

FIG LEAVES

Volume 21 Issue 11

December 2012

January 2013 Meeting: Tuesday Jan. 22, 7-9 PM, Hannaford Suites, Cincinnati

For our January meeting, we will be hosting a movie night.

Salvation Boulevard

featuring Greg Kinnear, Pierce Brosnan and Marisa Tomei

Come join FIG for a movie night and take a break from those winter doldrums. FIG will provide popcorn and soft drinks, but feel free to bring other snacks and drinks.

Salvation Boulevard is a tongue-in-cheek look at a charismatic larger-than-life evangelical preacher, Pastor Dan Day, whose charm – and real estate developments – have captivated a small western American town. Part satire and part parable, the film is based on Larry Beinhart's comic novel of the same name.

Carl (Greg Kinnear) is a former follower – not of Christ, but of the Grateful Dead – who has since become “found” in Dan's Evangelical community, serving as one of the preacher's great examples of spiritual and moral transformation. After a late night confrontation with a best-selling atheist professor (Ed Harris), Carl's new belief system is upended, leaving Pastor Dan's doughy henchman (Jim Gaffigan) to cover up an increasing series of “sinful acts.” As much as he prefers to “go with the flow”, Carl finds himself on the run, torn between two women: Honey (Marisa Tomei), a security guard who still longs for the Deadhead days; and his militantly devout wife Gwen (Jennifer Connelly). While a major groundbreaking and a chastity ceremony hang in the balance, only time – and perhaps God – will tell if the right or righteous man will prevail.

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Events

January 2013. Meeting

Tuesday, Jan. 22nd at 7-9 pm
Hannaford Suites Hotel
5900 East Galbraith Rd.
Cincinnati, OH

February 2013. Meeting

TBD

Directions to The Hannaford Suites Hotel,

5900 East Galbraith Rd.

- 1) Take Exit 12 onto Montgomery Rd.
- 2) From the off Ramp at Exit 12:

From the North - Turn Left **OR**

From the South - Turn Right

- 3) Continue on Montgomery Rd. to East Galbraith Rd. Turn Left.

- 4) After you go under I-71, turn right into the driveway of the Hotel.



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Whenever we send out an E-mail, several rejections are returned. To confirm your E-mail and Snail-mail address if it has changed, please send an E-mail to Brian Sellers at bsellers@fuse.net.

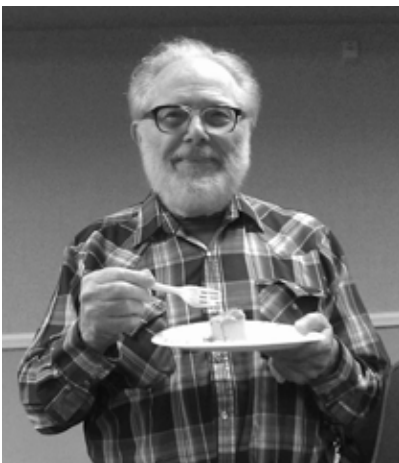


Nov/Dec FIG Meeting/Potluck:

Great Talk +



Good Food =



A Great Potluck!



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

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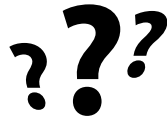
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We request contributions above membership dues. Contributions are tax deductible.



Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



This month I will discuss the nagging question that every atheist gets asked, “If you don’t believe in God, why do you talk so much about it?” Of course this is usually right after they have come knocking at your door trying to get you to go to church. I have been asked, “You don’t go on and on about how you disbelieve in Bigfoot, so why is god different?”

They are right in that I don’t reject other myths with the same vigor that I reject their deity. But there is something that the Christian is unaware of. The difference between believers in Bigfoot and Evangelical Christianity is that Bigfoot believers number a few thousand while they number millions. Bigfoot devotees are not trying to take over our government and make their beliefs the law of the land. Bigfoot devotees have not dominated our culture into giving them unfair and illegal privilege or been politically active like the current generation of Christian Evangelicals. Religion today is bolder and more vocal than it has been at any time since the anti-communist scare of the 1950’s.

We live in a nation of such overwhelming Christian privilege that the typical believer just takes it for granted that they should be able to post their religious messages and symbols everywhere including government buildings, businesses and mass media without anyone daring to question the intrusion. We tolerate billboards threatening us with eternal torture, call us names and insinuate that we are secretly craven immoral brutes because we are not believers. It is in our face every day, how can we not talk about it? They do not see it because they agree and accept the message, but we who do not share their beliefs are smothered in silly, harmful Christian dogma.

This is why we talk so much about the gods we don’t believe in, we are not given a choice. I know of no atheist or agnostic who would not be more than happy to never waste another second thinking about non-existent beings. However, the religious smugly mistakes silence for an inability to answer. There is so much at stake that we must argue, debate and win. The stakes are higher now than ever because a new movement has swept across the Evangelical world called Christian Dominionism (also called Christian Reconstructionism). This is a belief

that in order for Jesus to return, Christians must take over every facet of society including the government, business, finance and the media. They are self-proclaimed theocrats and include such well-known names as Texas Governor Rick Perry, Michelle Bachmann and Sarah Palin. I believe they would not hesitate to impose fines, imprison or do worse to those who disagree with them.

Furthermore, while a debate on the existence of pixies, elves and unicorns may be an intellectual discussion, a debate on the merits of religion cannot be. Why? Because the religious believer is far more concerned with emotion than reason, with how they feel over how they think. Unless we who oppose the Evangelical push to dominate our world also appeal to their emotions as well as their intellect we will not win. In the past, emotional appeals have been frowned on in the freethinking community but we must get past this hurdle of we are to succeed.

Activism with the atheist/agnostic movement is a must in order for survival in a world where you can’t go to a football or baseball game without the teams having to run through banners with scriptures written on them, or having to sit through prayers before every ceremony.

I hope that the day will come when none of us ever have to talk about a god again, but I think it will not occur in my life time. ☚



Victoria’s Secret

A husband walks into Victoria’s Secret to purchase some sheer lingerie for his wife. He is shown several possibilities that range from \$250 to \$500 in price, the more sheer, the higher the price. He opts for the most sheer item, pays the \$500 and takes the lingerie home. He presents it to his wife and asks her to go upstairs, put it on and model it for him. Upstairs, the wife thinks, “I have an idea. It’s so sheer that it might as well be nothing. I won’t put it on, but I’ll do the modeling naked, return it tomorrow and keep the \$500 refund for myself.” So she appears naked on the balcony and strikes a pose. Her husband says, “Good Lord! You’d think that for \$500, they’d at least iron it!”



He never heard the shot. Funeral will be Friday.



Love in the 40's

Our own Vivian Kline has a new book out now available at Kindle and Amazon.

Love in the '40s When Mail Came Twice a Day

A 19 year old Vassar College girl and an older man who is getting a PhD at Columbia University are 80 miles apart. Since a phone call then cost 80 times a 3 cent stamp, they write and write. (No face book, twitter or texting for them!). Thru their letters you will get to know a real and intimate love story set in a time when America was at war.



What makes their magic?
You'll learn their history.
He's young; she's younger.
You'll solve their mystery.

A great holiday gift for someone, or as one reviewer headlined "What a true love story!"



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Science Book Club

2012 Schedule, books, and dates

All meetings are on 3rd Sunday of month at 2:30 pm. All meetings at the Hamilton County downtown Public Library in room 3A.

December 16 — *How We Decide*, Jonah Lehrer 2009



Upcoming Meetups

Monday, December 17, 2012 6:30 PM

Monthly Monday Meetup @
Rio Grande Mexican Restaurant
40 Carothers Road; Newport, KY 41071

Friday, December 21, 2012 7:30 PM

End of the World Party @
Go Bananas Comedy Club
8410 Market Pl Ln, Cincinnati, OH 45242

Thursday, January 3, 2013 7:00 PM

First Thursday @ Betta's Italian Oven
3764 Montgomery Road, Norwood, OH 45212
(513) 631-6836



Judy Wallman, a professional genealogical researcher, discovered that Hillary Clinton's great-great uncle, Remus Rodham, was hanged for horse stealing and train robbery in Montana in 1889. The only known photograph of Remus shows him standing on the gallows. On the back of the picture is this inscription: "Remus Rodham; horse thief, sent to Montana Territorial Prison 1885, escaped 1887, robbed the Montana Flyer six times, caught by Pinkerton Detectives, convicted and hanged in 1889."



Judy e-mailed Hillary Clinton for comments. Hillary's staff of Professional image adjusters sent back the following biographical sketch:

Remus Rodham was a famous cowboy in the Montana Territory. His business empire grew to include acquisition



of valuable equestrian assets and intimate dealings with the Montana railroad. Beginning in 1883, he devoted several years of his life to service at a government facility, finally taking leave to resume his dealings with the railroad. In 1887, he was a key player in a vital investigation run by the renowned Pinkerton Detective Agency. In 1889, Remus passed away during an important civic function held in his honor when the platform upon which he was standing collapsed.

And **that** is how it's done when you're a politician, folks!



A Congressman, A Doctor, And A Member Of The House Science Committee Knows:

Rep. Paul Broun (R-GA) — a physician, with an M.D. and a B.S. in chemistry — tore into scientists as tools of the devil in a speech at the Liberty Baptist Church. “All that stuff I was taught about evolution and embryology and the Big Bang Theory, all that is lies straight from the pit of Hell,” Broun said. “And it’s lies to try to keep me and all the folks who were taught that from understanding that they need a savior.”

Broun serves on the House Science Committee, which came under scrutiny recently after another one of its Republican members, Rep. Todd Akin (R-MO), suggested that victims of “legitimate rape” have unnamed biological defenses against pregnancy. “You see, there are a lot of scientific data that I’ve found out as a scientist that actually show that this is really a young Earth,” he said. “I believe that the Earth is about 9,000 years old. I believe it was created in six days as we know them. That’s what the Bible says.”

“It teaches us how to run our lives individually, how to run our families, how to run our churches. But it teaches us how to run all of public policy and everything in society. And that’s the reason as your congressman I hold the holy Bible as being the major directions to me of how I vote in Washington, D.C., and I’ll continue to do that.”

God's Answers

David Jimenez believed his prayers had been answered. Day after day, he had stopped and knelt before the massive crucifix outside the Church of St. Patrick in Newburgh, N.Y., to seek God’s help for his wife, Delia, who was suffering with ovarian cancer. After many months, and excellent doctors, Delia was cured. David, in his gratitude, offered to clean the 600-pound crucifix. It fell on him. The 45-year-old pizza worker was flung “down to the parking lot, crushing his right leg,” He was truly slain by the Lord! His lawyer said: he’s suing the church, because the \$7,000 plus food that his fellow parishioners gathered for him, without a contribution from the archdiocese’s insurer, doesn’t make up for the loss of his leg and his lost ability to work. (*New York Daily News*)

Organic Life: Not The High Priced Stuff At The Supermarket.

Jet Propulsion Laboratory director Charles Elachi, speaking to an international conference at La Sapienza University in Rome last week, implied that evidence of extraterrestrial life had been discovered on Mars by NASA’s Curiosity Rover. The search for life to which we are not related is arguably the greatest scientific quest of our time. Although NASA and JPL now downplay the story, there’s room for uncertainty. “Organic” is not a particularly exclusive club. There are about four million known organic compounds and new ones are found every day. There is an urgent need for more detail about the discovery and how it was made. But I remind you that November is “rutting season.” Even as male deer are fighting over access to females, science laboratories around the world are fighting for a share of the tight science budget.

– *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 3 December 2012

Selling With Sex

Lindner, a Polish company that makes coffins, is promoting its wares with a calendar featuring sexy semi-clad models posing with the caskets. The calendars “show something half-serious, colorful, beautiful,” says the company’s owner, Zbigniew Lindner: “the beauty of Polish girls and the beauty of our coffins.” The Catholic church is not amused; 93 percent of Poles are Catholic, and a church spokesman says death should not be “mixed up with” sex. “We wanted to show that a coffin isn’t a religious symbol. It’s a product,” Lindner replies. “Why are people afraid of coffins and not of business suits?” (Reuters) You might think all those Catholics would be happy to go to heaven.

Well and Good

Iranian cleric Hojatoleslam Ali Beheshti was hospitalized in the town of Shamirzad in September, allegedly after being roughed up by a woman. According to Iran’s *Mehr* news agency, the cleric was merely performing his “duty,” warning an allegedly immodestly dressed woman to cover herself better. She suggested instead, that he should “cover his eyes,” and when he continued admonishing her, she, unladylike, pushed him away and kicked him.



A Rationalist Fights to Disprove Miracles in India

By Ashley Cleek, *The World*, November 23, 2012

India is no stranger to headline-making miracles. A few years ago, statues of the Hindu elephant God Ganesha reportedly drank milk placed before them. But as reports of the supernatural spring up, groups of rationalists in India have made it their job to disprove them. Sanal Edamaruku is the president of one group called Rationalist International.

Last March, when water began dripping from the feet of a statue of Jesus in Mumbai, Edamaruku visited the site to investigate the claim. His investigation has infuriated some Catholic groups and leaders in Mumbai, and led to a larger debate about secularism in India.

Sanal Edamaruku is a devout rationalist. He believes that all phenomena can be explained by science. Edamaruku has taken it upon himself to travel around India disproving miracles. In 2010, on live television, he challenged a tantric who claimed he could kill a man with one look. He survived. But Edamaruku says it's not just about theatrics, miracle men and superstitions are a deep problem in India. "The problem is, unlike the small superstitions, like people being afraid of a cat crossing their way, in India, superstitions have a deeper impact," he said. "It's making them weak, and it's blinding them." He points to many cases where people worry they've been the victim of witchcraft and actually kill the people they believe have cursed them.

I met Edamaruku three years ago in Delhi. But this time, we spoke over Skype, because he has decamped to Europe, for "an extended lecture tour." Few believe he'll be giving all that many speeches. Edamaruku faces jail time back home.

So what happened?

The controversy began in a sleepy backstreet in a middle class neighborhood of Mumbai, with a 12-foot tall statue of Jesus. It is pretty conventional: thin body, fallen head, stigmata on the hands and feet highlighted in bright red paint. "This cross was built in thanksgiving by parents of AM Dias after his birth in 1873," said Gordon Jacobs, president of a Catholic organization in Mumbai. Eight months ago, in March, a Hindu woman who cleans the statue noticed water dripping from the feet. She spread the word and soon the place was packed.

Church leaders say they never claimed it to be a miracle. But newspapers were

filled with headlines like "Mad Rush to See Jesus Miracle." A local TV station called up the "mythbuster," Edamaruku, to get his opinion on the phenomenon. He responded, characteristically, that such a miracle was impossible.

The Catholic groups insisted that he come investigate. So he went. And he looked. It's not surprising that the Catholics didn't like what he found. Sanal Edamaruku, the rationalist, paid a lot of attention to the feet of the statue. He believes water was traveling up the cross and along the nail to the feet through capillary action. (Photo: Ashley Cleek) On a national TV program, Edamaruku explained that a wall behind the statue was damp with water and algae. He figured the water source was likely a sewer line running close to the cross. And that was the so-called miracle.

In that televised discussion, which included the Archbishop of Mumbai, Edamaruku went further. He accused the church of being anti-science and mocked the Pope for condoning exorcism. Archie Sodder was part of the TV debate. He is a lawyer and a Catholic. He said they asked Edamaruku repeatedly to apologize for the comments he made on air about the Pope and the Catholic Church, but he refused. "We gave him an open opportunity to apologize for what he did," Sodder said. "The telecast was being watched live by millions of people. We gave him an opportunity; we told him 'apologize in true Christian style,' which he refused. Therefore we had no option but to lodge the complaint."

Two complaints were lodged under law 295 A - commonly called the "Blasphemy Law." It's an old law from the time of the British Raj, to punish anyone who, 'deliberately and maliciously attempts to harm the religious feelings of another.' It was created to prevent religious fighting and intolerance. But it's often used to quash

religious dissent.

John Dayal, former President of the All India Catholic Union, which represents some 16 million Catholics in India, said in this case, the law is being misused. "He has a right. He is a fanatic atheist, and a fanatic rationalist, but that is he," Dayal said. "I think India needs its rationalists. They are the pinpricks that keep us on our toes. They are the ones that show a mirror to the society. Rationalists are not questioning faith; they are questioning blind faith. They are questioning fake miracles; they are questioning sleight of hand. Real faith doesn't require all these things." But



the lines have been drawn. The complaints are being investigated by the police and the Catholic organizations remain stalwart. Catholics make up only 2 percent of the 1.2 billion people in India.

Edamaruku said he is not singling out the Church. Rather, denouncing miracles

and disproving superstitions is his life's work. And over the past 30 years, he has attacked almost every religion and spiritual leader in India, including the phenomenally popular Sathya Sai Baba, whose followers have included presidents of India. This is the first time a case has been lodged against him.

"I never ever believed that such a thing would happen in India. I never, ever though that doing something to promote scientific temper and educate people against superstition would be taken as a crime in India," he said. "That's a serious setback in the whole process of our growth in India."

The Catholic Church in Mumbai has released a statement saying they are not complicit with the complaints filed against Edamaruku. Though the Archbishop has reiterated that he should apologize and the complaints dropped.

Edamaruku remains in Europe on his 'speaking tour,' which he says will last until he can be assured of his safety. ❧



A Year In Jail For Not Believing In God?

By Laura Gottesdiener, *Alternet*, 24 November 12

In Kentucky, a homeland security law requires the state’s citizens to acknowledge the security provided by the Almighty God-or risk 12 months in prison. The law and its sponsor, state representative Tom Riner, have been the subject of controversy since the law first surfaced in 2006, yet the Kentucky state Supreme Court has refused to review its constitutionality, despite clearly violating the First Amendment’s separation of church and state.

“This is one of the most egregiously and breathtakingly unconstitutional actions by a state legislature that I’ve ever seen,” said Edwin Kagin, the legal director of American Atheists’, a national organization focused defending the civil rights of atheists. American Atheists’ launched a lawsuit against the law in 2008, which won at the Circuit Court level, but was then overturned by the state Court of Appeals.

The law states, “The safety and security of the Commonwealth cannot be achieved apart from reliance upon Almighty God as set forth in the public speeches and proclamations of American Presidents, including Abraham Lincoln’s historic March 30, 1863, presidential proclamation urging Americans to pray and fast during one of the most dangerous hours in American history, and the text of President John F. Kennedy’s November 22, 1963, national security speech which concluded: “For as was written long ago: ‘Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.’”

The law requires that plaques celebrating the power of the Almighty God be installed outside the state Homeland Security building-and carries a criminal penalty of up to 12 months in jail if one fails to comply. The plaque’s inscription begins with the assertion, “The safety and security of the Commonwealth cannot be achieved apart from reliance upon Almighty God.” Tom Riner, a Baptist minister and the long-time Democratic state

representative, sponsored the law.

“The church-state divide is not a line I see,” Riner told *The New York Times* shortly after the law was first challenged in court. “What I do see is an attempt to separate America from its history of perceiving itself as a nation under God.”

A practicing Baptist minister, Riner is solely devoted to his faith-even when that directly conflicts with his job as state representative. He has often been at the center of unconstitutional and expensive controversies throughout his 26 years in office. In the last ten years, for example, the state has spent more than \$160,000 in string of losing court cases against the American Civil Liberties Union over the state’s decision to display the Ten Commandments in public buildings, legislation that Riner sponsored.

Although the Kentucky courts have yet to strike down the law, some judges have been explicit about its unconstitutionality. “Kentucky’s law is a legislative finding, avowed as factual, that the Commonwealth is not safe absent reliance on Almighty God. Further, (the law) places a duty upon the executive director to publicize the assertion while stressing to the public that dependence upon Almighty God is vital, or necessary, in assuring the safety of the commonwealth,” wrote Judge Ann O’Malley Shake in Court of Appeals’ dissenting opinion.

This rational was in the minority, however, as the Court of Appeals reversed the lower courts’ decision that the law was unconstitutional. Last week, American Atheists submitted a petition to the U.S. Supreme Court to review the law. Riner, meanwhile, continues to abuse the state representative’s office, turning it into a pulpit for his God-fearing message. “The safety and security of the state cannot be achieved apart from recognizing our dependence upon God,” Riner recently told Fox News.

“We believe dependence on God is essential. ... What the founding fathers stated and what every president has stated, is their reliance and recognition of Almighty God, that’s what we’re doing,” he said. ☞

The Eight Days Of Hanukkah

(Note: The words “my true love” can be replaced with the Yiddish “mein Liebchen.”)

On the *first night* of Hanukkah my true love gave to me
Lox, bagels and some cream cheese

On the *second night* of Hanukkah, my true love gave to me
2 Kosher pickles and
Lox, bagels and some cream cheese

On the *third night* of Hanukkah, my true love gave to me
3 pounds of corned beef
2 Kosher pickles and
Lox, bagels and some cream cheese



Time To Reconsider Religious Tax Exemptions

by Bonnie Erbe, a TV host and writes this column for Scripps Howard News Service.

Contact: bonnieerbe@CompuServe.com. November 30, 2012

SAN ANGELO, Texas — While we're on the topic of the fiscal cliff (that's what everyone's talking about, isn't it?) let's not forget that there's one hefty sum Congress and the president could raise without too much trouble.

In April, a University of Tampa professor, Ryan Cragun, and two students examined U.S. tax laws to estimate the cost of tax exemptions for religious institutions. They came to the conclusion that by denying religious institutions tax exemptions on property donations, business enterprises, capital gains on investments and sales and "parsonage allowances," the Treasury could raise as much as \$71 billion a year.

Right now there are two complaints percolating through the Internal Revenue Service that challenge the ability of churches to take political stands and maintain their tax-exempt status. A watchdog group called Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington is asking the IRS to "investigate the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for engaging in prohibited political activity in violation of its protected tax status."

The Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed a complaint with the IRS about the activities of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The bishops under investigation told Catholic laypersons they would go to hell if they voted for President Barack Obama. Billy Graham's group ran newspaper ads in the Wall Street Journal, USA Today and others, pressing voters to vote for candidates who support "the biblical definition of marriage between a man and woman" and who protect "the sanctity of life."

There was only one such presidential candidate and that was Mitt Romney.

In addition, the San Francisco Chronicle online reports that before Election Day this year some "1,600 religious leaders around the country ... talked politics from the pulpit, in an organized movement challenging a 1954 federal law that bans churches from supporting candidates during worship services. "The Pulpit Freedom Sunday movement, organized by a Christian legal group in Arizona called Alliance Defending Freedom, encouraged pastors to 'preach a biblically based sermon regarding candidates and the election without fearing that the IRS will investigate or punish the church,' according to the group's website."

This effort was designed to provoke lawsuits. The 1954 law is rarely if ever enforced, but before that era, American churches received no special exemptions from the IRS. Even today churches are taxed if they engage in commercial activities and in certain other circumstances. They seem to do just fine, notwithstanding. They were granted tax-exempt status because they were seen at the time as doing local communities an awful lot of good. And they legitimately still do some of that. But in the intervening half-century, some (not all) churches have become politically biased and outspoken.

This is where churches begin to undo the good that they legitimately perform (feeding the hungry and clothing the poor) and start contributing to an even more divided nation. That does no U.S. citizen any good. Not all churches take political positions, and those that don't should not lose their tax-exempt status. But it's clear that when preachers allow politics to invade the pulpit, they have moved from being an asset to the community into being an agent for increased divisiveness.

Eventually I believe the IRS and the Supreme Court will move to eliminate tax exemptions for politically divisive churches. That won't happen anytime soon, but as churches become more like businesses and less like community do-gooders, this change seems inevitable. So while Congress is considering increasing individual tax rates and eliminating the home mortgage deduction, it might as well throw taxing politically active churches into the mix. ☞

On the *fourth* night of Hanukkah, my true love gave to me
4 potato latkes
3 pounds of corned beef
2 Kosher pickles and
Lox, bagels and some cream cheese

On the *fifth* night of Hanukkah, my true love gave to me
5 bowls of chicken soup
4 potato latkes
3 pounds of corned beef
2 Kosher pickles and
Lox, bagels and some cream cheese



The 'Stupid Party'

By Herb Silverman, *The Washington Post*,
15 November 2012

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal recently urged his Republican Party to “stop being the stupid party.” In order to win elections, he also advised Republicans to reject anti-intellectualism. While this sounds like an excellent step forward, it will depend on their interpretation of “stupid” and “anti-intellectualism.” This is the same Jindal who, in 2008, signed the Louisiana Science Education Act, which also sounds good on the surface. The act allows local school boards to approve supplemental materials for public school science classes as they discuss evolution, cloning and global warming. Though marketed as support for critical thinking in classrooms, the law was actually designed to open the door to teach creationism and scientifically unwarranted critiques of evolution in Louisiana public school science classes. Although the bill had been opposed by every scientific society that voiced a position, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Jindal ignored the plea of his former genetics professor Arthur Landy, who wrote, “Without evolution, modern biology, including medicine and biotechnology, wouldn’t make sense.” Instead Jindal gave credibility to Seattle’s Discovery Institute, the home base of “intelligent design,” which helped write the bill.

The Louisiana governor apparently doesn’t understand that neither he nor the Republican Party can avoid being stupid and anti-intellectual when they oppose scientific discoveries established for more than a century. It’s demonstrably unintelligent to weaken scientific standards for public schools just because those standards conflict with a literal interpretation of a “holy” book written in a pre-scientific era.

I’d like to hear Jindal criticize incumbent Republican Georgia Congressman Paul Broun, who ran unopposed and easily maintained his House seat, even though he denounced evolutionary theory, embryology, and the big bang theory as “lies straight from the pit of hell.” Worse yet, Broun sits on the House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space and Technology. However, the good news is that Charles Darwin received over 4,000 write-in votes against Congressman Broun. We can only hope that two years from now, Broun will be defeated by a live opponent who shows signs of basic science literacy.

Perhaps Jindal was only telling his Republican colleagues not to be politically stupid. Sadly, it will not be easy to get the current crop of Republican leaders to openly embrace science.

Herb Silverman is founder and president of the Secular Coalition for America and author of *Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt*. ☞



On the *sixth night* of Hanukkah, my true love gave to me
6 pickled herrings
5 bowls of chicken soup
4 potato latkes
3 pounds of corned beef
2 Kosher pickles and
Lox, bagels and some cream cheese

On the *seventh night* of Hanukkah, my true love gave to me
7 noodle kugels
6 pickled herrings
5 bowls of chicken soup
4 potato latkes
3 pounds of corned beef
2 Kosher pickles and
Lox, bagels and some cream cheese

On the *eighth night* of Hanukkah, my true love gave to me
8 Alka- Seltzer
7 noodle kugels
6 pickled herrings
5 bowls of chicken soup
4 potato latkes
3 pounds of corned beef
2 Kosher pickles and
Lox, bagels and some cream cheese

Source: *The Jewish Magazine*, (Dec. 09)



God and the Folly of Faith: The Incompatibility of Science and Religion

by Victor Stenger
(Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012)

Of Miracles and Magisteria

a book review by Richard Morrock

Physicist Victor Stenger is renowned in skeptical circles as a hard-core atheist, and in his latest book, he targets organized religion as well as the quantum spiritualism of Deepak Chopra and the accommodationist position taken towards religion by adherents of Stephen Jay Gould's Non-Overlapping Magisteria (NOMA). This book is clearly a must-read for anyone interested in the role of religion in society today, and it also provides an easy-to-understand explanation of quantum theory, showing that it lends no support to "New Age" spiritualism.

Stenger discusses everything from the origin of the universe to the 2012 elections. Even where one might disagree with his conclusions, he is still thought-provoking. Stenger demolishes the theist argument that science is no less based on faith than religion. He draws a firm line between faith and trust. We have faith in supernatural entities, whose actions we cannot experience directly, or in political or religious leaders whose sincerity has yet to be tested, but we trust science—or a reliable friend, or our auto mechanic—based on our experience. To believe in something in the absence of evidence is, in Stenger's estimation, foolish, and it would be hard to disagree.

Many scientists, following the logic of NOMA, have concluded that science has nothing to say about the supernatural. Stenger points out that scientists have looked into near-death experiences and the effectiveness of prayer on the sick, finding nothing but trickery and self-deception. Why should angels, demons or God himself be considered off limits?

In fact, scientists had better hope that the supernatural doesn't exist, because if it did, all scientific experiments could be invalidated. How would we know that a positive result was caused by the phenomenon the scientists were investigating, or by some lab worker who silently

prayed for the outcome, or by an invisible imp lurking in the corner? Should scientists call Ghostbusters to sweep their labs before each experiment? What, then, about spooky action at a distance?

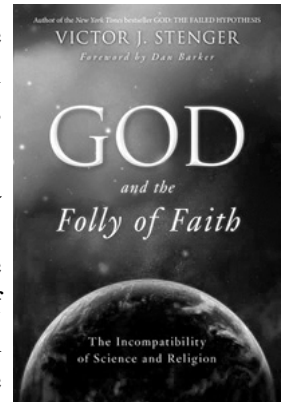
Stenger is right when he points out the hypocrisy of religious leaders who preach morality to their followers while leading depraved lives in private.

And he has fun with the Catholic doctrine that we are all sinners and must suffer the tortures of purgatory before we are admitted, if even then, to heaven. We are still waiting for a priest to say to the grieving relatives at a funeral, "Your beloved husband and father is now burning in the fires of purgatory for a thousand years because he did some bad things in his life." Instead, they invariably remind us that the departed are looking down on us from heaven.

Stenger says that the Vatican never excommunicated a Nazi leader. This is incorrect. Hitler and Goebbels were both excommunicated, but not because of their role in World War II or the Holocaust. Prior to the war, Goebbels married a Protestant woman without agreeing to raise their children—whom the couple murdered during the last days of the Third Reich—as Roman Catholics. Hitler was best man at the wedding. It's not that the Vatican didn't oppose Hitler—they thought he was too tolerant of other religions!

The theistic argument has always been that if the universe exists, it must have had a creator, who can only be God, whatever characteristics one ascribes to Him. This raises the question of who created God. Theists invariably respond that God always existed, to which Bertrand Russell replied that if God could always exist without being created, so could the universe.

That was before the Big Bang Theory (the cosmological event, not the TV show). Scientists accept the idea that the universe had a beginning 13.7 billion years ago. Even though this is consistent with the biblical account ("Let there be light"), fundamentalists in Kansas banned the Big Bang theory from the schools along with Darwinian evolution. Fundamentalists are opposed to science in principle, not only where it contradicts the Bible.





Ironically, while the Big Bang theory does not prove the existence of God, it at least leaves open the possibility.

If the universe was created by a Big Bang, what caused the Big Bang? Perhaps a purple-robed patriarch? Stenger gives us a number of alternative scenarios, all of which leave out supernatural entities. One of these is the two-sided universe. One side is ours, and the other is a mirror image in which time runs backwards. Each side begins with a Big Bang and ends with a Big Crunch, causing the Big Bang on the other side. There, since the arrow of time runs in reverse, ashes burst into flame and turn into wood, water runs uphill, and predators regurgitate their prey, which then comes to life, and the two run off backwards with the predator in the lead.

Another scenario Stenger presents is the Multiverse, which holds that our universe is the result of a black hole created in a much larger universe, which in turn came from an even bigger one, and so on forever. This seems to contradict Stenger's own claim that there are no infinities in nature, which, if true, would narrow down the number of possible scenarios for the origin of the universe. Furthermore, it overlooks the likelihood that each "daughter" universe would be far smaller than its "mother," ultimately leading to mini-universes too small to create any new ones. And it hands the theists the argument that God must have created the Multiverse, since what else could have started it? In any case, we have no more evidence for other universes than we have for God, and this theory violates Occam's razor by postulating a vast number of unproven entities. Also, how could scientists verify the existence of black holes, if they are in other universes?

Stenger is a reductionist, arguing that reality is "particles all the way up." He dismisses the theory that there are different levels of reality, with new laws emerging at each level, claiming that this is supposed to lead to God controlling everything. Not necessarily. What he terms the emergentist (I prefer "interactionist") position is just as compatible with atheism as it is with theism. The different laws that emerge at various levels—physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, history, philosophy—coexist with, rather than replace, the laws at the lower levels. After all, you cannot understand a football game simply by knowing the laws of physics; you also have to understand the rules of football, even if the players and the ball are ultimately made up of particles. Sometimes events at one level of

reality cause events at another level, typically higher but occasionally lower. Stenger denies the possibility of such "top-down causality." But examples of this would be someone suffering a heart attack (biological) after receiving distressing news (psychological), or the public getting angry (psychological) over something a politician said or did (historical). This has nothing to do with any supernatural creator.

Gould's argument for NOMA, which Stenger rejects, was never intended to be a description of reality, but rather a prescription for it. NOMA reduces the Bible and other holy books to works of literature, often set in historical context, but no more literally true than *Doctor Zhivago* or *Saving Private Ryan*. These works have something to tell us, even though we recognize them as fiction. Just as we should learn to distinguish between faith and trust, as Stenger informs us, so should we distinguish between knowledge, derived from science and involving facts, and wisdom, which is supposed to be provided by religion, and which involves values. To be sure, we have pretty much mined the Bible for whatever wisdom it contains, and there is no shortage of pious but unwise people.

Science does not know everything, but if there are things we do not know, or may never know, there are others we can now be sure of. The supernatural does not exist; the laws governing the universe are immutable, and do not change because of our prayers; we don't go to heaven or hell, or get reincarnated when we die; there is no inherent purpose to anything in the universe, except for our own lives and what we make of them. If the public can be educated to accept this, it hardly matters whether or not they call the laws of nature "God."

God cannot yet be disproved, but at least we can dismiss angels, demons, ghosts and Santa Claus. And if miracles were real, far from proving the existence of God, they would actually disprove it. After all, if the laws of nature do not always apply—if the dead return from the grave—then anything is possible and no God is required to maintain the order of the universe, because there isn't any order.

Religious people will not abandon their beliefs in the face of Stenger's arguments. But they might revise them. Take away the supernatural elements from religion, which can be disproven, and the difference between the religious and scientific camps become little more than a matter of semantics.





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

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



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

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

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

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