

FIG LEAVES

Volume 13 Issue 10

October 2004

October Fig Meeting: Tuesday, 26 September 7:00 PM

Frankenstein's Cat and other Biomedical Fantasies.

As a special Halloween treat Bill Jensen, Oesper Professor of Chemical Education and History of Chemistry at the University of Cincinnati, will discuss the myths surrounding Mary Shelley's classic horror novel, *Frankenstein*. How well does the present day myth created by Hollywood and assorted literary critics correspond to the actual content of Mary Shelley's original novel? Is the novel really a classic of English literature written by a brilliant teenage authoress or an overwritten potboiler? Is the novel really about science gone bad or is it a dig at theology and the responsibilities of God toward his creations? Are there lessons to be learned from the processes by which the novel has been mythologized and the formation of myths in general? These are but some of the issues that will be discussed.

November Meeting Tuesday 9 November FIG'S Post-Election Meeting Means Your Turn to Talk!

Tuesday, 9 November, 7:00 PM

We think that a November 9 meeting--one week after the elections--is best for this kind of program because you can lament or celebrate the results. Tell us what you believe we can expect in the next four years. But we don't want this to be just a political session. We want you to tell us about anything else you think would interest us. It may be a poem you have written, or that someone else has written. Or it may be about some important event in your life, like how you lost your faith in faith.

Those already signed up to speak include Wolf Roder on "Why there will never be an Atheist society," Charles Hughes on "to be announced," Joe Levee and George Maurer on "Highlights of FIG history," and Edwin Kagin on a topic to be announced.

The only limitation is that you speak for only 10 minutes so we give others a chance. You need to let us know before November 9 if you will be one of our speakers. Contact our Program Chair, Joe Levee at Joelevee@aol.com or 513-321-4824.

Step right up, ladies and gentlemen!

A Question of God -- Dessert, Video and Discussion!

You are invited to meet at the home of Wolf Roder on Friday, 15 October from 7 PM to 9 PM to review and discuss this special and the questions raised. Coffee and Cookies will be provided.

Please RSVP at 513-961-7331 to let us know you are coming or for directions.

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Events - PLEASE NOTE SCHEDULE CHANGES

October Discussion

Friday, 15 October 7:00 PM
At the home of Wolf Roder

October Meeting

Tuesday, 26 October 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

November Meeting

Tuesday 9 November 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

November Potluck

Tuesday 16 November 6:30 PM
At the home of the O'Kains

December Meeting

Sunday 12 November 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio



September Meeting Report

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

Steve de Villez: Public Relations Coordinator for the Center

After a number of FIG business announcements, our new president, Margaret O’Kain, introduced the evening’s speaker, Steve De Villez; who started out by disclosing that he had been involved with the Freedom Center for over four years. He had observed its growth from a hole in the ground to the completed structure that has recently been opened to the public.

The idea for a Freedom Center started around 1994-1995 from an idea by Chip Harris who is the executive director of the NCCJ, The National Conference for Community and Justice, Cincinnati Chapter. There were a number of activities going on in the city at that time that some of the citizens were not too happy about: The Ku Klux Klan erecting a cross on Fountain Square to coincide with the Christmas celebrations; the police and some of the youth were having differences, an owner of a professional baseball team made some disparaging remarks about some groups of people. Cincinnati was, therefore, in a bad, negative spotlight. Harris wanted to take a look at the good things about the city that made it a nice place to be.

During the 1800’s, Cincinnati had the fourth largest African-American population in the United States. The majority of this population lived in approximately the area where the P&G towers are today, a place called “Bucktown.” Since it was close to the river, its location pretty much facilitated the start of the Underground Railroad. During this time Cincinnati was a major river port and a lot of traffic moved up and down the river transporting goods. Sometimes the boats would be stalled at low water levels, or otherwise be laid up in port. There was always competition for jobs between Irish and German immigrants and the local African-American roustabouts on the river front. There was a lot of diverse activity going on so that it was possible for a slave who had stowed away on a boat to fade into the crowd of workmen, pick up a bale of something, and then disappear into the local Black ghetto of Bucktown.

The Underground Railroad really started with African-Americans deciding they had had enough and wanting to be free and going on the run, and thus becoming fugitives. The Railroad worked because people of good faith and principle helped the fugitives along the way with food, shelter, clothing, direction –whatever their need might be. Cincinnati was a hub of this movement. People ask today, “Where are all these Underground sites?” The answer is that a lot of them are gone. A lot were lost to new development and destruction of old buildings. There are still some sites with a lot of history. The institution is still gathering this information, and any help or hint would be appreciated.

The direction of the Underground Railroad was not always north. At this point, Steve showed a slide that depicted the direction that some routes took. One went through Texas into Mexico. That country had abolished slavery long before the United States, so runaway slaves were relatively safe there. There were stories of Indians, especially of the Seminoles, who took in fugitive slaves and gave them shelter because they could sympathize. There were also stories of slaves who stowed away on ships sailing north from southern ports.



FIG Leaves - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in Electronic format via the internet - figleaves@fuse.net ; 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. All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., its board, or officers.

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Most fugitives traveled on foot. Notable among the persons who walked whole groups of fugitives northward was Harriet Tubman. She had been born into slavery herself. As a child she was mistreated until she reached her limit of endurance and fled. She made it to Philadelphia and the home of William Still. He offered her assistance to move on to safety but she declined, insisting she could not be free until all of her people were free. She went back to rescue about sixty people in thirteen forays into slave country. Frederick Douglas was another former slave who worked as an abolitionist becoming a powerful voice during the pre-civil war period. He appeared on speaking tours with Sojourner Truth, another ex-slave. In addition to abolition of slavery they advocated women's rights and suffrage. Douglas also encouraged young African-American men to volunteer for service during the Civil War.

Our speaker then showed a slide of the John Parker house on the riverside in Ripley, today a small town upstream from Cincinnati. Parker, an African-American, was a skilled iron worker, who was able to earn enough money to purchase his freedom. He moved to Ripley, where he established his own iron foundry. John Parker "stole" slaves from the across the river, whom he rowed to freedom in Ripley. He worked with John Rankin, a Presbyterian minister, who had moved from Tennessee in protest against slavery, and other helpers who could route them north. Many times fugitives stayed at the Rankin farm which had secret rooms that can still be seen today.

William Still in Philadelphia was known for keeping accurate records. He recorded information from the many people who came through Philadelphia and sought his help. He kept a record of who they were, who they were related to, where they were from, numbering over a thousand people in his directory. Many people since have been able to trace their ancestry from referencing these documents. In interviewing one such fugitive he discovered his own brother, Peter Still.

The speaker's next slide showed a painting in the Cincinnati Art Museum. It depicts Levi Coffin and his wife Katherine with some fugitive slaves. Coffin was known as the unofficial president of the Underground Railroad. He owned houses in Cincinnati and Indiana. He built a house over a spring in Fountain City, Indiana, that they were able to draw water from inside. This prevented anyone watching the house from determining the number of "guests" they might be harboring by counting the number of buckets that went to the well.

In 1996 Ed Rigaud became head of the Museum Board on executive loan from P&G. He wanted to expand the concept of the institution so it would also deal with contemporary issues and engage the community in discussion. The result was the present 158,000 sq.ft. facility with interactive exhibits for people of all ages and community outreach geared toward not just the underground railroad but also to historic preservation and to engage the community in discussion.

The largest exhibit inside the Freedom Center is an intact slave prison. It was recovered in Mason County, Ky. about 50 miles up river from Cincinnati. It is a two-story structure which had been used to hold slaves for sale or en-route from one slave auction to another or for shipment down river to the cotton kingdom. Some features in the structure have been restored where the original parts are lost or destroyed.

Steve continued with slides that enabled him to detail the contents of the museum and take us on a tour. These slides we can not reproduce, so the best way to see what is inside is to pay a visit yourself.

-- Submitted by George Maurer

December Meeting Sunday 12, December



We are pleased to announce that on Sunday, December 12, Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists, will speak to FIG. The subject of her talk is to be determined.

ELLEN JOHNSON is President of American Atheists, and a leading spokesperson for Atheist civil liberties. She has presented testimony on behalf of the organization to numerous government agencies, including the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Ms. Johnson also lead our historic "break through" meeting with officials of the White House Liaison Office.

A wife and mom with two children, Ms. Johnson is vitally concerned about the cultural issues affecting Atheist families of all description. She speaks on CIVIL RIGHTS FOR ATHEISTS: AN ACTION AGENDA.

Join us!



Letters To The Editor



(Received: 14 September 2004)

Dear FigEditor:

Please do not confuse capitalism with democracy. Democracy is one person, one vote; capitalism is most dollars, most votes.

Andrew O. Lutes
Crestview Hills, KY

(Received: 15 September 2004)

To: FigEditor;

Subject: John Locke's Birthday was 29 August. The celebration is a little long and I'm too drunk to continue. Can we stop now?

Robert Riehemann
Bellevue, KY

Web master replies - Humanist Studies, our website host, has been in the process of switching our site from one server to another. This means that I have not had access to it and some of the information is getting a little old. I will be changing it as soon as I can get back access to the site.

Bush's Much Higher Taxes

George W. Bush touts his tax cuts as giving the American people more money to spend and producing a stronger economy. But Bush's tax cuts are just a deception to temporarily appease the public while huge deficits pile up from borrowing to pay for his administration's profligate spending. Your true taxes are not just what you pay each year but also what you owe on your share of the government's debt plus the interest on this debt, which can only be paid off with current and future tax revenues. Without a corresponding reduction in government spending, tax cuts are like receiving a Christmas gift paid for with your own credit card. In the summer of 2000, the Clinton administration announced that the surplus would be \$5 trillion over the next ten years. With the projected surpluses Alan Greenspan, the

Federal Reserve Chairman at the time, said "The numbers show we'll be virtually out of government debt by 2008."

What a reversal of fortune under Bush! The annual deficit ballooned to \$374 billion in 2003 and will be \$422 billion in 2004. Now rather than being paid off, the government's national debt is expected to spiral out of control to over \$10 trillion by 2010 with annual interest payments of over half a trillion dollars. This represents a per capita debt of well over \$30,000, equaling an overhanging tax burden for a family of four of over \$120,000 plus over \$6,000 annual interest on this debt. These are the back taxes that should have been paid but have been delayed for future payment.

And what happens when all the baby boomers retire and place additional strains on Social Security and Medicare and other governmental programs? The government should be accumulating huge surpluses to prepare for this, but instead they are running up huge deficits in a time of relative prosperity. We are on a course of dire financial disaster like occurred during the Great Depression.

Peter Peterson, Secretary of Commerce under Nixon, writes "George W. Bush has discarded traditional Republican qualms against big government with his own model of borrow-and-spend. This administration and the Republican Congress have presided over the biggest, most reckless deterioration of America's finances in history."

Ten Nobel Prize-winning economists recently signed an open letter attacking the Bush administration's economic policies that have turned sizable surpluses into huge deficits saying the Bush administration has "embarked on a reckless and extreme course of fiscal irresponsibility that endangers the long-term economic security and prosperity of our nation." And Paul Volcker, the venerable former Federal Reserve chairman during the Reagan years, says the likelihood of a financial crisis in the next five years is 75 percent. Bush's fiscal recklessness should anger all taxpayers, who will suffer the consequences after he leaves office. Every fiscal conservative should question how George Bush has betrayed the values of his own party.

— Bryan Sellers, Cincinnati, OH

Quote

- **Three Great Religious Truths:**
- (1) Jews do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah.
- (2) Protestants do not recognize the Pope as the leader of the Christian faith.
- (3) Baptists do not recognize each other in the liquor store or at nudie clubs.

..... **Unquote**



Center for Inquiry Launches Campaign to Expand Success as an Educational and Research Organization.

Amherst, N.Y. - The Center devoted to the public appreciation of science and reason is expanding. The Center for Inquiry is pleased to announce a \$2.5 million expansion of its world headquarters in Amherst, a suburb of Buffalo, NY. The expansion is part of the Center's new \$26 million New Fund for the Future campaign.

The Center for Inquiry is dedicated to extending reason, science, and free inquiry in every area of human interest, and in developing the public understanding of the scientific outlook and the methods of science. So said Paul Kurtz, chairman of the Center. "There is a critical need for additional space. We plan on breaching ground in the fall with an expansion of the Amherst headquarters." The additional structure will provide new offices, more seminar and meeting rooms, and a major addition to its growing library.

The Center for Inquiry maintains three branch offices in the United States: Los Angeles, Tampa, and in the Rockefeller Center in New York City. The Center for Inquiry also has branches in Germany, France, Russia, Poland, Peru, Egypt, Nepal, Uganda, and Nigeria. The Center for Inquiry is the publisher of two popular magazines, *Free Inquiry* and *The Skeptical Inquirer*, in addition to other scientific and scholarly journals. The combined circulation of the magazines, journals, and newsletters published at the Center for Inquiry—seventeen in all—exceeds 110,000.

The Center for Inquiry is an umbrella organization which is home to the Council for Secular Humanism, founded in 1980, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), founded in 1976, Secular Organizations for Sobriety, and for other programs dedicated to the promotion of science and secular values.

One of the Center for Inquiry's newest endeavors has been the establishment of the Commission for Scientific Medicine and Mental Health. The Commission champions the importance of evidence based medicine and mental health practices. It provides clinicians and the public unique resources to help distinguish effective from untested therapies.

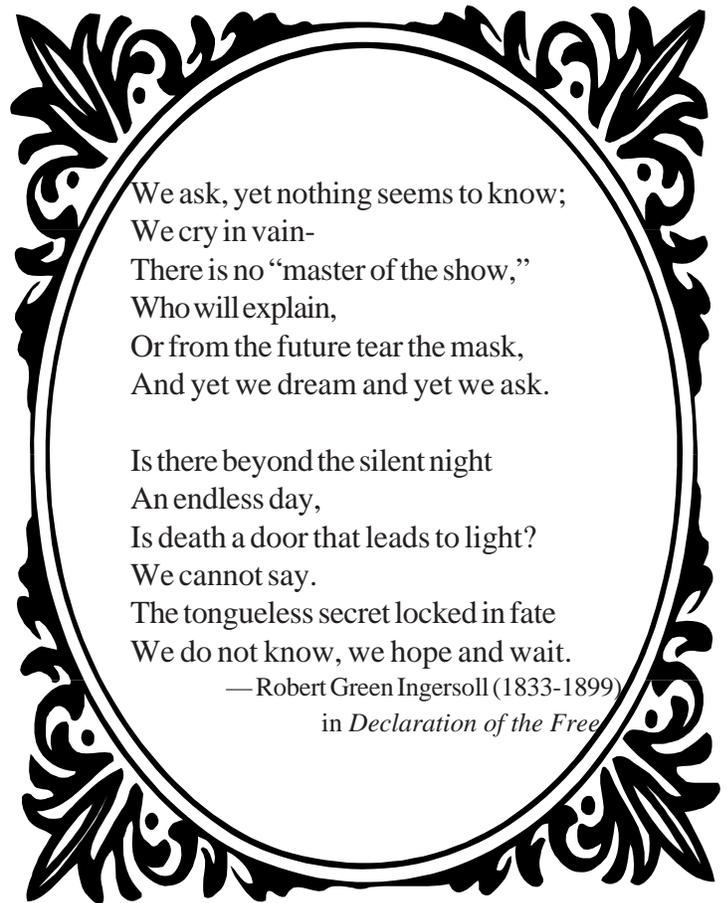
Through its media outreach efforts, the Center has provided experts for interviews on national television and radio news and discussion programs, where the address topics ranging from church-state separation to the proliferation of paranormal and irrational beliefs in society.

Website News

gofigger.org & freeinquirygroup.org

Due to events beyond my control, there have been "issues" with our Website. Humanist Studies had been in the process of switching our site from one server to another. This means that I have not had access to it and some of the information is getting a little old. My apologies. I will be changing it as soon as I can get back access to the site.

The section for Humanist Books still has over 10 book reviews waiting to be added to the website. This will be done in the next few weeks. If you have comments or requests, e-mail me at webnut@gofigger.org.



We ask, yet nothing seems to know;
We cry in vain-
There is no "master of the show,"
Who will explain,
Or from the future tear the mask,
And yet we dream and yet we ask.

Is there beyond the silent night
An endless day,
Is death a door that leads to light?
We cannot say.
The tongueless secret locked in fate
We do not know, we hope and wait.

— Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899)
in *Declaration of the Free*

Here are the times/channels for the autumn broadcast-
ing of **The Humanist Perspective** on public access:
Mondays at 12:30pm on channel 8
Tuesdays at 8:30am on channel 24
from: Tim Kelly



Salman Rushdie, James D. Watson and George Soros Among New Members Elected to the International Academy of Humanism.

Amherst, N.Y. (October 6, 2004)--The International Academy of Humanism is pleased to announce the election of seven new Humanist Laureates. Among them are Salman Rushdie, author, United Kingdom; James D. Watson, Nobel laureate and co-discoverer of DNA, United States; Vitalii L. Ginzburg, Nobel laureate, Academy of Sciences, Russia; Peter Singer, Princeton University, United States; Harvey Weinstein, co-chairman, Miramax Films, United States; George Soros, financier, United States.

“In these times when there is a flight from reason and attacks on the humanist ideals of an open, democratic society around the world, the Academy and its members stand boldly in its defense. We are pleased to recognize these seven new laureates for their achievements in the science, the arts, and literature,” says Paul Kurtz, president of the academy and chairman of the Center for Inquiry.

Established in 1983, the International Academy of Humanism is a unique organization based at the Center for Inquiry in Amherst, New York. It has worldwide membership limited to eighty distinguished men and women who have made notable contributions to arts, public affairs, and the sciences. Members of the Academy vote to elect new members in recognition of a lifetime of achievements.

The purpose of the Academy is to disseminate humanist ideals and beliefs. It is devoted to the principles of free inquiry in all areas of human endeavor; the scientific outlook and the use of reason and scientific method in acquiring knowledge; and humanist ethical values and principles.

The academy’s goals include furthering respect for human rights, freedom, and the dignity of the individual; tolerance of various viewpoints and willingness to compromise; commitment to social justice; a universalistic perspective that transcends national, ethnic, religious, sexual, and racial barriers; and the belief in a free and open pluralistic and democratic society.

Current Laureates include Umberto Eco, Sir Arthur C. Clarke, Simone Veil, E.O. Wilson, Richard Dawkins, and several Nobel Prize winners. Included in its roster of laureates have been Andrei Sakharov, Sir Karl Popper, Carl Sagan, Baroness Barbara Wootton, Sir Isaiah Berlin, and Peter Ustinov.

For more information about the International Academy of Humanism and a complete list of its membership, see the back inside cover of *Free Inquiry* magazine or visit <http://www.secularhumanism.org/academy/>.

Center for Inquiry’s Premier Caribbean Cruise

Cruise the Eastern Caribbean with Secular Humanists and Skeptics onboard Holland America’s *Zaandam*, 11-18 December 2004. The ship will sail out of Port Canaveral, Florida, visiting the British Virgin Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Bahamas.

Join Richard Dawkins, Lalla Ward, Paul Kurtz, Reba Wooden, and many others on a wonderful travel experience with CFI staff and friends.

For additional information, contact <<http://centerforinquiry.net/cruise/>>, or phone 800-398-7571, or write e-mail <cruise@cfiflorida.org>

Quote.....

Causes of Iraq War.

Re-applying the religious voting preferences of the 2000 elections, in which committed churchgoers were lopsidedly Republican, one can estimate that roughly 55 percent of Bush voters were Armageddon believers. Almost two-thirds of that 55 percent were evangelical white Protestants, just under a fifth were mainline white Protestants, and not quite a tenth were white Catholics. Intensity of religion and Armageddon belief would have a significant correlation, at least among Protestants.

Could 75 to 80 percent of the believers in Armageddon have voted for Bush? So it appeared. Churchgoing black Protestants, overwhelmingly Democratic, would have been the only major pool of Armageddon awaiters to prefer Gore. Moreover, hypothesizing the Bush coalition as a narrowly Armageddon believing electorate — probably the first in recent Republican presidential history — helps to explain Bush’s biblical rhetoric and overt pursuit of war in the Middle East. The commitment of his supporters was insufficiently particularized. For about half of his constituency, war in and around the Holy Land was not about battle per se. It was about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

— Kevin Phillips, *American Dynasty: the House of Bush* (2004)p. 242

.....Unquote:



Beyond Belief

When will secularism be allowed in the public square?

by Cathy Young

When John F. Kennedy ran for President in 1960, his Roman Catholic faith was widely viewed as a stumbling block to his campaign. Many voters feared that Catholic politicians would look to the Vatican for guidance, putting their loyalty to the Church above their obligations to the American people.

Kennedy responded by reiterating his absolute commitment to the separation of church and state. In a September 1960 address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, he declared his belief in “an America where...no Catholic prelate would tell the president [should he be Catholic] how to act.”

Fast-forward 44 years to the presidential campaign of another Catholic Democrat from Massachusetts, Sen. John Kerry. This time around, the charge is that he is *insufficiently* loyal to the Catholic Church.

In June 2004, the Los Angeles-based Catholic lawyer Mark Balestrieri filed heresy charges against Kerry with the Boston Archdiocese, asking that he be excommunicated because of his support for legal abortion. Around the same time, Pope John Paul II's doctrinal adviser, Cardinal Ratzinger, sent a memo to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops stating that politicians who support abortion rights should be denied communion. Four American bishops already had said they would deny Kerry communion.

Some commentators -- including several conservatives, such as *The Weekly Standard's* Terry Eastland -- noted that such tactics could backfire. But the controversy was generally seen as a liability and an embarrassment for Kerry. In his speech accepting the Democratic nomination at his party's convention in July, Kerry asserted that he did not wear his faith on his sleeve, yet much of his speech was crafted in religious terms.

Religion in politics has come a long way since 1960.

Kerry is not the first Democratic candidate to have a religion problem this campaign. The former front-runner, Howard Dean, was labeled too secular to be electable. A January 2004 cover story by Franklin Foer in *The New Republic* declared that Dean would have trouble shedding the “liberal” image -- less because of his politics than because he was “one of the most secular candidates to run for president in modern history.” (Dean, an Episcopalian turned Congregationalist, had openly said that he didn't go to church often and that religion didn't inform his public policy views.)

Other publications picked up on this theme. In a particularly bizarre moment, an interview with Dean by *Newsweek's* Howard

Fineman abruptly turned from various policy issues to the question, “Do you see Jesus Christ as the son of God and believe in him as the route to salvation and eternal life?”

It's hard to tell whether the meteoric fall of Dean's candidacy had anything to do with his perceived secularism -- or, for that matter, with his clumsy attempt to reinvent himself as a man of faith. Nonetheless, few would disagree with Foer's statement, “One day, a truly secular candidate might be able to run for president without suffering at the polls. But that day won't be soon.”

Article VI of the U.S. Constitution explicitly states that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust.” But formal tests are one thing, voter preferences another; no one can keep the people from imposing a religious litmus test on candidates. Today that litmus test is not membership in a particular religion but religiosity in general -- though it's hard to tell how the public would react to a Muslim or a Hindu candidate. In a 2000 Pew Research Center poll, 70 percent of Americans said that they wanted a presidential candidate to be religious.

The prominence of religion in the Bush White House makes secularist liberals profoundly nervous. Four of the six blurbs on the back of Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*, published in May 2004, refer directly or indirectly to the Bush presidency -- what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called, in his blurb, “the tide of religiosity engulfing a once secular republic.”

The real picture, as usual, is more complex. Indeed, Jacoby's fascinating if flawed history demonstrates that religi-

osity and secularism have always been competing strains in American public life. In a cyclical pattern, relatively secular periods have been followed by religious upsurges.

There is no question that religion and politics are entangled today in ways that would have been unthinkable in 1960. But blaming this solely on the right is disingenuous. Jimmy Carter was the first modern president to wear his faith on his sleeve. In 2000 Al Gore claimed that “What would Jesus do?” was his guide to making policy, while his running mate, Joe Lieberman, talked of renewing “the dedication of our nation and ourselves to God and God's purpose.”

Critics of Christian conservatives are often blind to it, but religion and politics mix freely on the left as well as the right, from Quaker peace activism to the role black churches play in mobilizing the African-American vote. Last April, in a review of *The Jesus Factor*, a PBS program about the role of Bush's evangelical faith in his presidency, *Salon* critic Charles Taylor stated with startlingly unselfconscious candor that the scary thing about Bush was not that he injected his faith into politics, but that he was using it to promote a right-wing rather than left-wing agenda -- in Taylor's words, to serve narrow constituencies rather than a “legitimate civil interest” such as raising taxes on the rich.

Given the liberal intelligentsia's high tolerance for the use of traditional religion in progressive causes, it's not surprising that hardly anyone questions the political influence of Earth-worshipping environmentalism, which novelist Michael Crichton has called “the religion of choice for urban atheists.” This environmentalist “spirituality” pervades Gore's 1992 book *Earth in the Balance*.





There is some truth to the conservative claim that liberal hand wringing about the intrusion of faith into politics often smacks of politically correct bigotry. The war in Iraq and the War on Terror were widely portrayed as a part of Bush's religiously inspired crusade against "evildoers." Many Bush critics, from British political commentator Rupert Cornwell in *The Independent* to Jim Wallis of the liberal evangelical magazine *Sojourners*, have even decried his use of the word *evil*, in reference to people who crash airplanes into buildings, as evidence of religious fanaticism.

Yet the faith-based presidency is genuinely troubling. This is not only because of the public policies justified by invoking God's name. No less important is the symbolic message that one must be religious in order to be a part of the body politic -- in order, perhaps, to be a "real" American. It's a message that goes hand in hand with a good deal of secularist bashing and particularly atheist bashing: In some of the Republican attacks on Democratic financier George Soros, *atheist* was used as a term of opprobrium.

The public's views on this subject are more complex than the champions of religion in the public square often make them out to be. For instance, a recent *Time* poll found likely voters evenly divided on the question of whether the president should allow his personal faith to be his guide in making political decisions. The vast majority of Americans consider themselves religious, but about a third do not consider religion very important in their lives and attend religious services once a month or less. That's a pretty large segment of the population to reduce to the status of political pariahs.

The idea that politicians should keep their religious faith private may seem outrageously intolerant. But is it not equally outrageous that, on today's political scene, a secularist figure cannot express his views honestly without committing career suicide? Unlikely though it is to happen, a moratorium on God talk might level the playing field.

Contributing Editor Cathy Young is a columnist for The Boston Globe.

Friends

There is a story about how two friends were walking through the desert. At some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "*Today my best friend slapped me in the face.*"

They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he carved on a stone: "*Today my best friend saved my life.*" The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why is that?" The other friend replied "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

Learn to write your hurts in the sand and to carve your benefits in stone. They say it takes a minute to find a special person, an hour to appreciate them, a day to love them, but then an entire life to forget them. Send this phrase to the people you'll never forget. If you don't send it to anyone it means you're in a hurry and that you've forgotten your friends. Take the time to live!

Do not value the *Things* you have in your life. But value *Who* you have in your life.

Hunting for votes with the cross

(Not only in the US is religion mis-used for politics.)

In Vasai, a town north of Mumbai in Maharashtra State in India, the Shiv Sena party's posters for the Maharashtra Assembly election try to cash in on *The Passion of the Christ*. In the predominantly Catholic area, Sena candidate Vivek Pandit woos voters with a still of the crucifixion of Jesus from Mel Gibson's film. The poster text in Marathi is impregnated with Biblical references.

"Jesus Christ is crucified again and again", it laments and continues quite self critically: "We have to ask whether again like Judas, who betrayed Christ for 30 silver coins, we will betray the people or stand up for them? Will we be like Peter, who denied Jesus three times? Or are we going to get powerful, to punish the injustice of the landowners? Hang the criminals to death, let the innocent live...." Ironically, *Shiv Sena* is not a Christian party but a radical Hindu party that has hardcore supporters as well as strong critics in Maharashtra state.

Candidate Vivek Pandit informs his voters to be that he does not want to be like Pontius Pilate, who washed the blood of Jesus off his hands with water, but prefers to be like the apostle Simon, who came to Jesus' help when he broke down under the weight of the cross. Competitors of the Shiv Sena were fast to alert the Election Commission on the poster. Using religion in election campaigns is illegal in India.

— from: *Indian Rationalist Bulletin* (5 October 2004)



FIG LEAVES



From Public Relations Material: New Book:

DGC Press (www.dgcpres.com) are thrilled to be publishing *One Nation Under God* the new distopian, speculative fiction novel by Vincent M. Wales. He is the author of the highly praised first fantasy novel *Wish You Were Here*.

The author has been a freethought activist for several years. He is a member of the *Freedom From Religion Foundation* and maintains the online forum, *The Atheist Attic* (<http://up.to/atheistattic/>), which contains over 200 freethought essays and other material. Wales is especially concerned with the social stigmatization that non-believers face, as well as with the entanglement of government and religion. *One Nation Under God* examines these issues, taking America and its tendencies two decades into the future. The book provides an Orwellian warning of where our country is heading if the close-minded attitudes of today continue to grow.

In the year 2021, eleven-year old Mary Christopher is the spunky daughter of the latest President vowing to return America to its righteous roots. Her mother is a well-known "family values" activist, and her "Uncle" Gene Sisco is head of the largest evangelical Christian organization in the land. Against the backdrop of an America where Christian fundamentalism has brought about tremendous change in Washington, Mary's is a conflicted coming-of-age story, in which she questions everything from her faith to her sexuality, and ultimately becomes one more victim of her father's repressive legislation.

Other figures in her life include: Jude, an atheist Mary befriends on the Internet; Vicki, the girl at camp for whom Mary develops confusing feelings; J. E. Cooper, the freelance reporter who labels Gene Sisco the most dangerous man in America; and Jefferson Paine, the

mysterious figure behind the infamous Voice of Reason website, dedicated to challenging the Christopher administration at every turn.

The novel takes events from present-day and extrapolates them to a possible conclusion two decades from now. The list of controversial topics in this fable is long, covering everything from radical education techniques to

communal living, group marriages to the failings of religion. Yet, through it all, *One Nation Under God* maintains a positive worldview, a hope that our society might one day get its collective act together, before it's too late.

DGC Press offer FIG the following special deal. Members will be able to buy the book directly from DGC Press for \$11.15 plus S&H \$2.85. A 30 percent discount. In addition, FIG would receive \$2.50 for every order.

There is a reduction of the order form. DGC Press invite you to download a full size order form from (www.dgcpres.com/ONUG/presale.htm). You can also download the first chapter of the novel for

free, 31 pp. For questions, contact DGC Press at sales@dgcpres.com or phone (866) 690-6027.



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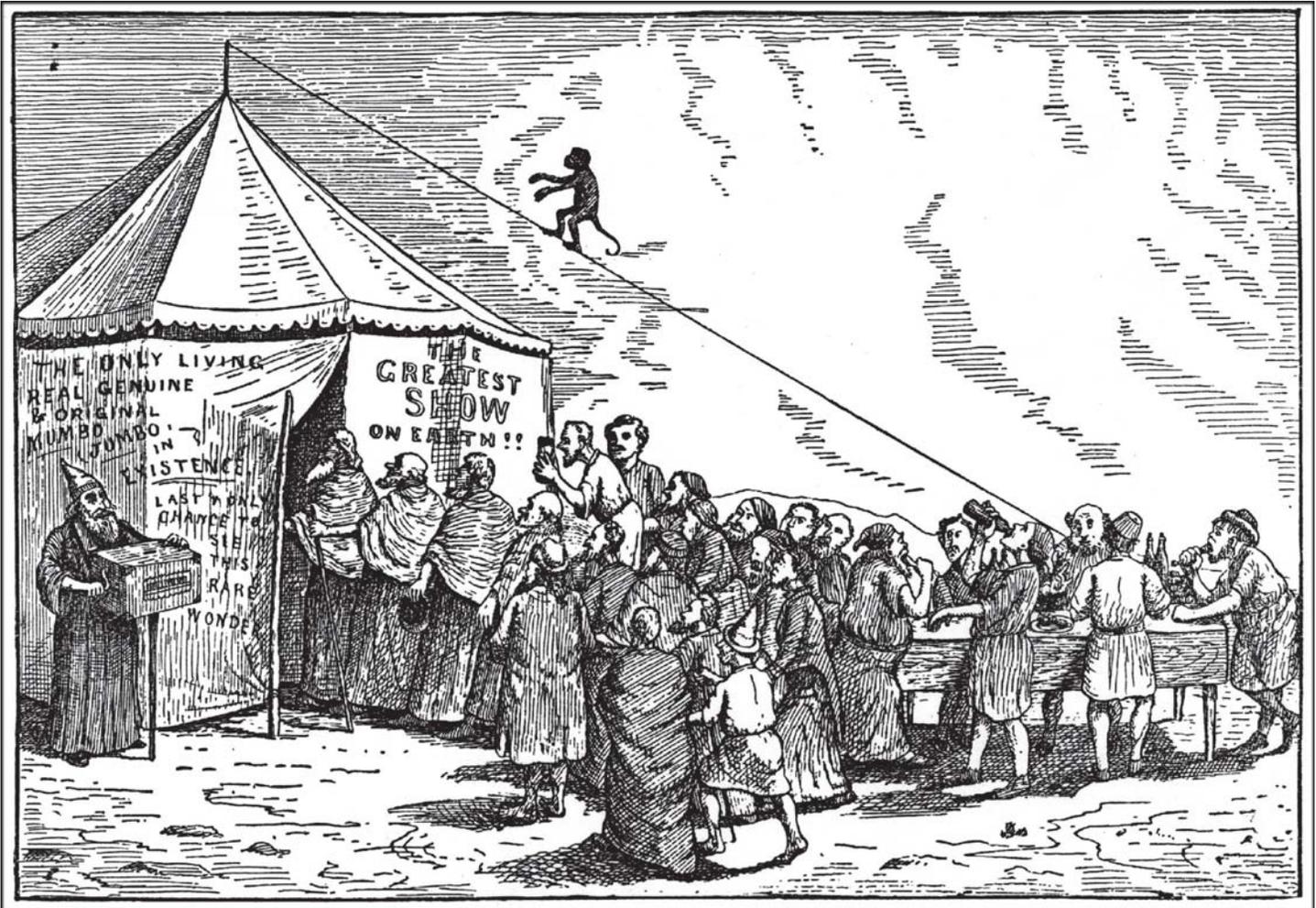
Dessert, Video and Discussion!

You are invited to meet at the home of Wolf Roder on Friday, 15 October from 7 PM to 9 PM to review and discuss this special and the questions raised. Coffee and Cookies will be provided.

Please RSVP at 513-961-7331 to let us know you are coming or for directions.



FIG LEAVES



And they saw the God of Israel. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand; also they saw God, and did eat and drink.--Ex. xxiv, 10, 11.

Watson Heston, *Old Testament Stories Comically Illustrated: The Stories being Humorously Told and Hard Facts Given Concerning the Origin and Authenticity of the Old Testament*. (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1892)

Every sect is a certificate that God has not plainly revealed his will to man. To each reader the Bible conveys a different meaning. About the meaning of this book, called a revelation, there have been ages of war, and centuries of sword and flame. If written by an infinite God, he must have known that these results must follow; and thus knowing, he must be responsible for all.

Is it not infinitely more reasonable to say that this book is the work of man, that it is filled with mingled truth and error, with mistakes and facts, and reflects, too faithfully perhaps, the "very form and pressure of its time"?

If there are mistakes in the Bible, certainly they were made by man. If there is anything contrary to nature, it was written by man. If there is anything immoral, cruel, heartless or infamous, it certainly was never written by a being worthy of the adoration of mankind.

— Robert G. Ingersoll, *Some Mistakes of Moses* (1879) chap. XII

Theistic scientists like Ross and Schroeder accept the big bang and the rest of cosmology, seeing them as a confirmation of scripture. Biblical literalists like Morris sharply disagree. They reject the big bang and modern cosmology, because, in fact, it does conflict dramatically with scripture. Ross's and Schroeder's approach is called *apologetics*, while Morris makes no apologies. In the first case we have physicists who accept the results of science, and then attempt to bend and twist what is in the Bible to fit scientific data. In the second case we have an engineer who will have none of this bending and twisting. For Morris, the Bible is the immutable word of God, and if it conflicts with science, then science must be wrong. Of course, neither extreme is willing to seriously consider another possibility — that unbent and untwisted science shows simply and unequivocally that an unbent and untwisted Bible is grossly wrong in its picture of creation. It follows, by implication, that the Bible is highly suspect in its other doctrines as well.

— Victor J. Stenger, *Has Science Found God?* (2003) pp. 170-171



BOOK REVIEW

Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America
by Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose
(New York: Random House, 2003)

This tirade against George Bush is going to be out of date very soon, regardless whether the subject is re-elected to the Presidency or not. Political reporting and criticism simply does not last, because new achievements and outrages come along before the printer's ink is dry or the binding is sewn. The authors of this book about decisions made by governments are two journalists based in Texas, the state where Bush was Governor from 1994 to 2000. Ivins' and Dubose's thesis is simple: the evil Bush did to Texas, he now is doing to the entire United States.

The authors write like old fashioned liberals, that is they have the naive idea that government could,-- and what is more should,-- help the people, that is aid ordinary Americans in getting and keeping jobs, good health services and adequate pension benefits. At the same time the government might help to preserve the citizens environment, and prevent their being injured or poisoned on the job or in their homes. Ivins and Dubose find that government no longer really works for most of the people but is beholden to the big political campaign donors. While talk of Christian compassion pontificates through the corridors of Washington, the real benefits go to the big corporations and the rich people who own them. Meanwhile "people are not only getting screwed-- losing their life's savings, their pensions, their jobs, and unemployment comp-- they're also getting sick, getting hurt, and even dying because the people's interest now takes second place to that of big-money contributors."(p.xii)

The Bush administration is driven by ideology. This is not the ideology of Christian compassion, or even irrational Christian fundamentalism, but the firm belief that free enterprise and the market economy can solve all problems. Government is seen as basically evil or at least bad for interfering with whatever big corporations want to do. We should privatize everything we possibly can. That thinking has given us "competitive" private electric supplies in California, Ken Lay and the Enron profits, and private contractor armies doing the essential work in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The administrations faith in free enterprise appears to

include a cavalier dismissal of science and "arrogant" scientists. Thus, there is no such thing as global warming, anti-missile missiles don't need testing, and worker safety will be protected by benign employers. Since 9/11 we have seen a serious decline of civil liberties, which is matched by an equally remarkable increase in property rights and privileges. Protecting the environment is unimportant or can be left to the extractive industries. National grazing range and old growth forests which earlier Presidents have tried to preserve, are thrown open to crass exploitation at give away prices. The people's air waves are sold off to the lowest bidder to construct a monopoly of news and entertainment across the country.

While Bush is using executive orders to direct millions of federal funds to Christian social service organizations, the Texas legislature was in the process of dismantling some of Bush's orders which exempted such programs from state supervision. Ivins and Dubose tell the story of one Christian child care facility which was torturing boys based on Biblical discipline. Bush's war against women as well seems to be an evangelical crusade. Most obvious are his anti-abortion orders and appointments. Others are his cutting funding to the UN Population Fund, where we have joined with fundamentalist Islamic states and the Pope in the fight against sex education for adolescents and contraceptive instruction for married couples. We even succeeded in blocking a consensus declaration against legal execution of minors.

Ivins and Dubose tell a lively story, most of it true, I think. In connection with the recent changes in corporate retirement plans they also explain the perfect Bush legislation: "they get to screw workers and get a tax break, and nobody can sue."(p. 291)

— Wolf Roder

Quote.....

I have to confess, I've never been taught proper prayer etiquette. As far as I can tell, it consists of folded hands, solemnly bowed heads, and no peeking at the other supplicants. I don't object to religious practices, per se. I'm just not crazy about having someone else inflict their beliefs on me. Whenever Jehovah's Witnesses appear at my door, I always ask for their addresses first thing, assuring them that I'll be around later in the week to plague them with my views.

— Sue Grafton, "F" is for Fugitive (1989) p. 84

.....Unquote



October Meeting: Tuesday, 26th 6:30 PM

November Meeting Tuesday, 9th 7:00 PM



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

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. 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. Our members are mostly secular humanists. However, 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 figleaves@fuse.net, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org