

FIG LEAVES

Volume 13 Issue 8

August 2004

Fig Annual Picnic: Sunday, 22 August 2:00 PM

The FIG Annual Picnic will be at the Kagin home on Sunday, 22 August, 2004 at 2:00 pm.

Phone: 859.384.2324. Call for Directions.

Food: Bring a side dish or dessert. Kagins will provide hamburgers, hot dogs etc. and drinks. They have a wonderful pool, so don't forget to bring a swim suit and towel.

See you there!

Note: There will no other meetings this month.

SEPTEMBER MEETING Tuesday, 28 September

Steve Devillez of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center will speak to FIG about Underground Railroad History. While this topic is always of interest to us, it is even more so at this time with the excitement of the opening of the Center here in Cincinnati.

Announcement from Judy Snyderman, President, End of Life Choices of Greater Cincinnati (EOLC)

Subject: EOLC Greater Cincy Chapter Meeting.

The next meeting will be Sunday, September 19, at 3 PM, at the Roselawn Lutheran Church. A detailed announcement will be mailed to everyone who gave us their email address at the meeting in May. It will go out about three weeks before the meeting, but I wanted to let you all know the date as soon as it was set.

We are very fortunate that Professor Elizabeth Malloy of the Law Faculty at University of Cincinnati has agreed to be our speaker. I don't have the title for her talk yet, but she will address legal issues relating to death, advance directives, living wills, etc.

Also mark your calendar for October 24 at 3 PM. There will be a panel discussion entitled *Plan Now, For End of Life Issues* at the Miami Valley Unitarian Fellowship Church in Centerville just south of Dayton right off interstate 75. The Reverend Richard Venus will be the moderator. More information on this event will be mailed early in October. — from Margaret O'Kain

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Events

August Picnic!

Sunday 22 August 2:00 PM
at the home of the
Edwin & Helen Kagin
Bring a side dish and swimsuit.

August Meeting

No Meeting is planned
Join us at the picnic!

September Potluck

Tuesday, 14 September 2:00 PM
at the home of

September Meeting

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

.Did you Know?

- **Hyperbolic Doubt** - "A systematic process of doubt which determines if a class of knowledge can be doubted in any way to arrive at a list of beliefs that are true and doubtless."
- Therefore "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am). Rene Descartes (1596-1650)



July Meeting Report

Some Things are Really and Truly Impossible

Wolf Roder, Professor Emeritus of Geography, University of Cincinnati

Wolf started with an explanation of how he came up with the title of his talk. He was considering the motto of the State of Ohio that was adopted in 1958. It is taken from the *New Testament*, Matthew, 19:26, which reads: "With God, all things are possible."



When viewed in context, it doesn't quite seem to be saying what the politicians who voted for it in the Legislature seemed to think it said. This quotation was preceded by one that said that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven but God could take anyone into heaven that he wanted to. As he contemplated this conundrum, he thought: "what things are really and truly impossible."

As he thought about this more and more, he recalled a book by a man named Wallace who enumerated lists of things that people said would never happen but they turned out to be wrong. One of the things that

purportedly would never happen was that man would ever fly. To get a man into the air would take an enormous amount of energy encased in a small package. In the middle of the nineteenth century, it was possible to build a steam engine to move a train but the technology to power a plane did not exist. The only way the Wright Brothers could get their plane into the air was to pull it along the ground with a catapult.

Another example was the famous doctor who said you could never operate inside the body. This too turned out to be wrong.

What are things that really can't be done? One of the things that comes to mind is that we shall never travel to another solar system. Einstein told us that the fastest thing going is the speed of light. If the nearest star is four light years away and we traveled at a tenth of the speed of light, it would take 40 years to get there and 40 years to return. So will we never go to another star? The physicists tell us that the anti-ballistic missile will never work; but if George Bush says he's ready to deploy one that may negate even that statement. Finally what Wolf came up with was that you cannot flatten a sphere. On a sphere, the equivalent of a straight line is a circumference. He demonstrated this visually on the globe he had brought with him. The only way for a map to proportionally represent area, direction, and distance of the real world is to have a globe.

If, as matter of practicality and convenience it is necessary to have a flat surface map, there has to be distortion in one or all of these variables. What happens when you make a flat map? First, it is necessary to cut the sphere open. Then (think of the surface as a rubber sheet) it is necessary to pull and stretch it. As a result there is distortion in distance, direction or area. It isn't possible to preserve all three without distortion. The great Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler wrote the proof of this in 1777. At the time he had been blind for 11 years. He was born in 1707 and lived until 1783, making him a



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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FIG LEAVES



contemporary of Benjamin Franklin. During his lifetime he wrote more mathematical treatises than anyone else before or since.

We distinguish two major types of maps. Equivalent or equal area maps keep area of the real world proportionate, but distort shapes. Cartographers can preserve the shape locally but only by exaggerating the areas. Roder then started to show some of the map projections by shifting to overhead projection. To make these examples understandable he needed to include a thumbnail history of cartography.

One of the interesting things about mapping and maps is that it is probably older than writing. We do know that the American Indians had maps before they were literate and also that people in Africa had maps and many had no written language. It is probable that the first map originated when one cave man asked another how to get to where the game were located and the first one took a stick and traced a route in the sand.

Wolf then showed a map that consisted intersecting lines made of reeds with seashells indicating islands tied along the vertical and horizontal lines representing ocean currents. This map from the South Seas was of a type used by the Polynesians to travel from Tahiti to Hawaii and all throughout the Pacific Ocean. His next map image was from 2500 BCE and is of a local Middle Eastern area, probably the Euphrates River Valley. It is considered the oldest surviving map. It is located at Harvard University. He next showed a map from 500 BCE from Babylon considered the oldest world map. Comparing this to a reconstructed map after Eratosthenes, a Greek mathematician who lived in Alexandria around the second Century BCE demonstrated how much further advanced the Greeks were than the Babylonians. The same scholar also calculated the circumference of the Earth, which remained the most accurate calculation until the seventeenth century CE.

Probably the greatest geographer of ancient times was Claudius Ptolemy who flourished around 150 CE. Although he knew the Earth is a sphere, he postulated an Earth-centered universe. He is credited with constructing the first map projections to obtain a reasonable picture of the sphere. His geographic and astronomical writings have survived but his maps represent reconstructions.

The end of classical antiquity arrived about 400 CE after the adoption of Christianity as the official state religion of the

Roman Empire. Learning was lost as emphasis shifted from science to salvation. This is demonstrated by comparing the map of Isidore of Seville in the seventh century with the Babylonian world map. They very much resemble each other; both are simple T in O drawings.

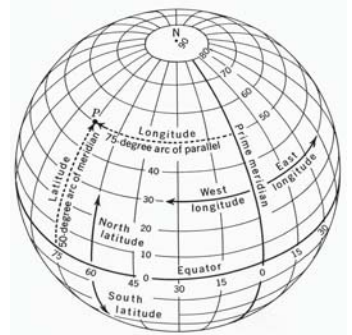
During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there was a rebirth of European civilization that became known as The Renaissance. Gerard Mercator was born in 1512 and died in 1594. He published many maps and globes and was the first scholar to use the word "atlas" to describe a book containing many related maps.

He is best known for his Mercator Projection. His meridians are parallel straight vertical lines. This map expands the distances between parallels of latitude in proportion to the actual distances between meridians. This greatly enlarges the far northern and southern latitudes, so that Greenland appears much larger than South America. The real South America is eight times as large as Greenland. In fact,

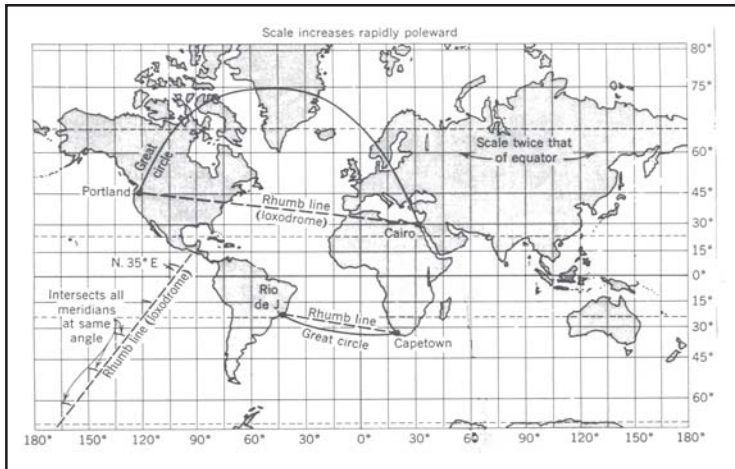
Wolf gave a rule of thumb for recognizing area distortion. Compare the Arabian Peninsula with Greenland — these are about the same size in reality.

The enormous distortion of area makes the Mercator projection a poor map for comparing economic or any other distributions. Its great advantage lies in navigation, because it shows a constant compass course — called a *loxodrome* — as a straight line. Compass courses on earth are not straight lines, but complex curves. A navigator can read his sailing directions off a Mercator map after he has drawn his great circle route from another source.

Mercator's achievement was extraordinary, especially because he worked without calculus, which would not be invented by Isaac Newton for another hundred years. Modern researchers have not figured out how Mercator accomplished his design. Specialized Mercator maps continue to be used for navigation by land and sea.

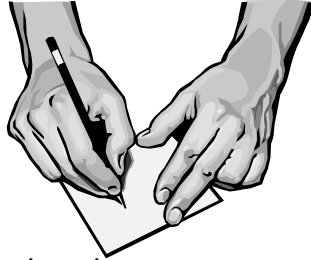


-- Submitted by George Maurer





Letters To The Editor



This letter appeared in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* on Monday, 26 July 2004

Stem-cell research wrongly suppressed.

Richard Cohen's column "Shame on Reagan Jr. for using dad's name" (July 18) isn't impressed with Ron Reagan Jr. getting an invitation to speak about stem cells at the Democratic Convention. I am available as an alternative. I don't have any famous relatives, but I am witness to many faces and stories just as compelling as that of the late president.

I recently attended a luncheon in Montgomery with 50 other women who have multiple sclerosis. I have had M.S. since 1978. Last month, I attended a conference on stem cells in Berkeley, Calif. with 300 people. They had all kinds of conditions or diseases — spinal cord injury, Parkinson's, juvenile diabetes and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

Fifty-eight senators and 206 members of Congress of both parties have sent President Bush a letter asking him to reconsider his executive order of August 2001, which limits federal funding to the existing lines of stem cells. The private sector is rallying to fund the research while public dollars are denied to citizens who are asked to be patient. Will we have to wait another four years?

— Idelle Datlof, co-executive director, Stem Cell Action Network

Recycled Myths
 A myth is just a story that's
 Made up to explain
 The dogmas of religion
 Creative and insane.
 Man's yearning for immortality
 Is like a deep deep well;
 You just can't fill it up without
 Floods and snakes and hell.
 By the time the young religion
 Christianity came about,
 The best myths had been taken
 So recycling was the route.
 Virgin births, angels, saviors
 Were a dime a dozen sure,
 So they borrowed what they needed
 To concoct the Bible pure.
 The sly reptile, the tree of life,
 Recycled sure as shoot,
 Along with resurrection, sacraments
 And trinity to boot!

Dorothy B. Thompson
Freethought Perspective (Jan. 03) p.86

So who is afraid of the Big Bad Nader? (Many pro-Kerry voters feel that Nader's candidacy may again throw the election to the Republican shrub.)

Ray Moore, ousted earlier this year as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, was slated to be a featured speaker at the Constitution Party's national convention in Valley Forge, Pa, June 23-26. The party, which was on 41 state ballots in the 2000 presidential election, claims 320,000 members, making it the third largest in the U.S. Its extremist platform calls for banning all abortions, extinguishing the "homosexual agenda," abolishing income taxes and stopping all immigration. Most appealing to Moore, the party wants to make Old Testament code the law of the land. In past elections the party was called the *U. S. Tax Payers* party.

Little known Maryland attorney Michael Peroutka, a member of the pro-Moore, neo-Confederate hate group, *League of the South* has ended up as their presidential nominee. The Constitution Party seems set on a Southern strategy this November. Peroutka says the party hopes to take right-wing votes away from President George W. Bush with "support not only from guys with Confederate flags on their trucks, but also with the Southern Cross in their hearts."

— from: *Intelligence Report* of the Southern Poverty Law Center Summer 2004) p. 4

Comment: These Guys obviously don't know an astronomical Constellation from a T-shirt.



Sapere Aude or as they say in English: audaciously sapient!

The Institute for Humanistic Studies has launched the Continuum of Humanist Education (COHE), the world's first online, interactive Humanist educational program. COHE is now available live on the Web at <www.HumanistEducation.com>. Use this URL to examine COHE for yourself.

COHE strives to explore, advance, and instruct Humanistic thought in fresh and stimulating ways. Interactive exercises, student controlled options, audio of speeches, and a community bulletin board are just a few of the tools COHE students will use to enrich their experience. The COHE motto remains Immanuel Kant's rallying cry from the Enlightenment period: *sapere aude*, meaning "dare to know."

Course modules are accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. Some courses are open at no charge whatever, others are available at low introductory rates. Payment can be made by credit card. Available also is a free demonstration course, *Introduction to Humanism: A Primer in History, Philosophy and the Goals of Humanism*, written by Matt Cherry, the Executive Director of the Institute for Humanistic Studies.

Initial Courses Available:

1. *Evolution, Creationism and the Nature of Science* by Massimo Pigliucci, Ph.D.
2. *Psychology and Humanism: Understanding Ourselves and Our Universe* by Dr. Reid Johnson
3. *Religion and the Constitution* by Timothy Gordinier, Ph.D. (The Institute's Director of Public Policy and Education)
4. *Developing Human Potential without Religion* by Dr. Jeanene Fowler
5. *Sacred vs. Secular Ethics* by Lewis Vaughn

Each cornerstone course is divided into three levels: Introductory, Basic, and Comprehensive. Completing each of these levels will take about 30 minutes, 90 minutes, and 5 hours respectively. Modules at all levels will contain quizzes, essay assignments, critical thinking exercises, field problems, or other tools for self-assessment. Some of these tests are auto-graded online to help COHE students gauge their understanding of the module's content, and to decide whether to move on to the next level of study.

During an introductory period the Area Overview and Introductory Level courses will be available free of charge. Basic Level course will cost \$ 10 each, and Comprehensive will be at \$ 25. The COHE courses are inexpensive to reflect the Institute's commitment to removing as many barriers as possible from the advancement of Humanism. It is also a way of IHS to thank the first wave of students participating in what is still an experimental program. New courses and features will

be added in response to student demand. Student support and feedback will help COHE develop and expand.

Source: IHEU *International Humanist News* (August 2004)

• Announcement •••••

• Belief and Dissent Conference

• Paul Kurtz, founder and chair of the Council for Secular Humanism, will be the featured speaker at the Belief and Dissent 2004 conference in Independence, Ohio, on Saturday, 25 September 2004.

• The event will be hosted by the Free Inquirers of Northeastern Ohio (FINO), which is affiliated with the Council for Secular Humanism.

• Other conference speakers include Joe Nickell of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, D.J. Grothe and David Koepsell of the Council, and Bruce Latimer, Executive Director of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Latimer's luncheon address is titled: "The Case For Unintelligent Design."

• The conference will take place at the Clarion Hotel South at I-77 and Rockside Road, and will run from 9 am-4 pm. Early bird registration is \$40 per person, which includes a buffet lunch. After 14 September the cost will rise to \$45 per person. The village of Independence is south of Cleveland, and Rockside road is the last exist before I-77 crosses I-400.

• To register or to ask for more information about the conference, contact FINO President Brent Bowen at (330) 664-0787 or by e-mail at BBowen1005@aol.com.



FIG Board of Directors

At our meeting on 27 July we elected the following members to two year terms on the Board of Directors: Philip Ferguson, Michele Grinoch, Inez Klein, Joe Levee, Donna Loughry, George Maurer, Bill O'Kain, and Brian Sellers. The following were elected to two year terms last year and have one more year to serve: Nurit Bowman, Helen Kagin, Margaret O'Kain, and Wolf Roder. All members of the Board will meet in August to elect officers to serve for one year.





Arrogance and Knowledge

By Brian Leiter

Andrea Lafferty, executive director of the Traditional Values Coalition, a conservative religious organization, delivers what could be the signature line for our backward times in America:

There's an arrogance in the scientific community that they know better than the average American.

In fact, of course, scientists do know quite a bit better than the "average American" about the matters for which their scientific expertise equips them. Those with knowledge, surprisingly, know more than those who are ignorant. Is that arrogance?

As Chris Mooney remarked, "science is not a democracy," and in a democratic culture, that inevitably becomes a cause of resentment, as Ms. Lafferty's comment attests. This resentment of competence was first made vivid to me when I appeared on CNN more than a year ago to discuss the textbook selection process in Texas. When I dismissed the argument that the textbook selection process should be "democratic" (which it isn't, though it pretends to be) on the grounds that competent educators should vet textbooks, not political and religious groups, the CNN host, Anderson Cooper, cut me rather short: that reply clearly made him uncomfortable, and he changed the topic to how the selection process wasn't really democratic anyway.

Resentment of competence was also a motif suggested by my exchange with Professor Eastman - one of the ignorant law professors shilling for teaching creationist lies to schoolchildren—who used that favorite rhetorical device of the anti-Darwin crowd by referring to its "tyrannical orthodoxy." Unfortunately, as I noted on that occasion, "views that are correct ought to be orthodox, and they ought to exercise the tyranny appropriate to truth, namely, a tyranny over falsehood and dishonesty."

But when truth and knowledge clash with deep-seated prejudices—especially those reinforced from the pulpit and in the public culture—resentment towards the "arrogance" of those with knowledge and competence grows.

Unfortunately, I don't see much room for compromise in this domain. Knowledge and competence can not become meek and abashed merely to avoid offending the vanity of the undereducated, the parochial, and the unworldly. The Enlightenment dream was to extend the blessings of reason and knowledge as widely as possible. In the United States, that Enlightenment project has been stymied: at the highest echelons of the culture, the material and institutional support

for the pursuit of knowledge and competence is unparalleled, yet the fruits of these labors are often either regarded with suspicion and resentment in the public culture at large—or simply go unrecognized and unnoted altogether.

Could there be a greater failure of the Enlightenment project than that a huge majority of U.S. citizens actually believe there is an intellectual competition between Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection and "intelligent design" creationism? Or that the President of the country publically affirms their skepticism, without being held up for ridicule in the media and the public culture?

These are, for various reasons, scary times in America, but the increasingly brazen haughtiness of the purveyors of ignorance and lies—who cloak their backwardness in the judgmental rhetoric of "arrogance" and a none-too-subtle appeal to the "ordinary" person's sense of democratic equality—may be the most worrisome development of all. That the empire of ignorance spreads its domain portends calamities from which it could take centuries to heal.

-- This article first appeared on *The Leiter Report*.

Quote.....

In the holy books of the Mandeans we have a sense of some level of animosity on the part at least of some of John's followers toward Jesus. The Mandaeans, whose name derives from *manda*, an Aramaic word roughly equivalent to the Greek *gnosis*, are perhaps a survival of one of the earliest of the gnostic religions. Their scriptures are in Aramaic and record that they were originally from Palestine, but that they emigrated to Haran in northern Mesopotamia because of disputes with the Jews. Certain place names and other evidence in their scriptures indicate that the story of Palestinian origins is probably true, though some scholars believe that their origins are Mesopotamian.

At present they number probably less than 10,000 and are located mainly in southern Iraq. Baptism figures prominently in Mandaean worship, and their sacred texts honor John the Baptist. However, there is little else in their worship that connects them to the Jews, towards whom their writings direct considerable animosity. Another target of their animosity is Jesus, whom they call a "lying messiah" who perverted the light. According to their sacred texts, Jesus begged John to baptize him, though the Baptist was reluctant to do so. They also claim that their messiah, Anosh-Uthra, exposed Jesus as a false prophet, brought about his death, and also caused the destruction of Jerusalem in CE 70.

— Tim Callahan, *Secret Origins of the Bible* (2002) p. 395

.....Unquote:



We Remember Francis Crick, 1916 – 2004

Science has lost one of its brightest luminaries on Wednesday, July 28, when Francis Crick died at age 88 after a long battle with colon cancer. Crick was co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, pioneer researcher on the neural correlates of consciousness, a powerful promoter of science and critical thinking, and a good friend of the skeptical and atheistic movements.

In what has become one of the most famous collaborations in the history of science, in 1951 Crick and an American postdoc named James Watson teamed up to crack this greatest mystery of biology. This led to the discovery in 1953 of the double helix nature of DNA, for which both men, along with Maurice Wilkins, received the Noble Prize.

-- From Michael Shermer *E-Skeptic* #29 (30 July 2004)

My parents were religious in a rather quiet way. We had nothing like family prayers, but they attended church every Sunday morning and when we were old enough my brother and I went with them. I accepted all this, as children do, as part of our way of life.

At exactly which point I lost my early religious faith I am not clear, but I suspect I was then about twelve years old. It was almost certainly before the actual onset of puberty. Nor can I recall exactly what led me to this radical change of viewpoint. I remember telling my mother that I no longer wished to go to church, and she was visibly upset by this. I imagine that my growing interest in science and the rather low intellectual level of the preacher and his congregation motivated me, though I doubt if it would have made much difference if I had known of other more sophisticated Christian beliefs. Whatever the reason, from then on I was a skeptic, an agnostic with a strong inclination toward atheism.

I have no doubt that this loss of faith in Christian religion and my growing attachment to science have played a dominant part in my scientific career not so much on a day-to-day basis but in the choice of what I have considered interesting and important. I realized early on that it is detailed scientific knowledge which makes certain religious beliefs untenable. A knowledge of the true age of the earth and of the fossil record makes it impossible for any balanced intellect to believe in the literal truth of every part of the Bible in the way that fundamentalists do. And if some of the Bible is manifestly wrong, why should any of the rest of it be accepted automatically?

— Francis Crick in "How I Got Inclined Towards Atheism."

Website

Website News: gofigger.org Check it out!

Fig's Website has been revised and expanded. Most of the pages still exist but have been changed to load cleanly and quickly. The Chat and Bulletin pages have been removed but can be added back if needed. The first page will have announcements for the next meeting as well as any other announcements or birthdays that members bring to my attention.

A brand new section has been added called "Humanism." It includes two complete sections called "Humanism 101" and a "Historical Overview of Humanist Philosophers." The not yet complete sections are a page entitled "Types of Humanism," a section on Humanist poetry and a section for reviews of Humanist Books. These sections will be completed in the next few months. If you have comments or requests, e-mail me at webnut@gofigger.org. **Check it out!**

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



Militant Christianity is on the march, apparently without love and forgiveness

writes Nicholas Kristof in the *New York Times*.

If the latest in the Left Behind series of evangelical thrillers is to be believed, Jesus will return to Earth, gather non-Christians and toss them into everlasting fire: "Jesus merely raised one hand a few inches and a yawning chasm opened in the earth, stretching far and wide enough to swallow all of them. They tumbled in, howling and screeching, but their wailing was soon quashed and all was silent when the earth closed itself again."

These are the best-selling novels for adults in the United States, and they have sold more than 60 million copies worldwide. The latest, *Glorious Appearing*, has Jesus returning to Earth to wipe all non-Christians from the planet. It's disconcerting to find ethnic cleansing celebrated as the height of piety.

If a Muslim were to write an Islamic version of *Glorious Appearing* and publish it in Saudi Arabia, jubilantly describing a massacre of millions of non-Muslims by God, we would have a fit. We have quite properly linked the fundamentalist religious tracts of Islam with the intolerance they nurture, and it's time to remove the dust from our own eyes.

In *Glorious Appearing*, Jesus merely speaks and the bodies of the enemy are ripped open. Christians have to drive carefully to avoid "hitting splayed and filleted bodies of men and women and horses." "The riders not thrown," the novel says, "leaped from their horses and tried to control them with the reins, but even as they struggled, their own flesh dissolved, their eyes melted and their tongues disintegrated. Seconds later the same plague afflicted the horses, their flesh and eyes and tongues melting away, leaving grotesque skeletons standing, before they too rattled to the pavement."

One might have thought that Jesus would be more of an animal lover. These scenes also raise an eschatological problem: could devout fundamentalists really enjoy paradise as their friends, relatives and neighbors were heaved into hell? As my *Times* colleague David Kirkpatrick noted in an article, this portrayal of a bloody Second Coming reflects a shift in American portrayals of Jesus, from a gentle figure to a martial messiah presiding over a sea of blood. Militant Christianity rises to confront Militant Islam. This matters in the real world, in the same way that fundamentalist Islamic tracts in Saudi Arabia do. Each form of fundamentalism creates a stark moral division between decent, pious types like oneself -- and infidels headed for hell.

No, I don't think the readers of *Glorious Appearing* will ram planes into buildings. But we did jail thousands of Muslims here and abroad after the September 11 attacks, and ordinary

Americans joined in the torture of inmates at Abu Ghraib prison, in part because of a lack of empathy for the prisoners. It's harder to feel empathy for such people if we regard them as infidels and expect Jesus to dissolve their tongues and eyes any day now.

I had reservations about writing this column because I don't want to mock anyone's religious beliefs, and millions of Americans think *Glorious Appearing* describes God's will. Yet ultimately I think it's a mistake to treat religion as a taboo, either in this country or in Saudi Arabia. I often write about religion precisely because faith has a vast impact on society. Should we really give intolerance a pass if it is rooted in religious faith? People have the right to believe in a racist God, or a God who throws millions of non-evangelicals into hell. I don't think we should ban books that say that. But we should be embarrassed when our best-selling books gleefully celebrate religious intolerance and violence against infidels. That's not what America stands for, and I doubt that that's what God stands for.

•Alert!•••••

• "Atheist Charities" Scam. •

• The *Atlanta Freethought News* (August 2004) • reports on web solicitations for "Atheist Charities" which • are suspected of being bogus and a scam out of Las Vegas. • The Atlanta newsletter provides its source as *Humanist Network News* for 21 July. *HNN* is a weekly web • publication of the *Institute for Humanist Studies*. •

• Atheist Charities are reported to maintain a website at • <www.atheistcharities.com> and solicit contributions, via • spam, from a variety of addresses. Some of the spam • originated ostensibly from the IHS under • <humaniststudies@angelfire.com>. Needless to say it is a • false address never used by IHS. Contributions are to be • made via PayDirect or PayPal. *HNN* found the website is • registered to a post office box in Las Vegas. The zip code • of the address is in Clark County, but no Atheist Charities • is registered there as either a business or with a solicitor's • license. *HNN* has filled out a suspected fraud form with the • US Postal Inspection Service. •

• Portions of the text appearing on the *Atheist Charities* • website match language on the website of *Catholic Charities of San Jose* almost word for word. Merely • substitute "atheist" for "Catholic" in most cases. A give • away this does not come from a legitimate freethought • source is the use of inflammatory anti-Christian wording • and grammatically incorrect language. •

• *HNN* continues to collect information on Atheist • Charities. If you have had any contact with them or have • any information on this spam, please inform them at • <www.humaniststudies.com>. •



A Christian America?

What do people actually believe? Where do we stand? During the last week in May the Barna Group asked a random sample of Americans six questions on the topic “How Christianized Do Americans Want Their Country To Be?” Barna is an opinion and attitude survey company which specializes in religious questions, and sells its products and insights mainly to churches and their pastors. From time to time the owner, George Barna, posts a report on general questions on the company website, <www.Barna.org>.

George Barna himself appears to be a fundamentalist and conservative Bible believing Christian, who has a background in theology and preaching. This does tend to affect the kinds of questions asked by the company, and the interpretations they give their findings. Nevertheless I think the results obtained, that is the answers and their distributions represent the general views of Americans.

Barna’s surveys of 1000 to 1600 respondents have error limits of 2.5 to 3.0 percent — due to the vagaries of chance in the polling. The surveys are carried out by means of random dialing from Ventura, CA, in phone interviews across the continental United States. We can not know how large a bias this introduces of people who do not have phones, or of people who do not answer telephone survey questions on principle. The proportion of people who refuse to answer surveys has increased as a result of telephone scams and of telemarketers pretending to make surveys.

The Questions:

(1) Do you support posting the Ten Commandments on or in government buildings? 79 percent of all adults accepted this policy. Even 68 percent of people adhering to non-Christian religions supported the Ten, and, surprise, 45 percent of agnostics and atheists were willing to tolerate such displays.

(2) What about removing the motto “in God we Trust” from the nations currency? 87 percent of all adults rejected this idea, and 63 percent of atheists/agnostics went along.

(3) What about removing “one nation under god” from the pledge of allegiance? 85 percent of adults rejected this action, and a 60 percent majority of the a/a respondents agreed with them.

(4) How many are willing to have “creationism” taught in the country’s schools? Note, that the question did not ask about this instruction in the “science classroom” but only in general or at all. 59 percent of the entire adult sample favor such teaching, and even 29 percent of the a/a bunch agreed to such instruction.

(5) How do people feel about permitting the f-word on television? 94 percent of the general population are squeamishly unwilling to hear such language. Only 65 percent of the a/a segment refuse to admit to a dirty mind.

(6) How about having “a constitutional amendment to establish Christianity as the official religion of the United States?” 68 percent of all respondents oppose this, and 92 percent of the unbelievers. In fact all segments of the survey opposed this idea with the single exception of evangelical, born again Christians among whom 66 percent supported such declaration. In the Barna surveys this segment of American respondents make up 8 percent of the population; with atheists and agnostics fielding another 8 percent. Other Christians comprise 77 percent, and 7 percent represent other religions (Jews, Muslim, Hindu, etc.)

Comment.

One way to interpret these findings is that on the whole Americans agree on issues of faith including the atheists. Only a minority want to remove the god mottoes from money and pledge of allegiance. A majority of Americans, though not quite the atheist group, are willing to have the ten commandments on public walls. It is of course no news that the teaching of creationism remains a real bone of contention, but the majorities willing to introduce this controversial topic into the nations classrooms is small. Here ignorance of the points at issue may be a major effect for holding the supporters to their yes votes. Finally, despite the strong agreement on symbolism, a majority of Americans sees no need to institute Christianity as the national religion. On the other hand it is frightening that almost a third wants to do so. Maybe each such supporter should be asked just which version of Christianity would fill the national bill.
— reported by Wolf Roder

Quote.....

That was then.

When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting for public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers, just men who will rule in the fear of God. The preservation of a republican government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty; If the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made not for the public good so much as for the selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the Laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizens will be violated or disregarded. If a republican government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the divine commands, and elect bad men to make and administer the Laws. — Noah Webster (1832)

Unquote.....



A very low key, polite way of saying we, the U. S,
screwed millions of the poor.

US decision to deny funds could cost thousands of lives - UN population agency

16 July 2004 – The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) today voiced regret that the United States administration has decided to withhold \$34 million appropriated by Congress for the agency, warning that lives will be lost as a result.

UNFPA called the US administration’s reason for continuing to withhold funding for a third straight year – that the agency supports coerced abortions in China – “baseless.” The US State Department conducted an assessment which found no evidence to back the allegations, and instead reported that the Fund had registered its strong opposition to coercive practices. That team recommended that funds allocated by Congress be released to UNFPA.

Three other independent teams, from the UN, the British Parliament and a multi-faith panel of religious leaders, reached the same conclusion, UNFPA said.

The US is the only country to withhold funding to UNFPA for non-budgetary reasons, and the impact will be felt, according to agency chief Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, who said the denied contribution “could have saved thousands of lives.”

UNFPA estimates that Washington’s \$34 million could have helped prevent as many as 2 million unwanted pregnancies and nearly 800,000 abortions, 4,700 maternal deaths and over 77,000 infant and child deaths. The funds could also have been used to scale up promising maternal health and HIV-prevention efforts.

“Historically, the United States has been a world leader in promoting reproductive health and family planning and we hope it will take up that role again,” Ms. Obaid said. “Promoting global health and alleviating poverty are urgent tasks that require strong partnerships and international cooperation.”

UNFPA works in nearly 140 countries to increase access to reproductive health services, including family planning, to promote safe motherhood, and to prevent unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS.

-- Source: U.N. News Service

NOTE: In 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell dispatched a team to China to investigate whether the UNFPA was assisting the Chinese government’s coercive practices. The investigators reported that there was “no evidence that the UNFPA has knowingly supported or participated in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization.” The investigative team recommended “that funds allocated by Congress be released to UNFPA.”

FH is Back!

Due to a variety of circumstances the newsletter *Freethought History* had to suspend publication in 1999. However, it is now resuming regular publication with four issues to appear each year. Professor Fred Whitehead remains the editor.

As before the newsletter will report on important events, such as the Jefferson Conference at the University of Paris in 2001, and the recently concluded Giordano Bruno symposium hosted by the Alliance against Conformity in Freiburg, Germany. Forthcoming issues will supply information on Dr. Marvin F. Zayed’s *International Archive of the Islamic Inquisition* — an ambitious and comprehensive project to collect and disseminate facts on the repression of intellectuals and freethinkers in the Muslim world. Another initiative, an International Committee for the Protection of Freethinkers, has been launched by Jaya Gopal of the Atheist Society of India, and the results of this solidarity effort will appear in various issues.

In addition, *FH* will carry book reviews, profiles, interviews, plus news and notes literally from all over the United States and abroad. *FH* remains the only publication devoted to the history of freethought and to atheist movements.

The price of a subscription to any place in the world is still only \$ 10. Please enclose \$ 10 and send to *Freethought History*, PO Box 5224, Kansas City, KS 66119.

Quote.....

Jesus is really, really worried how you dress!

In our culture, the Feminism of the Mothers is the Destruction of the Daughters. The most blatant and horrific form of this destruction is abortion — the murder of unborn children by their mothers. But abortion is not the only fruit of feminism. Our culture abounds with its fruits: from divorce, to the existence of day care, to women in the workforce and in the military and in positions of authority in the church and civil government — the list is endless. Feminism has become so prevalent that we are influenced by it probably without even realizing it. Feminism has affected the way we think — even the way we dress. Did you know that the lack of clothes we see women wear today is an effect of feminism? How many feminists — pro-aborts — do you know who dress modestly? We as Christian women need to make a distinction in our dress and make a conscious effort to dress modestly and femininely. We need to have a dress standard, and it needs to reflect Christ and not the world.

From a speech by Sarah Zes at the 2003 Operation Save America National Event, Charlotte, North Carolina, 17 July 2003, promoted by the Columbia Christi ministry.

.....**Unquote!**



BOOK REVIEW

When Science & Christianity Meet

David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, editors
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

This is a very good book and must reading for anyone wishing to understand the notorious “Warfare between Science and Christendom” of literature and legend. Saying so is high praise from this reviewer, because I generally don’t like collections of essays, which are too often held together by nothing more than binders twine and lack a continuous thread of thought. In this case, not only are the historian authors well known experts in their subjects, the book follows a time line. Starting with Saint Augustine and Roger Bacon and the Medieval Church, the essays proceed through Renaissance, Enlightenment, and the nineteenth century to Scopes Trial and godless science in the present century.

Biologist Richard Dawkins or philosopher Michael Ruse may be quite clear and certain about the controversy, contest, and conflict between science and religion, but when the subject is in the hands of historians we are informed the relationship is much more complicated than simple combat. The links and contests between Christianity and astronomy, evolution, or geology have never been clear-cut. The reactions of theology to science have been many and varied. At all times there have been some religious thinkers willing to accommodate their interpretations to the leads of science. In contrast, no matter what the scientific finding, some variety of religious leaders could be found to denounce any insight or new direction, no matter how innocuous it appeared to less engaged observers. Here I consider the type of preacher who thought lightening rods could defeat god’s wrath, or that anaesthesia for women in child birth was contrary to Genesis. On the other hand, until the twentieth century few scientists were willing to abandon religion altogether, though their values and commitments could and can be idiosyncratic or unacceptable to the orthodox.

Through the middle ages and into the Renaissance most men doing science were not only religious, but very often in holy orders themselves. Until the nineteenth century academics at the great English universities had to be theologians, and students had to be members of the established, i.e. the Anglican church. No conflict was expected between the Scriptures and science, indeed god’s

word was thought to be recorded not only in the Bible, but also in the “book of nature.” Galileo’s astronomy showed serious differences between the words of god and the observed solar system. Newton’s laws of gravity confirmed a universe running on its own, in which god did not have to turn the crank of the solar system. Yet, neither of these scientists lost a smidgin of their faith in the established religion.

Until the nineteenth century most investigators fully expected their researches in nature to confirm the words of the Bible. Only as the findings of scientists continued to diverge from even the most latitudinarian interpretation of the scriptures, did a break between science and religion become unavoidable. Even then, the issue was more a contest about the boundaries between science and religion. The question was raised whether god provided signs, wonders, direct works, and power in the natural world, and most of all, who was to interpret the action of god in nature. Much of the contest was not between science and religion, but between the prerogatives and social status of the men of the cloth or the new upstarts in lab coats. “Proper Victorians valued both religion and science and did not like to see them squabbling” (p. 219).

Which side would win was not always simple or self-evident. Throughout the later nineteenth century Darwinian scientists interpreted the indigenous races of the various continents as representing species which had evolved from different beginnings. This *polygenist* theory lent itself to defending racism, slavery, colonialism, and segregation. Scientists of a more religious bent, and thinking of the first couple in *Genesis* argued that humanity must be one, evolved from a common ancestry, which turned out to be the correct interpretation.

There is no doubt that Christian Europe gave birth to modern science, and that a large majority of early contributors were Christians. Even today, a majority of scientists profess some form of faith, although not necessarily the personal deity of the Abrahamic religions.

— Wolf Roder

Quote

One of the less scintillating debates among theologians is on the distinctions between a religion and a cult. But all together, our religions or religious cults testify to the deeply serious American thirst for celestial connection. We want a spiritual release from the society we have made out of secular humanism.— E. L. Doctorow, *Reporting the Universe* (2003), p. 84

Unquote



FIG Leaves
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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