

# FIG Leaves

Volume 12 Issue 11

December 2003

## December Meeting :

**Tuesday, 16 December**, Ed Kagin and Joe Levee - (Note: 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday)

FIG Presents: Brights—Good or Bad Idea?

What is a Bright?

See: <<http://www.the-brights.net/>> to find out.

On December 16, at 7:00 PM at the Vernon Room of the Vernon Manor, 400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, FIG will conduct a forum on the newly created term Brights. Under discussion will be a history of the term Bright, how it is used, why it is used, and the far from settled question of should it be used at all, and whether it should be used by individuals and groups to define themselves.

What is a Bright? The creators of the term say: "A bright is a person who has a naturalistic world view. A bright's world view is free of supernatural and mystical elements. The ethics and actions of a bright are based on a naturalistic world view."

Why use this word rather than Atheist, Agnostic, Humanist, Secular Humanist, etc.? Maybe we shouldn't. Come to the FIG meeting and participate in the discussion.

Leading the forum will be FIG members Edwin Kagin and Joe Levee. Edwin will present arguments for the use of the term and Joe will present arguments for why it should not be adopted. It is hoped the audience will participate fully with questions and comments in this friendly debate. So be sure to attend for an evening of information, fellowship, and fun.

### Bright



Are you an Atheist, a Freethinker, or a Humanistic Jew,  
A Unitarian, an Agnostic, and maybe a Secular Humanist too,  
A Humanist, a Rationalist, or some new alphabet stew?  
If the words you would express don't clearly clarify you,  
But should address you don't caress some supernatural world  
view,

No need for grief, there is relief, and something you can do—  
Use the new word for all of us who think that it is right  
To know that scientific law is what holds back the night,  
That naturalism, not belief, gives human beings light—  
A word that means no more than that, and that new word is Bright.  
We can all still use words that divide us and also be a Bright,  
For what we have in common gives us all much greater might.  
Whatever we might call ourselves, we each can be a Bright.



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## Events

### December Potluck

Tuesday, 9 December  
6:30 PM at the home of

### December Meeting

Tuesday, 16 December  
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor  
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati

### January Potluck

Tuesday, 13, January  
6:30 PM at the home of

### January Meeting

Tuesday, 27 January  
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor  
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati  
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Tom Flynn



Photo: Ed Kagin

## Robert Green Ingersoll: America's Greatest Infidel

Speaker: Tom Flynn, editor Free Inquiry magazine, author

Tom introduced his topic by recalling his own experience in how he had progressed from a believing Roman Catholic (he said parenthetically, that we all have handicaps to overcome) to a non-believing atheist all the while doing undergraduate work at Xavier University in Cincinnati. He credits the Jesuits at that institution with teaching him how to think rather than what to think and so he could follow his own

path to truth, as it were. Although he could accept his atheism intellectually, it was emotionally more difficult for him to acknowledge until one day in 1980 in Milwaukee, he woke up to accepting his atheism on an emotional level as well. He then went to the public library in Milwaukee and looked up atheism in the card catalogue. He came across several books by Madelyn Murray O'Hair and others but also the Complete Works of Robert Ingersoll. He took the first volume entitled The Gods, which encapsulates Ingersoll's bold critique of Christianity and opens with a one-liner "An honest god is the noblest work of man," which is a riff on Alexander Pope. All at once he felt buoyed. Finding Ingersoll capstoned his development as an atheist and he felt profoundly in his debt. He then paid tribute to Emmet Fields who was in the audience. Emmet had preserved much of Ingersoll's work by making it available on the Internet to a whole new generation.

People who are skeptical of religion and who put their emphasis on human welfare first have always been part of the American experience. It is almost forgotten that many of the founders of the United States were deists that believed in an impersonal god who wound up creation like a clock and then went away. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century was also rich in freethought movements.

Cincinnati had roots in this tradition. German immigrants came to the Midwest in great numbers during the 1850's. They settled in Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas, Texas and Ohio. This is one of the reasons that the neighborhood north of Central Parkway is called Over-the-Rhine. Many of these immigrants called themselves the 48er's because they had participated in the failed revolution of 1848. This pitted monarchy against democracy, traditionalism against reform, orthodoxy against freethought. The reformers lost; the traditionalists won. Large numbers of Germans, the best educated most progressive individuals emigrated to America. As a group they had more of their fair share of feminists, socialists, labor activists, free lovers, agnostics, and other radicals.

Some of them followed the early reformer Friederich Jahn who coined the phrase "A sound mind in a sound body." He urged his followers to chal-  
Continued on page 5....



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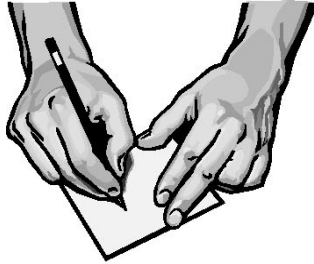
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# Letters To The



Date: Fri, 28 Nov 2003 05:54:18 -0500  
To: letters@worldnetdaily.com  
From: Robert Riehemann <briehema@cinternet.net>  
Subject: Jane Chastain on Thanksgiving

To the Editor of WorldNetDaily,

I read with interest and horror the article by Jane Chastain about Thanksgiving (2 Values Systems Clash on Thanksgiving Day:

<[http://worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=35837](http://worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=35837)>).

She evidently believes that Christians are to be in control of government processes and that other citizens should consider themselves guests. She states, "...people of faith are willing to acknowledge that there are atheists in their midst..." Well, at least she acknowledges those with other beliefs, although they are clearly second class citizens in her view. And how many of these people are there? She states "...only 11 percent..."

So let's see, that's a little more than one out of ten people that she wants to write out of the political process--at least as far as having a political process that is neutral with respect to them. I suggest that Ms. Chastain try a little experiment. Run a business and daily insult 10 or 11 percent of your customers by forcing them to listen to your religious diatribe. Make sure that all customers have no option but to use your business because it's the only one in town. What will happen? Does the word riot come to mind? As nearly as I can tell, your commentator wants a religious war that perhaps some "judicial activists" wish to avoid.

But then again, it might be a good thing. African Americans comprise a little less than 13 percent of the population according to the US Census Bureau. We did very well before those people became uppity and wanted to be treated equally. It was even written into the constitution that they were not full citizens. If it hadn't been for that "...boisterous and pushy..." author, Harriet Beecher Stowe with her book, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and that damned activist republican, Abraham Lincoln, and his Civil War, we might have kept those people in their places. Let's not mess it up with the non-Christians.

After all, the United States of America belongs to

Ms. Chastain and not the rest of us. We should all be thankful on Thanksgiving Day that she even lets us visit.

Dr. Robert Riehemann  
229 Foote Avenue  
Bellevue, Kentucky 41073

To Joe Kirby, Editor  
Editorial Page Marietta Daily Journal

## What is Cal Thomas Really Afraid Of?

Dear Editor:

Cal Thomas ("Definition of 'Marriage,'" 21 Nov 2003) may be right that definitions of marriage should be dragged into the presidential campaign. But he is foolishly wrong and probably dangerous to suggest that biblical authority is the right basis for deciding.

This is and must remain a society governed by secular authority, not religious authority, if we are to keep the freedom, peace, and security we have. This is directly related to terrorism. We cannot hope to win the war against terrorism and for freedom except by remaining a nation under secular government. If those Muslim extremists who claim that America is fighting a war against their religion carry the day, the world will suffer from endless, irresolvable war--a fight to the death between religions.

Many modern Christians, such as Mr. Thomas, claim as he did that marriage is a one-man, one-woman affair "established by God as the best arrangement for fallen humanity to organize and protect itself and create and rear children." But cultural anthropologists have established beyond any reasonable doubt that marriage, in various forms, predated Judaism along with more recently created religions.

Biblical definitions of marriage not only are not the original definitions Mr. Thomas claims they are; they also do not match what he considers ideal. The Bible nowhere condemns polygamy and is replete with marital definitions that modern Americans--except for Mormon fundamentalists--reject. For one example among many, see Second Samuel, Chapter 12, for the story of how the Lord Himself provided multiple wives for King David--and threatened to take those same wives away and bestow them on David's neighbor if David did not shape up.

Definitions of secular "marriage" should indeed

be made with an understanding that marriage and family are foundational to our society and with a view toward protecting individuals and children as well as society. Religious bodies have--and must continue to have--the right to define marriage for their own members, subject only to restrictions based on substantial dangers to children, to individual rights, or to society. Most Americans would, for example, deny the right to have multiple wives--or husbands--even to those who can claim, based on Bible verses or the writings of Joseph Smith, that multiple marriage is a religious duty.

I do not think that depriving gay men and lesbian women of the rights and responsibilities that come with marriage--by continuing the "special rights" now reserved for heterosexuals--can be justified. But any attempts to justify those special rights must be made on bases other than religious grounds.

Regards,  
Ed Buckner, Southern Director  
Council for Secular Humanism  
www.secularhumanism.org

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To Pledge or Not to Pledge?  
By Johannah Oldiges, 12th Grade

On June 28, a federal appeals court in California ruled that reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools is unconstitutional. This ruling was a 2-1 decision that would apply to all public schools in the nine states covered by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals (although the court blocked enforcement of the law, so that recitation of the pledge would not immediately stop). The states affected are Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington.

The case was filed by Dr. Michael Newdow, an atheist whose daughter is a second grader in Elk Grove, California, public schools. The court said that reciting the pledge is an "endorsement of religion" in violation of the First Amendment separation of church and state. The court also asserted that an atheist or a holder of certain non-Judeo-Christian beliefs (i.e. someone who believes in more than one god) could see the pledge as it stands as an attempt to "enforce a 'religious orthodoxy' of monotheism."

I personally feel that the court made the right de-

cision. I think that the Pledge of Allegiance is a good representation of my own love for my country, with the exception of the phrase "under God." I am an atheist, and I still care about the U.S. and the ideas, like liberty and justice for all, that our flag represents.

Being patriotic has nothing to do with believing in God, much less only one god. I agree that reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with the phrase "under God" is not politically correct in public schools, where everyone is supposed to be equal. As the court pointed out, this phrase "sends a message to nonbelievers that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to (people who believe in one God) that they are insiders, favored members of the political community." In other words, the phrase "under God" shows favoritism, which isn't right.

But why should we have to do away with the pledge entirely? Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of the school day is a tradition, one that fosters love and respect for all that is symbolized by the flag. Instead, I believe that the appropriate thing to do is to simply remove the offending words from the pledge.

"Under God" was not added to the pledge until 1954. This action was an attempt by the United States government to "recognize a Supreme Being" in an effort to publicly oppose atheistic communism. Because the motive was for the U.S. government to endorse monotheistic religion, the supplement to the pledge was unconstitutional. I feel that the time has come to correct this mistake.

The June ruling sparked a public outcry in support of the beloved pledge. Many people (including myself) want to keep the pledge in our schools as a reminder of our nation's heritage and the tenets on which our country is founded. I think that removing the words "under God" would solve the problem.

Until this happens, I will continue to recite the pledge and just keep quiet while everyone else says, "Under God." I hope that someday all United States citizens will be able to enjoy pledging their allegiance to their country, knowing that equality and justice for all is being served.

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*Quote* • • • • •  
• PRAY, v. To ask that the laws of the universe be •  
• annulled in behalf of a single petitioner con- •  
• fessedly unworthy. •  
• — Ambrose Bierce, The Devil's Dictionary •  
• • • • • *Unquote*

Flynn on Ingersoll from page 2  
 lence not only their minds but their bodies as well through gymnastics. He invented the horse, the ring, and the parallel bars – most of the equipment of competitive gymnastics today. They called it “turnen” rather than gymnastics. In the 1850’s every German community had a turnverein, a turner society or a turner club. Many of these had meeting halls that included a gym, social hall and a stage for singing. The first president of the Turner’s Club of Indianapolis was Clemens Vonnegut, the great grandfather of present-day author Kurt Vonnegut Jr. This organization was a great force in the community that went against the teaching of religion in public schools. At that time the controversy was whether Catholic prayers would be allowed in the schools. They also had a Sunday school for the children of freethinkers. They also sang.

Among German-Americans, freethinkers, Lutherans and Catholics love to sing. The next generation after Turner Societies was dominated by singing societies. Cincinnati was no exception to this movement. The numerous singing societies formed a coalition and called it Sangerbund. In 1867 they built a wood-framed, tin-roofed, singing hall at 14<sup>th</sup> and Elm Streets and called it the Sangerhalle. In Spring they held singing contests in the building. These contests were the forerunners of the current May Festival. One disadvantage of the hall was the tin roof, which made so much noise when it rained that it was impossible to hear the music. In 1870 the city acquired the building and renamed it Exhibition Hall. In 1876 it was the site of the National Republican Convention, which featured Robert Ingersoll as a speaker.

The convention nominated Rutherford B. Hayes from Ohio, who went on to win the presidency. Among the other candidates considered at the convention was James G. Blaine of Maine. His name was placed

in nomination by Robert Ingersoll. This was the speech that launched Ingersoll’s career as America’s best known, best-paid, and most controversial orator.

In 1880 the Democrats held their convention at the new Music Hall (dedicated in 1878) that had replaced the former Exhibition Hall at 14<sup>th</sup> and Elm. They nominated General Winfield Scott Hancock who lost to James A. Garfield, another Ohioan

Tom then turned to his primary topic to which he had only alluded before, Robert Green Ingersoll whom he called “the most remarkable man most people have never heard of.” During his public life, which

### Birthplace of Robert G. Ingersoll



Photo by D Loughry

extended from the Civil War to the final year of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, he was anything but obscure. He was a successful attorney and the most successful public speaker in American History, a spokesperson for the Republican Party and an agnostic.

Ingersoll had significant ties to Cincinnati and neighboring regions. In 1876 he spoke from Monument Circle in Indianapolis giving a speech to 10,000 Civil War Veterans. This speech included a prose poem called A Vision of War. In its time it was considered the 2<sup>nd</sup> noblest thing written on the Civil War. The first was Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Today the author of the noble prose poem is, like its author, almost forgotten. Crawfordsville in Indiana was the home of Lew Wallace the author of the novel Ben Hur set in Roman times.

It was considered the most popular novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Wallace was inspired to write it by Robert Ingersoll after a meeting during a train ride between Indianapolis and Cincinnati.

Ingersoll may have been the best known person in America in the post civil war period. He was born in Dresden, New York in 1833 in a house that is now a museum operated by the Council for Secular Humanism as the only freethought museum in the country. He was the youngest of five children of John and Mary Ingersoll. His father was a Presbyterian minister. He was a stern and uncompromising man.

His attitude as well as his anti-slavery sermons caused his dismissal from pastoring churches. Mary Ingersoll died when Robert was only a year and a half. The father and his five children migrated westward to find churches that would hire him. Later, the family lived in various communities in New York, Ohio and Wisconsin. Robert entered public life as an experienced Peoria, Illinois attorney. Following distinguished service in the Civil War, he served as the first Attorney General of Illinois, an appointive office. It was to be the first and last public office that Robert Ingersoll would ever hold. Politically, he

aligned himself with the Republicans who were at that time the party of Lincoln, the voice of reform and progress. From then to the end of the century, no Republican who failed to get Ingersoll’s support was elected to the White House.

Ingersoll criss-crossed the country to give speeches for more than thirty years. He spoke without notes for about three hours to audiences numbering in the thousands. His topics ranged from Shakespeare to Reconstruction, from science to religion. He gave 172 of these speeches in Ohio. In the gilded age, public oratory was the dominant form of entertainment. He was the unchallenged king of American orators. His speaking fees ranged around \$7000, a tidy sum in those days. Most people who paid top dollar to hear him disagreed

with everything he said and detested his worldview but they came anyway. His friends included Andrew Carnegie, Mark Twain, and Eugene Debs. He was admired by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. He bitterly opposed the religious right of his day and was an early popularizer of Charles Darwin. He also advocated the rights of women and African Americans.

Before his death in 1859 the father, John Ingersoll, moved to Peoria where Robert and his brother had their legal practice, to live with his sons. In 1858 he had long talks with Robert and they were reconciled. He had softened some of his views and no longer believed in the inerrancy of the bible but he still believed in the immortality of the soul because on his death bed he asked Robert to read from the passage in Plato that deals with this topic. He died in Robert's arms. Robert Ingersoll, himself died in 1899.

Tom then played a video tape he had produced to greet visitors to Ingersoll's birthplace in Dresden, N.Y. Anyone wishing to view this tape can visit the museum dur-



*John Ingersoll*



**Clarification:**

In last month's Report on Bill Jensen's talk, I cited a quotation, which said that Einstein, did not blame the Germans, they were acting out their nature. Some people may have felt that this was in reference to the Holocaust. Since the statement was made in answer to a journalist's question following World War I, the Holocaust would not occur for twenty plus years. Einstein did express himself with reference to the Holocaust when he said the he did not, could not forgive them for the Holocaust. This was later noted in Bill's talk.

— George Maurer

**Quote**

Most people past college age are not atheists. It's too hard to be one in our society, for one thing. For another you don't get any religious holidays off. And even if you hide behind being an agnostic, you can't be sure if people will take you seriously. The best position is to claim a Catholic father and a Jewish mother — then take all the holidays.

— Franz Bibfeldt Jr.  
after Mort Sahl

**Unquote**

**Quote**

... the teleological view of the universe is an illusion. Bluntly, human existence is an accident, with no ultimate purpose.

— Norman Levitt, Prometheus

**Unquote**

**Quote**

Another science vs. religion conflict.

Is the era of disinterest in, or the culling of human skeletal remains over with? I suggest not entirely. NAGPRA [the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act] law is now interpreted by some archaeologists and American Indians to effectively mean that when a burial is discovered it should be reburied without study or with only minimal field study. In some cases I have heard about, cleaning of bones was not permitted for even the cursory field observations, and photographing burials was prohibited, all

of which brings to mind the old cultural repressive practice that limited Chinese physicians to using a ceramic model of a woman to try and diagnose a female patient's illness. Reburying human remains does only one thing - it destroys the record of our evolution that rightfully belongs to all societies. From both scientific and humanistic perspectives, this unique evolutionary record belongs to all of humankind regardless of race or religion. The heat of this science versus religion controversy boils down to the question of whose values are going to be gored.

Compromises are beginning to emerge as enlightenment takes hold in both camps, so that the physical evidence of our evolution may eventually be held as important as are the spiritual concerns.

— Christy G. Turner quoted in ACPAC Newsletter (March 2003) p. 1

**Unquote**

# Why the Wall? What did the Fathers of the Country fear?

We are not and never were a "Christian nation." Our founders understood the devastating nature of holy wars and wisely established a secular state ruled by "We the People" through a godless document known as the United States Constitution.

Herb Silverman, Charleston Post and Courier (2 November 2003)

The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States says: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, ..." This simple phrase instructs the government never to favor one religion over others, which can only be accomplished by not favoring any religion. The fathers of the Constitution were very much aware of history, and that meant European history. A history replete with religious strife and conflict.

Less than 150 years before the American Revolution the bloodiest, most destructive war in European history was fought on German soil. In this war every major power intervened on one side or the other. For thirty years, 1618 to 1648, armies of France, Sweden, Denmark and Austria marched and countermarched across the country, plundering and burning the towns and villages. Many lands were so devastated and burned over, that some villages of the time are lost in the forest regrowth and have been recovered only recently by aerial survey. The Thirty Years War started as a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics, and ended with the principle that each ruler would determine the religion of his realm and people. Germany became a patchwork of Lutheran and Catholic dukedoms and small kingdoms. Many believers were not willing to follow these established churches. Baptists and Anabaptists, who insisted on adult baptism fled to America. In 1683 the first organized migrants sailed on the Concord to follow William Penn's call to settle in Germantown.

The absolutist rulers of Europe used the Churches to implement their rule. English rulers extended the power of the Anglican Church to Ireland. Scottish kings appointed bishops to supervise the Presbyteries of their subjects. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Mary Stuart as Queen of Scotland led the Roman Catholic counter reformation. Her son, James I of England, authorized a new version of the Bible in 1611. The King James version was deliberately shaped to support the "divine right of kings" against the democratic impulses of the Protestant people. This version of the scriptures was resisted in the homeland, but control of imports into the American colonies forced the King's version willy nilly on the Americans. From 1640 to 1660 the British Isles lived under the religious dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell. In the turmoil that led to the dictatorship a group of religious separatist set out on the pilgrimage to America arriving in 1620 on the ship Mayflower.

In 1685 King Louis XIV of France lifted the Edict of Nantes on the toleration of Protestants. He desired to unify the country and

bring the Protestants into line under the rule of the Church. Hundreds of Protestants were murdered. Thousands of Huguenots fled the country, many to settle in the American colonies. Nowhere did the imposition of one Christian version of religion or another proceed without bloodshed, and often the use of civil force led to war. To avoid the bloody religious problems of Europe, the American framers of the constitution sought a way to avoid Royal power and the conflicts of religion.

The 18<sup>th</sup> Century was also the Age of Enlightenment. This is a term used to describe the trends of thought in Europe and its colonies before the French Revolution of 1789. This wording was used by writers of the period itself, convinced they were emerging from centuries of religious ignorance and obscurantism, into a new age in the light of reason, science and human rights.

As the fathers of our country saw it, religious quibbles and quarrels can not be settled by reason and logic. To make someone else believe your way leads quickly to the use of force. No matter how tolerant a religion the state implements, there will be some dissenters. On the other hand Jefferson pointed out, whether you believe in one god, or twenty or no god does not harm my life or property. So allow everyone to believe as he wishes, and keep the government out of people's churches and creeds. Jefferson's ideas are perhaps most clearly shown in the 1786 Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom:

Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly, that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall

be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in nowise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

At the time of the American revolution several of the States had established one Church or another as official State Churches. As late as 1801 the Baptists of Danbury in Connecticut had reason to fear persecution from the authorities of their State. They appealed to the President for help and support. Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists, dated 1 January 1802 has become a fundamental document explaining the meaning of the religion phrase of the First Amendment and the relationship between Church and Government. The phrasing of Jefferson's letter has become justly famous:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;" thus building a wall of separation between church and State.

Let me add that this letter does not merely represent the private opinion of Thomas Jefferson, but the official interpretation of the Constitution by the President. Jefferson did write the letter, but as a document of State had it examined and vetted by his Attorney General.

— Wolf Roder

# January Meeting :



Tuesday, 27 January, Tommie Thompson and Dr. Richard Bozian

## Cooperation with The Interfaith Alliance

On January 27, at 7 PM at the Vernon Manor, Tommie Thompson and Dr. Richard Bozian will tell us about The Interfaith Alliance and why FIG should cooperate with it.

With over 150,000 members drawn from more than 70 faith traditions --and those with none at all-- the Interfaith Alliance has local groups in 38 states, including one here in Cincinnati. Their website contains the following excerpts:

We actively challenge those, such as the Religious Right, who foster intolerance and degrade the value of a multi-faith nation, instead protecting religious integrity in America by affirming the duty of people of faith and good will to promote the healing and positive role of religion in public life.

On Capitol Hill, through community and online activism, and by focusing media coverage, we work to safeguard religious liberty, ensure civil rights, restore good government, strengthen the public education system, eradicate poverty, and champion a safe and clean environment.

We work toward a religiously diverse and pluralistic society, wherein people of all faiths — and those who identify with no faith — are welcome, and no one faith receives preferential treatment. We reject the use of religion as a political weapon, and refute any claim that the only true national vision is that of a Christian America.

The Interfaith Alliance works to ensure that no American is discriminated against on the basis of religion, race, creed, ethnicity, color, gender, age, or sexual orientation. [www.interfaithalliance.org]

Tommie Thompson and Dick Bozian co-facilitate the local chapter of The Interfaith Alliance. Dick is also a member of FIG. He has spoken to us several times over the years, particularly on subjects connected

## Quote . . . . .

The "Wedge," a movement — aimed at the court of public opinion — which seeks to undermine public support for teaching evolution while cultivating support for intelligent design theory, was not born in the mind of a scientist, or in a science class, or in a laboratory, or from any kind of scientific research, but out of personal difficulties after a divorce which led to Phillip Johnson's conversion to born-again Christianity. The wedge movement thus began, in a very real sense, as a religious epiphany in the life of Phillip Johnson. In accounts given by Johnson himself, he says that "the experience of having marriage and family life crash under me, and of achieving a certain amount of academic success and seeing the meaninglessness of it, made me . . . give myself to Christ at the advanced age of 38. And that aroused a particular level of intellectual interest in the question of why the intellectual world is so dominated by naturalistic and agnostic thinking."

— Barbara Forrest, "The Wedge at Work" in Robert T. Pennock (ed.) Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics p. 6 and quoting Stephen Goode, "Johnson Challenges Advocates of Evolution" in Insight on the News (25 Oct. 1999)

## . . . . . Unquote

## Quote . . . . .

A West African Myth:  
God created several human beings, male and female, from clay. He then put them into an oven to be baked nicely black. The Devil opened the oven door prematurely and some people jumped out. These were pale and underdone and therefore weak - so Blacks feel under an obligation to help Whites who are unable to do hard work. God closed the oven door again, but at successive openings yellow and brown people jumped out, also before the baking process was complete. Only the black people remained to be fully baked, as God had intended.

## . . . . . Unquote

## Quote . . . . .

Is this why the church is so afraid of sex?  
Even if I have kept some of the reflexes of a practicing Catholic to this day (secretly making the sign of the cross if I'm afraid something is going to happen, feeling watched as soon as I know I have done something wrong, or make a mistake), I can no longer really pretend that I believe in God. It's highly possible that I lost this belief when I started having sexual relationships.

— Catherine Millet, The Sexual Life of Catherine M. (2002) p. 22

## . . . . . Unquote





# An Interview with Anthropologist Scott Atran

by Josie Glausiusz in the October 2003 issue of Discover. Internet posted on 20 September 2003 at <<http://209.157.64.200/focus/f-news/991723/posts>>

In your book *In Gods We Trust*, you call religion an evolutionary riddle. Why?

Answer: Think about it. All religions require costly sacrifices that have no material rewards. Look at the Egyptian pyramids. Millions of man-hours. For what? To house dead bones? Or the Cambodian pyramids. Or the Mayan pyramids. Or cathedrals. Or just going to church every Sunday and gesticulating. Or saying a Latin or Hebrew prayer, mumbling what are to many people incoherent words. Stopping whatever you're doing to bow and scrape. Then think about the cognitive aspects of it. For example, to take alive for dead and weak for strong. I mean, what creature could possibly survive if it did these kinds of things systematically?

Look at the things that religion is said to do. It is said to relieve people's anxieties, but it's also said to increase their anxieties so that elites can use them for political purposes. It's supposed to be liberating. It's supposed to encourage creativity. It's supposed to stop creativity. It's supposed to explain events that can't be explained. It's supposed to prevent people from explaining them. You can find functional explanations, and their contraries, and they're all true.

Why then has religion survived in so many cultures?

Answer: Because humans are faced with problems they can't solve. Think about death. Because we have these cognitive abilities to travel in time and to track memory, we are automatically aware of death everywhere. That is a cognitive problem. Death is something that our organism tells us to avoid. So now we seek some kind of a long-term solution. And there is none. Lucretius and Epicurus thought they could solve this through reason. They said, "Look, what does it matter? We weren't

alive for infinite generations before we were born. It doesn't bother us. Why should we be worried about the infinite generations that will be after us when we're gone?" Well, nobody bought that. The reason that line of reasoning didn't work is because once you're alive, you've got something that you're going to lose.

Another problem is deception. Look at society. If you've got rocks and stones and pieces of glass and metal before you, and you say, "Oh, that doesn't exist," or "That's not really a piece of metal," or "That's not really a tree," someone will come along and say, "Look, you're crazy; I can touch it; there's a piece of metal there; I can show you it's a piece of metal." For commonsense physical events, we have ways of verifying what's real or not. For moral judgments, we have nothing. If someone says, "Oh, he should be a beggar and he should be a king," what is there in the world that's going to convince me this is true? There is nothing. If there is nothing, how are people ever going to get on

with one another? Especially non-kin. How are they ever going to build societies, and how are they ever going to trust one another so they won't defect? One way that humans seem to have come up with is to invent this minimally counterintuitive world developed by these deities, who are like big brothers who watch over and make sure that there will be no defectors.

Do you think science will ever replace religion?

Answer: Never. Because it doesn't solve any of the problems that religion solves, like death or deception. There is no society that survives more than a generation or two that isn't religiously based—even the Soviet Union, where half the people were religious. Thomas Jefferson's unitarian God fell by the wayside. The French Revolution's neutral deity also fell by the wayside. People want a personal God, for obvious reasons, to solve personal problems.

## Quote

• Precise

• Fewer than one in ten Americans accept evolution as a process that goes on without divine intervention. This book not only endorses that last view, it also claims that every aspect of the human spirit — mind, thought, feeling, love, dreams, hope, admiration, decency, faith, and in general everything that the religious person takes as evidence for the soul — came from that same natural process, without need of divine assistance.

— Melvin Konner, *The Tangled Wing: Biological Con-*

## Quote

• Hutton's arguments about God's motivations would hold no weight in modern geology, but they show that science is muddier than it seems, and that scientists' ideas and inspirations can come from unexpected sources. What distinguishes science from pseudoscience is not whether your theory originated with some particular conviction about how the world works, or whether you feel an emotional attachment to it. What matters is the evidence you find to support it, and whether you are ultimately prepared to accept that it could be wrong.

## Unquote

## Unquote



## Becoming an AHA Minister.

"Everyone needs a faith to live by." Such remarks by People of Faith irk me mightily. Such folks are really saying that if one is not a theist, one has no faith to live by. Furthermore, one is then free to be quite immoral because faith in God and His Bible and clergy are the only effective basis for morality. This would mean that Buddhism and Confucianism are not religions! Religion, after all, is institutionalized faith. (Organized religion can also be a lot of other things. Permit me to leave its sins for some other venue.) Faith, for me, is the name we give to a very high degree of confidence. If you lose your faith, the consequences are disastrous. Neurotic apathy or suicide may result. Faith for me consists of whatever

one's most important values are, — the belief in which one has the most confidence. They support life's purposefulness.

What, then are the values held most dearly by Humanists? In what do they place their faith? Humanism's faith is in human reason. Our survival as a species and as individuals depends on our efforts, down through the millennia, to use our ability to reason and to be as rational as possible. Only thus can we understand the mysteries of human life, the world we live in, and the entire cosmos

itself. It is a confidence based on the history of our species' extraordinary success in surviving natural catastrophes and human errors using human skills. This has produced an abundance of people and an abundance of products to sustain and entertain us. What stronger basis can there be for a system of beliefs, — a faith? If our ancestors had relied entirely on prayer, chants, incantations, rituals, mythic demons, angels and gods, we would still be cowering in the caves and wandering fearfully in the forests. Faith in the supernatural has served millions, but only as a placebo. Rational observation and its consequences have turned grasses into grains, and replaced demons with bacteria and viruses, against which we could construct rational defenses.

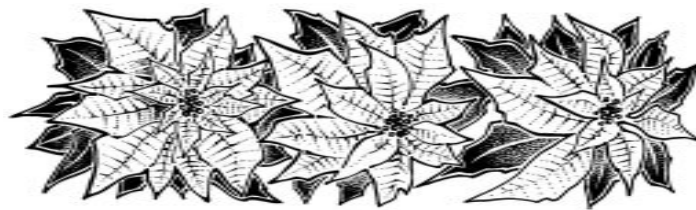
Whether humanists call themselves secular humanists or some other sort of humanist is not a primary concern, to me. If you define "faith" and "religion" differently than I do, make this clear. But, let us not be divided by semantic word games. I rejoice in the acceptance of humanism whether it is labeled secular or something other.

So, when I noticed an ad in The Humanist about becoming a humanist minister, I responded. I supplied the required information about myself, my beliefs, and my life. With some delay I found a number of people who knew me well enough to write letters of recommendation and were members of the American Humanist Association. In October of 2002 I received the documents which proclaimed me a humanist minister. This enables me to conduct marriages and other ceremonies for folks who are so distant from churches that they will not even make use of a Unitarian Church, but who still desire a meaningful ceremony. For me, "faith without dogma" means I can be an active member of a Unitarian-Universalist Church and at the same time be of service to folks beyond the ranks of the U.S. Having passed my eightieth year, why not be of such service.

-- Laurence Grambow Wolf (professor emeritus)

## ---And a Happy Feast Season and Good Wishes to All !

Whatever day you plan to celebrate. We wish you a good time whether you celebrate Christmas or Father Frost, Chanukah or Sylvester and the New Year. Whether you hoist one on the Winter Solstice, which falls on 22 December at 7:04 Universal Time (12:04 EST), on St. Nicolas Day, which is the sixth of December, or have a final revel on Perihelion, 4 January at 18 Universal Time.



## A Freethinker's Thanksgiving

From Jeff Seaver via Secular Humanist internet Group

We take time from our busy lives to pause and celebrate together. Though we live in a world of divisions, where differences in culture and religion can lead to ha-

tred and violence, we see the beauty of these differences. We give thanks for the prosperity that we enjoy and we are thankful for the chance to live in peace with so many people of different backgrounds.

We realize that many do not share this good fortune, and those of us belonging to different Faiths or to no Faith, share a responsibility to give back to our world. We should all work to extend this feeling of compassion and acceptance beyond tonight and into all of our families and communities, including those who do not accept us.

We give thanks to all those who fight poverty with generosity, hatred with love, exclusion with acceptance.

He drew a circle that shut me out —  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle that took him in.



# BOOK REVIEW

Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?  
Edited by Paul Kurtz, Barry Karr, and Ranjit Sandhu  
(Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003)

A collection of essays is always difficult to review. Do I examine them each, or try to say something about all of them collectively. This book contains a total of 37 pieces, plus "An Overview of the Issues" and "Afterthoughts" by the first editor. The majority of the essays come from just three venues. Twenty-four were written for or reprinted in the *Skeptical Inquirer*; six appeared in *Free Inquiry*; and another four were delivered at the conference on *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible* sponsored by the Center for Inquiry and held in November 2001 in Atlanta, Georgia. Only three of the pieces have been extracted from other sources. Even the editors' "Afterthoughts" have already been printed in the *Skeptical Inquirer*. So if you subscribe to these magazines and attended the conference, you would already be familiar with the vast majority of thought presented in this volume.

The book is organized into seven themes on the roles of science and religion: cosmology, intelligent design creationism, conflicts between science and religion, science and ethics, paranatural claims, scientific explanations of religion, and the possibility of accommodation. In most sections the essays explain the position of science and the unbeliever against religion. But there is a possibility of bringing out conflicts between supporters of religion and their skeptics. William Dembski is given an opportunity to explicate his ideas on "Intelligent Design" but instead expounds on the politics which will make it difficult for skeptics to "unseat" this form of creationism in the public square.

Stephen J. Gould's argument about two intellectual realms: science for the material, religion for morality leads the section on science and ethics. Dawkins, in contrast, argues Gould's contention is nonsense. In practical reality nobody draws on scripture for ethics, especially not on the Old Testament. On the contrary, science impacts ethical ideas. Think only of the issues raised by cloning and embryonic cell experiments. "Evidently, we have some alternative source of ultimate moral conviction which overrides scripture when it suits us." (p. 208)

The fact is that science and religion are quite far apart, and probably not merely incompatible, but incommensurable. To scientists, at least to some biological and social scientists, religion is merely another phenomenon of the material world. The section "Scientific Explanations of Religious Belief" presents some interpretations. Why indeed do people believe in a god or gods or other weird improbabilities? What is there in biology and culture, or in human evolution that gives us the strong conviction there is a human soul, even an immortal soul, or a soul that survives the body, and a place or places where that soul migrates after death. The very fact that such fantasies are well-nigh universal among contemporary humans and throughout understood history has often been used as a proof that there must be some truth to the god myth. Science in contrast sees no soul, only a mind that is part of the body. The universe is impersonal and uncaring. When you are dead, you are dead, finish, gone. Physicist Matt Young comments: (p. 351)

Some people find this argument very threatening. It might imply that mind is an epiphenomenon, that is the result of physiological processes in our brains and bodies, and nothing more. That there is no purpose to our existence. That one day there will be no more humans, no Earth, no universe as we know it. To me, however, these are plain physical facts with no moral or ethical content. The fact that we do not have immortal souls does not justify unethical behavior. We might like the world to be otherwise, but it is not.

The world perceived by science and unbelief is not a pleasant place. Nor is it a place where good and justice and well being are ultimate victors. Perhaps that is why we need the fantasy of god and heaven. If you are strongly interested in these subjects, it is good to have all this material in one place on one shelf, instead of scattered in boxes of old magazines.

— Wolf Roder

*Quote* •••••  
• Most preaching sounds to me like advertising.  
• But I can never tell if God is the sponsor or the  
• product.  
••••• *Unquote*



December Potluck: Tuesday 9th 6:30 PM

December Meeting: Tuesday 16th 7 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 and an affiliate of the American Humanist Association. We have applied to be also affiliated with 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](mailto:figleaves@fuse.net), or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at [gofigger.org](http://gofigger.org)