both like to see fewer abortions, with every child a wanted child. I would follow the opposite strategy of that employed by the pope in the preceding paragraph, since there is overwhelming evidence that comprehensive sex education programs make abortions more rare.

I thought I was reading George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when I saw leaders in the Catholic Church refer to the “democratic ideal,” and call voting a “serious moral obligation.” When do Catholic citizens get to exercise this “democratic ideal” and vote for pope, cardinals, priests, or any other church-related issue? The Vatican theocracy has the Chutzpah to call democracy an ideal for which all humans should strive. If so, Pope Benedict: Heal thyself.

Religious institutions can favor issues and still maintain their tax-exempt status, but they are not permitted to endorse or oppose specific political candidates. The Catholic Church may be crossing this line by telling their faithful to vote for the candidate who opposes abortion. To paraphrase from another Orwell book, *Animal Farm*: “All issues are equal, but one issue is more equal than others.” Not only is the Catholic Church telling its flock to vote against a candidate who favors a woman’s right to choose, the church is essentially saying that no other issues matter.

Let’s take a hypothetical case (not so hypothetical, actually):

Candidate A supports the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and favors more government money for Defense, opposes government money to educate or offer services for the poor, opposes immigration and wants to build a fence around the country to keep immigrants out, wants to reduce taxes on the wealthy, favors capital punishment, and favors criminalizing abortion under all circumstances.

Candidate B takes the opposite side of Candidate A on all these issues, and favors the right of a woman to choose.

The Catholic Church agrees with all the positions of Candidate B but the last, yet would urge its faithful to vote for Candidate A. That’s what happens when a church engages in politics. I wish Catholics would ignore the pontiff when he pontificates theologically, but even more so when he pontificates politically. At least the pope and I agree that voting is a good thing, though I’ll never have the pleasure to vote against a candidate for pope. ☘



.....
Quote

.....
Technically, the difference is that a Catholic miracle happens through divine intervention, while the folk concept of magic concerns a person manipulating the natural world on his own. But nothing is unambiguous in the realm of the supernatural.

.....
- Constantine Pleshakov, *There is not Freedom without Bread!* (2009) p. 37

.....
Unquote



BOOK REVIEW II

*Remarkable Creatures: Epic Adventures In The Search For
The Origin Of Species*

by Sean B. Carroll

(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009)

a book review by James N. Gardner

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin's masterpiece *On the Origin of Species*. While this event, so seminal in the history of science, will be celebrated in a number of books slated to appear in 2009, none is likely to prove more compelling a read than Sean Carroll's *Remarkable Creatures*.

The "remarkable creatures" of which Carroll writes are both the amazing denizens of the biosphere whose existence and ecological niches were largely unknown before 1859, and the brave scientific adventurers who journeyed far and wide to study life on Earth. As Carroll puts it:

They are, without exception, remarkable people who have experienced and accomplished extraordinary things. They have lived the kinds of lives that [Mark] Twain extolled — they walked where no others had walked, saw what no one else had seen, and thought what no one else had thought.

Remarkable Creatures encompasses a vast span of geography and history, beginning with Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt's five-year expedition through Central and South America at the beginning of the 19th Century and ending with the dawn of the new science of astrobiology, which searches for and imagines the nature of extraterrestrial life forms yet to be discovered.

Three of the best chapters in the book chronicle the intermingled lives of Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace, and Henry Walter Bates. Darwin is, of course, the most famous of the trio but what is often overlooked is how vital were the contributions of Wallace and Bates to the birth and acceptance of Darwin's theory of speciation through natural selection. Darwin sketched out his theory almost two decades before *On the Origin of Species* appeared but kept silent about his revolutionary ideas because of fear of ostracism. As Carroll writes: "His species theory was heresy to the dogma of special [divine] creation, and he knew that heretics were not treated well. It was too much of a risk to gamble his soaring reputation on his species theory."

What finally broke Darwin's silence was fear of a different kind — terror that his theory would be eclipsed by the

work of a young naturalist named Alfred Russel Wallace who had independently developed a theory of natural selection nearly identical to Darwin's. When Darwin famously received Wallace's short paper sketching out the latter's evolutionary ideas in June of 1858, Darwin went into panic mode, confessing that he "feared that all of my originality, whatever it may amount to, will be smashed." In the end, Wallace's paper and a brief outline of Darwin's theory were read together at a meeting of a leading scientific society. Darwin's great book was subsequently published and the rest is history.

Would Darwin's name be known to us and forever associated with the theory of evolution absent the goad of fear furnished by Wallace's meager little paper? We shall never know. Nor shall we ever know whether Darwin's theory would have prevailed absent the early validation provided by the third member of the trio — naturalist Henry Walter Bates. Bates spent eleven incredible years exploring the wonders of the massive Amazon river system. The privations he suffered during those years — unrelenting heat, yellow fever, fire ants, biting flies and intense loneliness — were offset by extraordinary rewards. As Carroll writes:

Those rewards were many — river dolphins, anteaters, frigate birds, anacondas, hummingbirds, bird-eating spiders, all sorts of monkeys, jaguars, caimans, blue hyacinthine macaws, parrots, eagles, five species of toucans, and butterflies — flocks of butterflies. Bates collected 14,712 animal species in all, of which more than 8,000 were new to science.

Of special importance to Darwin's new theory were Bates' discoveries concerning butterflies. After returning to England, Bates wrote his most important scientific paper, which described the phenomenon of mimicry among butterfly species and explained it by means of Darwinian natural selection. Butterfly species edible by predators, Bates noted, could grow to resemble unpalatable butterfly species as a survival strategy. The phenomenon of mimicry became an important source of support for the theory of evolution.

Shortly after Wallace returned to England from his journey abroad, he and Bates spent a memorable weekend with Darwin celebrating their mutual adventures in scientific discovery. One can imagine Bates telling his two colleagues something he later wrote about his own deep linkage with Darwin's theory, "I think I have got a glimpse into the laboratory where Nature manufactures her new species."

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I'm Perfect, You're Doomed:

Tales From A Jehovah's Witness Upbringing

by Kyria Abrahams

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009)

Only Jehovah's Witnesses are going to survive at the end of the world at Armageddon. God is going to murder everyone else, Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Muslim, everyone. And only the members of the cult will live with Jesus and God in a perfect world right here on Earth. That at least is what Kyria Abrahams was taught from birth and what she believed, and in some way deep down in her soul, – whatever that is, – still believes.

Since everything and everybody except the Witnesses will soon be destroyed, nothing much matters. Important only is clinging to the cult since you do not want to miss the end of the world, or be destroyed with all the others. And that requires having no close relationship with non-Witnesses, going to Church, – sorry Kingdom Hall, – services three times a week. Going from door to door to introduce all the unbelievers to the Watchtower literature and the Witnesses cult is required. Sex outside of marriage, drinking, smoking, and having any fun in general is strictly *verboten!*

While stupidity is not a stated requirement of the Jehovah's Witnesses, it helps. Reading any material that throws doubt on the revealed word of the Watchtower society is not allowed. Which means reading just about anything is not encouraged. Since the world is ending soon there is no need to acquire education, which in any case can be quite threatening to the belief of the Witnesses.

While there is no law against being rich, there is a consensus that the rich make the worst Witnesses. They tend to be materialistic, have no real need for God, and are too satisfied with life as it is, and seem to have no need for living eternally in paradise.

In this irrational cult Kyria grew up. She leaves school at sixteen, and marries another Witness at seventeen. Because sex outside of marriage is grounds for being "fellowshipped" Witnesses marry young, and hence the wrong person.

Not everything can be blamed on Jehovah's Witnesses. It becomes clear early on in the book and in her life, that her family is disastrously dysfunctional. Her parents hate each other, and probably their children. Since divorce is not countenanced by the cult, Jehovah's Witnesses can not end their marriages. Father and mother simply avoid each other as much as possible, and the kids do their best to stay out of their way and out of trouble. But, they are good and obey, because who would want to miss their chance at surviving the end of the world and living with God in paradise on earth.

Don't expect to learn about a deep, emotional struggle in this coming of age biography. Rather than a fierce and bitter fight to leave the Witnesses, Kyria drifts. She drifts into an unloving and unloved marriage, and right out again. She drifts into love and sex, she is introduced to poetry slams, and a wide variety of bohemian kids her own age. She tells her story with a funny, unsettling wit and a stand up comedian's throw away lines. About her secular friends she comments at the end:

These worldly, godless poets had loaned me money when I hadn't asked for it and had given me a place to stay. When the people I'd known for 23 years stopped talking to me, the people I'd known for 23 days helped me move. So maybe I wasn't going to survive Armageddon and live for all eternity in God's future paradise. Maybe, just maybe, I was not actually immune from death, wouldn't live forever like a Bible-toting Highlander. Maybe, in that case, I should try to get a better job.

Thus, Kyria, not longer believes in a future paradise on earth. She struggles on without having planned for adulthood, without an education, with a job not requiring even a high school diploma. But she does call herself a poet and a standup comedian. – Wolf Roder ☘



Quote

Life in Lubbock, Texas, taught me two things: One is that God loves you and you're going to burn in Hell. The other is that sex is the most awful, filthy thing on earth and you should save it for someone you love.

– Butch Hancock

Unquote



FIG Movie Night
 Monday Dec. 6, 2010 at 6:15 PM
 "Agora"



December Meeting
 Sunday, Dec. 17, 2010, 3:00 PM
 (No November meeting)



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Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

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