

# FIG LEAVES

Volume 20 Issue 1

January 2011

## January FIG Meeting:

Tuesday, Jan. 25 at 7:00 pm  
Hannaford Suites

### The Role of the African American Church

Dr. Tonya Matthews; Vice President, Cincinnati Museum Center

For our January meeting, Dr. Tonya Matthews will be joining us to explore the role of the church in the African American community. Many freethinkers wonder how African Americans can be Christians when the Bible supports slavery. This question and others will be explored throughout our meeting. While it was not necessary to attend the exhibit to be able to understand the talk by Dr. Matthews, she was involved in the America I Am exhibit at the Museum Center that some FIG members toured in December and she will take questions that people have relating to the exhibit.

Dr. Matthews is an engaging and dynamic speaker and always brings her creativity of thought and experience to topics which she discusses. Recently Dr. Matthews penned an article for the *Cincinnati Herald*, "A Tale of Three Hoods" in which she highlights three hoods that are featured in the America I Am exhibit: the first is the doctoral hood from W.E.B. Du Bois when he graduated from Harvard; the second hood is the hood of the Ku Klux Klan outfit in the exhibit; and the third hood was that of hip hop artist Tu Pac Shakur who has a poem in the exhibit. She highlights that the KKK hood was designed to stop the proliferation of hoods such as W.E.B. Du Bois' and that the three hoods stand for one to strive for; one to never forget; and one to hold the promises of tomorrow.

FIG Members are encouraged to explore resources that can be found online relating to the topic before our meeting. In September, Richard Dawkins was at Howard University speaking on Science and the Black Community. Also search for Diane Griffin's article "The Color of Humanism," Diane is with the Institute for Humanist Studies.

Tonya Maria Matthews, Ph.D. is the Vice President of Museums at Cincinnati Museum Center. She is also a nationally noted poet, storyteller and spoken word artist who recently moved to Cincinnati from the East Coast. At the Museum Center she oversees all education, research and community outreach programs for the Center. She also handles the direction and application of all research, as well as the creation and delivery of all educational programs.

## Inside

## Page

December Meeting/Trip.....	2
Things To Do, Things To See	4
Science Book Club.....	4
In The News.....	5
Non-Theists In The City: Gray Off On The Wrong Foot. .	6
Gay And Straight - A Black And White Issue .....	7
Unbuckling The Bible Belt - Skepticon III .....	8
Sarah Palin Is Wrong About Jfk, Religion And Politics	9
<i>The Reason For God: Believe In An Age Of Skepticism</i> Book Review By Kenneth Grubbs .....	11

## Events

Note Location/Date/Time  
Changes!

### FIG Community Dinner:

None for January

### January Meeting

Tuesday, January 25, 2011, 7:00 PM  
Hannaford Suites Hotel

### FIG Community Dinner:

None for February

### February Meeting

Tuesday, February 22, 2011, 7:00 PM  
Hannaford Suites Hotel



## December Meeting/Tour

### America I Am

In December, a group of 14 FIG members went to the Cincinnati Museum Center to tour the “America I Am” exhibit. The Museum Center is the fourth stop on the national tour of this exhibit and wrapped up its local run on January 2, 2011. “America I Am” highlights the nearly 500 years of African American history and the imprint Blacks have made on America. The exhibit featured twelve galleries including the arrival of Africans in the New World, Slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, Civil Rights Movement, the role of the African American Church, and Motown and the achievements of black entertainers.

Featuring more than 200 artifacts culled from every period of U.S. history, the exhibition includes objects, texts, religion, music, narration, and media. The first quote to engage the viewers is from W.E.B. Du Bois, “Would America have been America without her Negro people?”

The first gallery features African artifacts and the effects of colonization of Africa that led to enslavement of Africans in the new world. The exhibit highlighted the importance of Africa not only in African American history, but in the evolution of humanity through this quote by Howard Dobson, “Whether one uses the Biblical Adam and Eve or the anthropological Lucy as a point of origin, Africa is recognized as the place where human beings originated as a species.” I think FIG members have always relied on the Museum Center to provide science based experiences and to see this quote early in the exhibit reinforced that this exhibit would again meet those expectations.

As the exhibit continues, viewers confront the Point of No Return, a prison-like complex where Africans were held before they were forced onto slave ships to the new world. Leaving that room, viewers traveled into early slavery in the United States. In each room, multiple artifacts and accounts were displayed and in this room the most striking item was a matching sterling silver bedside grooming platter for women that



Buffalo Soldiers

included a brush, comb, mirror and whip. It made the viewer realize how socialized white men and women were in the South that a whip was part of the collection. The next two rooms highlighted the role of free blacks in the North and the role of the Underground Railroad. There was an exposé on Frederick Douglas and artifacts and accounts from people on both sides of the Underground Railroad - those searching for freedom and those assisting them along the way. There was a wall



**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.

All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., its board, or officers.

#### FIG Board of Directors:

President: John Welte  
 Vice President: Donna Loughry  
 Secretary: Susan Davis  
 Treasurer: Bryan Sellers,  
 Program Chair: Shawn Jeffers,  
 Members: Michele Grinoch,  
 Philip Ferguson,  
 Joe Levee,  
 Pam McKenna  
 Dennis Davis  
 Terry Kassler  
 FIG Leaves Editor: Wolf Roder.



#### Memberships run from:

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

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

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



# FIG LEAVES



size American Flag displayed that belonged to the Black Brigade of Cincinnati, a regiment of soldiers organized to protect Cincinnati when it was in danger of being attacked by the South. In this room, viewers encountered another striking item - a silver cup presented to Preston Brooks, a Senator from South Carolina, for his "gallant behavior" in beating Charles Sumner, a Senator from North Carolina, in the Senate Chambers with his cane in the 1850's as tensions escalated before the Civil War.

The next two rooms highlighted the role of Reconstruction through accounts of African Americans who were elected to Congress after the Civil War, those

who worked as Pullman Porters, students who started Black fraternities and sororities and Garrett Morgan, the inventor of the stoplight. There was also a room highlighting the role of African Americans role in military service, including the role of the Buffalo soldiers, Black cavalry regiments who fought in the West.

In the next room, visitors were confronted with a Ku Klux Klan uniform. It is one of the most striking moments of the exhibit, since the uniform is in a case in the middle of the room and set on a red background. Not surprisingly the next room was the African American church. The juxtaposition of these two areas highlights the presentation of Dr. Tonya Matthews from the Cincinnati Museum Center for our January meeting, since the terror experience outside was often able to be soothed by the camaraderie experienced inside the church.

The last room transitioned to the role of entertainers, athletes, politicians in shaping modern views of the African American experience and the civil rights movement. Glittery outfits were displayed from musicians including Ray Charles, Bootsy Collins, Mavis Staples, Prince, Marvin Gaye and many others. A touching story in this area highlighted the role of being an ally. In 1939,

Marian Anderson, a well known opera singer and a voice against racism, was refused an opportunity to perform in Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). In response, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned her membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution and organized a concert for Marian Anderson to sing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

The exhibit was informative and forced us to think about the collective history that has shaped our nation. The final quote from Thurgood Marshall sums up the experience, "We must dissent because America can do better, because America has no choice but to do

better. Take a chance, won't you? Knock down the fences that divide. Tear apart a the walls that imprison. Reach out; freedom lies just on the other side."

- Reported by Shawn Jeffers ☘



FIG At the Museum



Quote

Beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. Intellect is in itself a mode of exaggeration and destroys the harmony of any face. The moment one sits down to think, one becomes all nose, or all forehead, or something horrid.. Look at the successful men in any of the learned professions. How perfectly hideous they are! Except, of course in the Church. But then in the Church they don't think. A bishop keeps on saying at the age of eighty what he was told to say when he was eighteen, and as a natural consequence he always looks delightful.

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Unquote



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



## The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group

**When:** Monday, January 17, 2011 6:30 PM

**Where:** At the Washington Platform Saloon  
1000 Elm St Cincinnati, OH 45202513-421-0110

### Meetup Description

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

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



The Humanist Association of San Diego needs help with promoting their first annual Southern California Secular Humanist Conference. The Conference is being held at the Mission Valley Resort Hotel in San Diego, California on February 5th. The conference features speakers such as David Silverman, Roy Speckhardt, and James Underdown. Here is the link to the conference's website.

[http://southerncaliforniasecularhumanistconference.org/Home\\_Page.html](http://southerncaliforniasecularhumanistconference.org/Home_Page.html)

Ronald Ramirez



True bravery is arriving home late after a boy's night out, being assaulted by your wife with a broom, and still having the guts to ask:

"Are you still cleaning, or are you flying somewhere?"

## Science Book Club

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

### Preliminary Schedule for 2011:

**January** - Kirk - *Rhythms of the Brain* by Gyorgy Buzsaki, 2006, 464pp

**February** - Peter - two of his articles  
"Is It Inevitable That Evolution Self Destruct?" 4,400 words  
"To Achieve Sustainability" 9,000 words, for both of which he will send out copies by email

**March** - Randy - *The Rational Optimist: How prosperity evolves* by Matt Ridley, 2010, 438pp

**April** - Rick Davis - *You Are Not a Gadget* by Jaron Lanier, 2010, 209pp

**May** - Carolyn - *On The Take : How America's Complicity With Big Business Can Endanger Your Health* by Jerome Kassirer, 2005, 251 pp

**June 5 or 26** - Eric Otto - *Wrong: Why Experts Keep Failing Us - and How to Know When Not to Trust Them* by David Freedman, 2010, 295pp

**June 5 or 26** - Bryan - *A Life Decoded: My Genome, My Life* by J. Craig Venter, 2007, 390pp

**July** - Bob Streifthau - *13 Things That Don't Make Sense* by Michael Brooks, 2008, 240pp

**August** - open

**Sept or Oct** - Frank - *Sacred Geometry* by Stephen Skinner, 2006, 160pp

**October, Nov** - Gary - *What Have You Changed Your Mind About? Today's Leading Minds Rethink Everything* by John Brockman, ed, 2009, 387pp

**Oct or Nov** - Richard Bozian - *The Dependent Gene: Fallacy of Nature vs. Nurture* by David S. Moore, 2002, 312pp,

**November** - Pauline - *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker, Pulitzer Prize, 1973, 314pp

**December** - open

**no date** - Bernie - *The Dominant Animal: Human Evolution & The Environment* by Paul R. Ehrlich 2008, 420pp





## THINGS TO DO....

## THINGS TO SEE...



G. R. Pafumi, author of the recent book *Is Our Vision of God Obsolete? Often What We Believe Is Not What We Observe* would like your to know:

To my fellow Atheists, Agnostics and Non-believers,  
I have just launched my new **Obsolete Vision of God website**, [VisionOfGod.web.officelive.com](http://VisionOfGod.web.officelive.com). In addition to providing information about my book, *Is Our Vision of God Obsolete? Often What We Believe Is Not What We Observe*, I have added web pages which include my Essays and Letters. They can be read online or downloaded and printed as they are in PDF format. My recent talk at the Michigan Atheists State Convention is based on my essay, *God is Dead...and Carl Sagan killed him! The Principle of QED*. It provides many examples of how the "god" concept defies the reality provided by modern science. I hope you will take the time to look it over.

I added a **News Stories** page which includes Relevant News Articles for Non-Believers. Articles include the *50 Most Brilliant Atheists of All Time*, *Can Animals Be Gay?*, Former Dominican priest and evolutionary biologist says, "God is the greatest abortionist of them all," and fifty percent of professors of psychology at US universities and colleges do not believe in any god, and another 11percent are agnostic. These stories are a must read for non believers.



Dear Humanist Group,

I am writing today on behalf of the American Humanist Association's LGBT Humanist Council. The LGBT Humanist Council, founded in 2009, aims to represents the interests of LGBT humanists, working with gay rights organizations to further an agenda of equality for all and aiming to create national and local support for LGBT humanists.

We are embarking on a project to increase local representation of LGBT humanists and incorporate the pursuit of gay rights more deeply in the daily fold of the work of local humanists groups.

As you may know, many humanists already identify as LGBT. Often, coming out as a humanist is just as hard

as coming out LGBT, and visa versa. Humanists can help LGBT people identify their nontheism. Similarly, through their political policies and social practices, humanists can provide a warm and accepting place for their fellow members to come out as LGBT, and thrive!

Would your local group leaders consider creation of a LGBT Humanists Council within your existing Humanist group? The American Humanist Association has long been an LGBT ally, and with the creation of local LGBT Humanists groups, we can show our commitment to locally supporting the struggle for gay rights.

The creation of LGBT Humanist Councils will open local LGBT's eyes to the greater good of humanism, growing your membership and increasing the scope of your group's social action. It may help your humanist group determine which members are interested in working more to advance local gay rights, and allow those people a platform to discuss issues and from which to take action. Whether or not an official subgroup is formed, we are also encouraging your local groups to develop deeper alliances with local existing LGBT groups, to help strengthen the fight for LGBT rights and support those who already act locally in your town, county or state.

As the manager of the LGBT Humanist Council, I am excited to be working with local humanist groups to foster greater involvement with your LGBT communities. I will be getting in touch with your group leadership in the next few weeks to discuss creation of a LGBT Humanist Council in your area. We can further discuss the American Humanist Association's willingness to provide resources and technical assistance to aid in the creation and growth of local LGBT Humanist Councils, as well as provide help in local LGBT advocacy.

I will be getting in touch with each of you in the next few weeks. I very much look forward to continuing this conversation. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me via email or phone.

Thank you in advance for all the hard work this exciting project will take. Together, I know we can make a big difference for LGBT members of our local communities!

Michael Friedman, Manager  
LGBT Humanist Council  
American Humanist Association  
(415) 644-5234; [mfriedman@lgbthumanists.org](mailto:mfriedman@lgbthumanists.org)





## Non-Theists In The City: Gray Off On The Wrong Foot

by Herb Silverman, 30 December 2010

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

An inauguration is a traditional ceremony to mark the beginning of a newly elected leader's term. Such festivities send symbolic messages to the citizenry. You would not think any reasonable politician would want to exclude citizens from participating in this ritual based on race, color, creed, sex, or national origin. But it appears you would be wrong.

I assumed Washington's Mayor-Elect Vincent Gray would oppose discrimination in any form, for any reason. However, he apparently finds it acceptable to discriminate against atheists, agnostics, humanists, and other non-theistic citizens in his city. The mayor's first official inaugural event, on January 2, is scheduled to be an interfaith service entitled "One City ... Praying Together." Nontheists, through the Secular Coalition for America, have asked to be included, but we have been told there is no room for us.

This is wrong on a variety of levels.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits government from taking any action that has the purpose or effect of endorsing religion. Government cannot favor one religion over another or religion in general over non-religion. So how can Mayor-Elect Gray begin his administration with a religious ceremony?

Despite our opposition to government-sponsored prayer of any kind, when the Secular Coalition learned about plans for the inauguration event, rather than simply protest we asked to be part of it along with the invited religious groups. We believe any such service should unite the entire city. The ten national member organizations of the Secular Coalition for America represent millions of secular Americans, and many are Mayor-Elect Gray's constituents.

We are not asking for special treatment. We look for opportunities where religious and secular people in our community can gather for common purpose. Mayor-Elect Gray would not bar blacks, women, or gays from celebrating his inauguration. Why should he exclude those without god beliefs? The bottom line is that Gray

is mixing government and religion, and this is a glaring example of why such a mixture always ends badly. It is a terrible way to start a new administration.

While discrimination still exists against blacks, women, Jews, and gays, it is neither as overt nor permissible as it once was. Nontheistic Americans may be the last minority against whom intolerance and discrimination are not only permitted, but even sometimes promoted by political leaders.

The atheist and humanist community has remained silent too long. The Secular Coalition is working actively to bring about change. In the first century BCE, Rabbi Hillel asked the challenging question, "If not now, when?" I think Barack Obama answered Hillel's question at his January 20, 2009 inauguration: "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change we seek."

We ask Mayor-Elect Gray to change his inauguration plans by either cancelling his prayer service or including nontheistic citizens in the ceremony. ☘





Moses was praying to God to free his people when the voice of God was heard from the heavens: "Moses," he said, "I have good news and bad news."

"What is the good news?" asked Moses.

And God said: "If Pharaoh will not let my people go I will send down a rain of frogs, a plague of locusts and a plague of flies, and I will turn rivers to blood. And if Pharaoh pursues you, I shall open a path for you through the Red Sea, but close it again to drown his army."

"That would be helpful," enthused Moses, "but tell me, what's the bad news?"

God said: "Before I can do all this, you have to prepare an environmental impact statement."





## Gay And Straight--A Black And White Issue

by Herb Silverman, 15 November 2010

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

Despite public and military support for overturning “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the legislation which bans openly gay service members, political, military and religious leaders cite a variety of objections to changing the law.

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) worries that allowing gays to serve openly would impact troop “morale;” Marine Corp Commandant Gen. James Amos says that a policy change may affect “unit cohesion” and “combat effectiveness.” Among the religious leaders opposed to overturning “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is Catholic Archbishop for the Military Services Timothy J. Broglio, who fears that chaplains would be forced to compromise their principles in accepting “objectively disordered” homosexuality, adding that he “can never condone -even silently -homosexual behavior.”

What beliefs are behind banning gays in the military? What’s the role of religion in this debate?

Blacks and whites should not serve together in the military and they certainly shouldn’t share sleeping quarters and mess halls--so said the overwhelming majority of Americans, including our military, in 1948 and 1949 surveys. Nevertheless, courageous and sensible President Harry Truman signed an executive order declaring, “there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.”

At the time, arguments against integration were based on religion and concerns about troop morale. True, you can find arguments in the Bible for separating races, maintaining slavery, and stoning homosexuals. Fortunately, our founding document is the U.S. Constitution, not the Bible.

Racists and homophobes may serve in the military, but they must put aside their prejudices when working as a unit. If they can’t accept that their gay and lesbian comrades deserve equal rights and respect, then they are not fit to remain in the service. Sexual orientation should not be a factor in determining individual rights inside or

outside the military.

It’s a bit ironic that a Catholic Archbishop for Military Services wants to force gays out of the military. What would happen to the Catholic Church if all gay priests were forced to leave their positions? Richard Sipe, a psychotherapist and former priest, has studied celibacy and sexuality in the priesthood for four decades and has authored three books on the topic. He estimates that between 25 and 45 percent of American priests are homosexual.

Civil authority over military authority, as well as separation of religion and government, has worked well in this country for over two centuries. We must not base our decisions on ancient religious texts that are flawed and anachronistic in so many ways. Our secular decisions should be based on the best available evidence.

Most of our recent wars have been against theocratic countries and groups that do not afford gays any rights. On the other hand, in more than thirty countries, including allies like Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom, gays and straights have served their countries openly and effectively for years. When it comes to our ill conceived “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, the question for me is why it is taking so long to repeal? If the United States can’t be a leader in human rights, it should at least not follow so far behind. ☚





A little girl asked her mother, “Where do people come from?” The mother told her the Bible story, how God first made Adam and Eve and they had children, and from them came all mankind. A few days later the girl asked her father the same question. The father told her, many thousands of years ago there were monkeys from which the human race slowly evolved.

The girl was confused. Later she returned to her mother and asked, how it was possible that she told her people were created by God, and Dad said they developed from monkeys? The mother thought a moment and answered: “Well, dear, it is very simple. I told you about my side of the family and your father told you about his.”





## Unbuckling The Bible Belt - Skepticon III

Springfield, Missouri has long been known as the “buckle of the Bible belt.” Now it is also known as the home of one of the largest skeptics conferences in the United States. On November 19, 20, and 21 over 900 people from all over the country gathered in this college town to ask the question, “Does skepticism lead to atheism?” There were talks by fifteen speakers and two panel discussions over the three day event. There was also an active social life with events every night after the scheduled activities.

The Skepticon series began in October of 2008. A small group of students led by J. T. Eberhard decided to encourage skepticism and critical examination of religion in response to a fire and brimstone preacher who regularly appeared on their campus. They formed the Missouri State University Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster and held outreach programs on campus. The group quickly grew. They convinced P. Z. Myers and Richard Carrier to come to the campus and speak. Thus, the first Skepticon event took place with about 150 attendees and two speakers.

The speakers list for this year's event was a mixture of people from all parts of the skeptical movement. It included folks that have been active in scientific investigation for some time such as James Randi, investigator of the paranormal and pseudoscience, Joe Nickell, paranormal investigator and senior Research Fellow for the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, Dr. Victor Stenger, physicist and author, and Dr. P.Z. Myers, biology professor and author of the science blog Pharyngula. Mr. Randi presented anecdotes and film highlights from his long career including his exposure of the faith healer Peter Popoff on Johnny Carson's Tonight Show. Dr. Nickell related stories of his investigation of paranormal phenomena such as the Amityville Horror house (a hoax), the Shroud of Turin (faked in the 14th Century) and UFO's (no evidence found of alien intelligence). Dr. Myers gave a fascinating and often humorous explanation of the way genetic mutations facilitate natural selection by using the analogy of a poker game. Dr. Stenger presented “The Abuse of Physics by Theists and Spiritualists.” He explained the evidence that refutes theologian's claims that the universe is fine-tuned for life and the “New-Age” claims about quantum mechanics that say we can make our own realities with our thoughts.

Historians David Fitzgerald and Dr. Richard Carrier brought skeptical and objective analysis of the origins of Christianity

and the perpetuation of myths related to Christianity. Fitzgerald's talk was entitled “10,000 Christs and the Evaporating Jesus,” and Dr. Carrier's talk was entitled, “Are Christians Delusional?” More about these topics can be found in their books, “Nailed” by Fitzgerald, and “The Christian Delusion” by co-author Carrier.

Most of the speakers are engaged in activism but a few specialize in activism and outreach. Dan Barker is the co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). It is one of the largest free thought organizations in the country and is active in the courts and with its billboard campaigns. Barker spoke about his transition from evangelical minister to well known atheist.

Debbie Goddard is the campus organizer at the Center For Inquiry. Her experience in state-church separation, secularism, and GLBT and other progressive activism enhanced her talk, which was simply titled, “Diversity.” The title was simple but the presentation was an excellent and detailed analysis of the need for diversity in the secular movement. D. J. Grothe, President of the James Randi Educational Foundation and associate editor for Free Inquiry Magazine, spoke about the relationship between skepticism and atheism. His point was they are not interchangeable terms; some skeptics are not atheists and some atheists are not skeptics about subjects other than religion.

John Corvino is an activist and the author of “The Gay Moralists,” a weekly blog. His talk, entitled, “Coming Out Skeptical,” urged those in the skeptic and atheist movement to make it as easy as possible for others to accept them. Be out and proud but also be well dressed, well spoken and respectful. His message was “choose your battles.” Sometimes accommodation is more advantageous than confrontation.

The internet has provided the media for rising stars in the movement. The following are most known for their blogs. Amanda Marcotte is the author of “It's a Jungle Out

There: The Feminist Survival Guide to Politically Inhospitable Environments,” and is a blogger on the blog Pandagon. Her talk, “The Role of Irrationality in Sexism,” exposed the irrational aspects of religion and pseudo-science that lead to sexist attitudes and gender discrimination. Greta Christina, a freelance writer known for her blog, “Greta Christina's Blog,” spoke on “Atheism and Sexuality.” She favorably compared the freedom and responsibility of sexuality associated with atheism to the restrictive, misogynistic and repressive sexuality associated with religion. Rebecca Watson is the head blogger of Skepchick.org and co-host of the podcast “The Skeptic's Guide to the Universe.” Her talk was entitled, “How To Ruin Christmas,” a humorous tongue-in-cheek presentation that provided many good laughs for the audience.

Friend of FIG Sam Singleton presented his play “Patriarchs and Penises.” It is a hilarious and sometimes touching view of the world of Pentecostal evangelists with a few comments on religion in our society thrown in for good measure. His main worry concerns God's followers: “It's knowing that this enthusiastic embrace of the improbable, this obstinate fidelity to falsehood, is damn near an absolute requirement for the highest offices in the most powerful government in human history.”

The conference ended with a presentation by J. T. Eberhard entitled “Dear Christian.” It was a funny and yet warm and passionate appeal for rationality from Christians in their dealings with atheists. He asked Christians not to use the same old arguments to convert him (also, atheists don't try to convert), since he reached non-belief as a conclusion after much thought and study. He reminded them that non-believers are not the ones following a dogmatic attitude of being exclusive and intolerant. It was a call for communication and cooperation between groups to further the common good.





Recommendation: Go to a humanist, atheist or skeptic conference. Not only do you get to enjoy the company of fellow freethinkers and relax in the knowledge that you can be at ease with your lack of belief, but you also get to hang out with the top members of the movement. Most of the speakers at the conferences I have attended

are approachable, friendly and willing to listen to your concerns and answer your questions. Conferences give us a chance to visit with old friends and to make new friends. (There were many folks from Ohio there, including Cincinnati, Dayton and Columbus). Several FIG members attended including Edwin, Terry, Susan, Dennis, Travis,

Pam, and Fran and I. Conferences like this energize and inspire. Many thanks to J. T. and his crew for hosting an exceptional event and for all the hard work and effort they put into it. Look for these talks online soon at <http://skepton.org/>

- John Welte ☸



## Sarah Palin Is Wrong About JFK, Religion and Politics

By Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, *The Washington Post*; 07 December 2010

Sarah Palin has found a new opponent to debate: John F. Kennedy.

In her new book, *America by Heart*, Palin objects to my uncle's famous 1960 speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, in which he challenged the ministers - and the country - to judge him, a Catholic presidential candidate, by his views rather than his faith. "Contrary to common newspaper usage, I am not the Catholic candidate for president," Kennedy said. "I am the Democratic Party's candidate for president who happens also to be a Catholic."

Palin writes that when she was growing up, she was taught that Kennedy's speech had "succeeded in the best possible way: It reconciled public service and religion without compromising either." Now, however, she says she has revisited the speech and changed her mind. She finds it "defensive... in tone and content" and is upset that Kennedy, rather than presenting a reconciliation of his private faith and his public role, had instead offered an "unequivocal divorce of the two."

Palin's argument seems to challenge a great American tradition, enshrined in the Constitution, stipulating that there be no religious test for public office. A careful reading of her book leads me to conclude that Palin wishes for precisely such a test. And she seems to think that she, and those who think like her, are qualified to judge who would pass and who would not.

If there is no religious test, then there is no need for a candidate's religious affiliation to be "reconciled." My uncle urged that religion be private, removed from politics, because he feared that making faith an arena for public contention would lead American politics into ill-disguised religious warfare, with candidates tempted to use faith to manipulate voters and demean their opponents.

Kennedy cited Thomas Jefferson to argue that, as part of the American tradition, it was essential to keep any semblance of a

religious test out of the political realm. Best to judge candidates on their public records, their positions on war and peace, jobs, poverty, and health care. No one, Kennedy pointed out, asked those who died at the Alamo which church they belonged to.

But Palin insists on evaluating and acting as an authority on candidates' faith. She faults Kennedy for not "telling the country how his faith had enriched him." With that line, she proceeds down a path fraught with danger - precisely the path my uncle warned against when he said that a president's religious views should be "neither imposed by him upon the nation or imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office."

After all, a candidate's faith will matter most to those who believe that they have the right to serve as arbiters of that faith. Is it worthy? Is it deep? Is it reflected in a certain ideology?

Palin further criticizes Kennedy because, "rather than spelling out how faith groups had provided life-changing services and education to millions of Americans, he repeatedly objected to any government assistance to religious schools." She does not seem to appreciate that Kennedy was courageous in arguing that government funds should not be used in parochial schools, despite the temptation to please his constituents. Many Catholics would have liked the money. But he wisely thought that the use of public dollars in places where nuns explic-

itly proselytized would be unconstitutional. Tax money should not be used to persuade someone to join a religion.

As a contrast to Kennedy's speech, Palin cites former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney's remarks during the 2008 Republican primary campaign, in which he spoke publicly of "how my own faith would inform my presidency, if I were elected." After paying lip service to the separation of church and state, Romney condemned unnamed enemies "intent on establishing a new religion in America - the religion of secularism."

"There is one fundamental question about which I am often asked," Romney said. "What do I believe about Jesus Christ?" Romney, of course, is a Mormon. He answered the question, proclaiming that "Jesus Christ is the son of God."

Palin praises Romney for delivering a "thoughtful speech that eloquently and correctly described the role of faith in American public life." But if there should be no religious test in politics, then why should a candidate feel compelled to respond to misplaced questions about his belief in Jesus?

When George Romney, Mitt Romney's father, was a presidential candidate in 1968, he felt no such compulsion. Respect for the Constitution and the founders' belief in the separation of church and state suggests that those kinds of questions should not play a role in political campaigns. ⇒



Palin contends that Kennedy sought to “run away from religion.” The truth is that my uncle knew quite well that what made America so special was its revolutionary assertion of freedom of religion. No nation on Earth had ever framed in law that faith should be of no interest to government officials. For centuries, European authorities had murdered and tortured those whose religious beliefs differed from their own.

To demand that citizens display their religious beliefs attacks the very foundation of our nation and undermines the precise reason that America is exceptional.

Palin’s book makes clear just how dangerous her proposed path can be. Not only does she want people to reveal their beliefs, but she wants to sit in judgment of them if their views don’t match her own. For instance, she criticizes Rep. Nancy Pelosi (Calif.), a Democrat and a faithful Catholic, for “talking the (God) talk but not walking the walk.”

Who is Palin to say what God’s “walk” is? Who anointed her our grand inquisitor?

This is a woman who also praises Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural, even though Lincoln explicitly declared, “But let us judge not that we not be judged.” The problem for those setting up a free-floating tribunal to evaluate faith is that, contrary to Lincoln, they are installing themselves as judges who can look into others’ souls and assess their worthiness.

Kennedy did not and would not do that, but not because he was indifferent to faith. In fact, unlike Romney or Palin, in fealty to both his faith and the Constitution, he promised on that day in Houston that he would resign if his religion ever interfered with his duty as president.

My uncle was a man who had his faith tested. His brother and brother-in-law were killed in World War II, and his sister died in a plane crash soon after the war. He suffered from painful injuries inflicted during his Navy service when his PT boat was cut in two by a Japanese destroyer. His God did not make life easy but did require a commitment to justice.

America’s first and only Catholic president referred to God three times in his inaugural address and invoked the Bible’s command to care for poor and the sick. Later in his presidency, he said, unequivocally,

about civil rights: “We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution.”

Faith runs as a deep current through my family. Faith inspired my uncles’ and my father’s dedication to justice. My father, Robert F. Kennedy, on returning from apartheid-era South Africa in 1966, wrote a magazine article titled “Suppose God Is Black.” And my uncle Teddy fought for health care for all Americans, even if in her book Palin presumes to judge that he took positions “directly at odds with his Catholic faith.”

Teddy Kennedy believed that his stands were at one with his faith. He did disagree with the Roman Catholic hierarchy at times. But as we have seen, the hierarchy’s positions can change, and in our church, we have an obligation to help bring about those changes. That may not be Palin’s theology, but the glory of America is its support for those who would disagree - even on the most difficult and personal matters, such as religion.

John F. Kennedy knew that tearing down the wall separating church and state would tempt us toward self-righteousness and contempt for others. That is one reason he delivered his Houston speech.

Palin, for her part, argues that “morality itself cannot be sustained without the support of religious beliefs.” That statement amounts to a wholesale attack on countless Americans, and no study or reasonable argument I have seen or heard would support such a blanket condemnation. For a person who claims to admire Lincoln, Palin curiously ignores his injunction that Americans, even those engaged in a Civil War, show “malice toward none, with charity for all.”

Palin fails to understand the genius of our nation. The United States is one of the most vibrant religious countries on Earth precisely because of its religious freedom. When power and faith are entwined, faith loses. Power tends to obfuscate, corrupt and focus on temporal rather than eternal purposes.

Somehow Palin misses this. Perhaps she didn’t read the full Houston speech; she certainly doesn’t know it by heart. Or she may be appealing to a religious right that really seeks secular power. I don’t know.

I am certain, however, that no American political leader should cavalierly - or out of political calculation - dismiss the hard-won ideal of religious freedom that is among our country’s greatest gifts to the world. As John F. Kennedy said in Houston, that is the “kind of America I believe in.”

*Kathleen Kennedy Townsend is a former lieutenant governor of Maryland and the author of “Failing America’s Faithful: How Today’s Churches Are Mixing God With Politics and Losing Their Way.”* ☚



**From: *The Disputation***

by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

He explains that in the Godhead  
There are three persons – three –  
Who, however, when convenient  
Turn into a Unity.

This is your Trinity mystery  
We’ll discuss some other season,  
When the moon’s in its first quarter  
And I’m less disposed to reason

Than in daytime’s sober brightness  
Where the sunlight’s plain to see,  
When the Rule of Three holds sway  
In its dry reality.

It’s a mystery that only  
Can be grasped if you dispense  
With the reasons mental shackles  
And the prison house of sense.



The second most unused  
book, I suppose is the Holy  
Bible, a perennial best seller  
thanks to our good intentions  
to attend to the Word and divine the  
Lord’s Will, which you do for a few  
days until you realize that you al-  
ready know the Lord’s Will and you  
would prefer not to.

- Garrison Keillor,

“Inner Tranquillity and Unread Books”



## *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*

by Timothy Keller (New York: Dutton, 2008)

a book review by Kenneth Grubbs

Dr. Timothy Keller is a highly regarded Presbyterian minister in New York City. Not surprisingly then, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, draws considerably more from Christian doctrine than from philosophical pondering.

From the outset the Reverend makes a concerted effort to paint skepticism with the same brush he uses to justify his Christian beliefs - simply by defining them both as resting on the same premise of faith. He writes in his Introduction that, "All doubts, however skeptical and cynical they may seem, are really a set of alternate beliefs." He asks the reader to accept the notion that *belief* in God is as equally valid as *belief* in skepticism since both positions rely equally on belief. The author also argues that turning to evolutionary psychology for explanations on the nature and origins of *belief* presupposes a *belief* in evolutionary psychology.

The book itself is divided into two parts. Part 1, *The Leap of Doubt*, addresses some of the most common "doubts" and "objections" that Keller has faced during the course of his career. Included are such questions as; "How could a good God allow suffering?" and, "How could a loving God send people to Hell?" The other doubts to be considered and refuted include the literal inerrancy of the Bible, past historical injustices of the church, and science's role in casting doubt on religion.

To understand how an omniscient and omnipotent God could or would permit needless pain and suffering in the world, the author suggests that, "Just because you can't see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn't mean that there can't be one." We should simply accept on faith that it is our limited capacity that prevents us from understanding God's "reasons."

When considering the Bible's clear acceptance of slavery, the author asks us to concede that the apparent conflict is also nothing more than our limited understanding, this time of "historical context." He writes with authority that, "When the New Testament was written, there was not a great deal of difference between slaves and the average free person." But condoning the acceptance of slavery by saying that everyone was oppressed hardly supports the notion that the opinions of biblical authors were divinely inspired higher morality.

On the literal inerrancy of the Bible, Keller espouses his conviction to the concept, and then qualifies his conviction. He reflects, "I think Genesis 1 has the earmarks of poetry and is therefore a 'song' about the wonder and meaning of God's creation." In this well crafted model, the Bible remains inerrant

insomuch as our definition is stretched to include its poetical value.

In a brief "Intermission" before moving on to Part 2 titled *The Reasons for Faith*, we are again cautioned about the vulnerable and shaky nature of skepticism. Keller restates that, "Underlying all doubts about Christianity are alternative beliefs, unprovable assumptions about the nature of things." He continues that we should "not expect conclusive proof", and that "reason alone won't be enough." With the bar now lowered to exclude evidence and reason, and with skepticism dismissed as an *alternate belief*, the author sets the tone for the second half of the book.

Part 2 is presented as a series of "clues", and the reader is informed that these clues will "cumulatively" point to God.

The first of these clues is the "fine-tuning" of the universe, Paley's watch, the Anthropic Principle, the inexplicably perfect nature of such things as the electromagnetic force, gravity, and the temperature at which water freezes. That these precise features occur, and are required to support the existence of the universe is, most assuredly in the author's mind, a profound reason for God.

*Beauty* itself points to God. Keller writes that, "in the presence of great art and beauty we inescapably feel that there is real meaning in life." The double whammy here is that the door is now open for *feelings* to qualify as "clues", and that "real meaning in life" implies the existence of God.

In addition, Keller states with clarity and conviction that the existence of *moral imperatives* also implies that God exists. He flatly states that "If there is no God, then there is no way to say any one action is moral and another immoral."

These "clues" eventually also include the "infinite sacrifice" of Jesus Christ's death on the cross, and the "miracle of the resurrection." Both of these events, according to the author, are clearly evidenced by *eyewitnesses* at the empty tomb, and further corroborated by other irrefutable *eye witness accounts* prior to Jesus' ascension.

Reverend Keller also claims that the *Christian* God of Jesus Christ maintains a theological status superior to the other monotheistic Gods of our day, and goes on to explain the distinction. He writes that the other monotheistic faiths have founders who claimed to *show* the way to salvation, however "only Jesus claimed to *be* the way." (Italics added). To Keller these semantics endow Christianity with superior sanction over Judaism and Islam; a bold assertion.

The remaining chapters, among other things, advocate for the redeeming value of a fierce and terrifying eternal hell, and the need for us to "submit" to our Lord. Keller writes, "He is our Creator, and for that fact alone we owe him everything."

Timothy Keller's, *The Reason for God*, though falling short of any expectations one might harbor based on the title, does serve us with distinction as an important offering of contemporary conservative Christian thought. The reader hoping for philosophically satisfying discourse on an Uncaused First Cause may find himself frustrated and sadly disappointed by the narrower scope of Reverend Keller's dogmatic perspective. Nevertheless, for anyone wishing to maintain an understanding of modern fundamentalist Christian doctrine, this work is a must read.

*Contents are Copyright © 2010 by the Skeptics Society and its contributors.*



**February Meeting**  
 Tuesday, February 22, 2010, 7:00 PM



**January Meeting**  
 Tuesday, January 25, 2010, 7:00 PM



If you have a Facebook account, become a Fan of FIG. To join you can type in this long weblink: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Cincinnati-OH/FIG-Free-Inquiry-Group-of-Cincinnati-and-Northern-Kentucky/306015475868> or it is much easier to search for "Free Inquiry Group" and find it the first option on the search page.

**FIG Is On Facebook**  
 FIG updates and meeting notices and RSVP for events such as the monthly FIG Community Dinners.

**FIG Leaves**  
 P.O. Box 53174  
 Cincinnati, OH 45253

# FIG

## Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

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