

FIG LEAVES

Volume 22 Issue 1

January 2013

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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Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



From my many previous articles you might guess that I've had several debates over the years with religious believers involving biblical contradictions and errors, and you would be correct. During such debates I am often accused of pointing out only insignificant errors and ignoring the context; of getting lost in unimportant details and missing the intent of scripture.

In this article I would like to step back and look at the larger message to determine if it is rational as a whole or just as flawed in comprehensive message as it is in detail. I will not try to discern the overall message myself because I would be told immediately that I was mistaken, so instead we should be able to ask believers for this message. Although there is a lot of disagreement between Christian sects there are a few things that the majority agree that man and the world he lives in were designed and created by their god in a perfect sinless state. They also generally agree that through the sin of disobedience humanity fell into depravity and punishment. Finally they claim that redemption can be had through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The creation story itself has been discussed in exhaustive detail, so here I will discuss the fall of man from perfection into sin. Although many Christians do not insist on a literal interpretation of this story, they still agree that it depicts descent from a state of innocence into one of accountability that requires atonement.

Mankind's ability to stay in this original state of perfection is conditional on his obedience to a single rule that they not eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil". Humanity's great sin is seeking knowledge, and not just any knowledge but the ability to tell right from wrong, the understanding of morality. In essence, Adam and Eve are punished for trying to determine moral law on their own, outside God's single law. What a strange message - the very book that would be upheld as the ultimate moral guide condemns all humanity for trying to understand that same morality.

Dear reader, what we are being asked to do by the dominant religions of our age is to ignore consideration of morality for ourselves and defer to an invisible, unknowable dictator without question. The believer says an act is immoral because God says so, I say an act is immoral because of its outcome. No wonder religion has ridden on the coattails of kings; what better method could you devise to control your subjects? "Don't think for yourself; just obey God's command and his representative, the king!" No wonder agnostics, atheists and free-thinkers cause revulsion in the believer, whether they are aware of it or not, we are a threat to way of understanding the universe. They see our desire to weigh the costs of our actions as a rejection, a revolutionary act, a sin that deserves death.

Virtually all Christians agree that this sin (desire to determine morality on our own) is such a huge offense that all humanity deserves annihilation because of it, God has no choice. Talking to Christians you get the idea they think it was God's intention all along, to condemn all of humanity in order to set the stage for Jesus' sacrifice. More on that next month...

The story of man's fall forces us to ask several questions. Was mankind actually innocent before knowing right from wrong? From this story one would think that murder or theft would be okay as long as no one knew better. At this time there



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Contradiction Corner Cont.

was only one prohibition, eating from a certain tree, so anything else would not be a sin if morals are based on obedience rather than weighing outcomes. This myth appears to be an “innocence lost” tale where innocence equals ignorance.

Other questions include... If Adam and Eve could not tell right from wrong, how could they comprehend the ban on eating from the one tree? If we humans lacked the ability to determine right from wrong then we could not possibly understand the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit, therefore the punishment is unjust and the biblical god is unjust for punishing us. Not to mention the injustice of punishing all humanity for the offense of one or two ancestors.

Did the all-knowing creator somehow not know that his creation would choose knowledge over obedience? Why did he not instead make his creation with less curiosity and more will-power? Worse still, why would an all-knowing, omnipresent being need to test his creation anyway? Would he not already know that they would fail?

Imagine that the Christians are right and God did plan on failure; then how could a perfect being make imperfect creations that would fail? Did he intend for mankind to fail? I don't know which is worse; an incompetent creator who couldn't see the results of his actions or one who intentionally chooses failure.

Next month I will discuss the problems with the concept of redemption and substitution for sin. Happy New Year everyone!



Quote

God must hate the common people, because he made them so common.

Philip Wylie

God must love the common people, because he made so many of them.

Abraham Lincoln

Unquote



THINGS TO DO...

THINGS TO SEE...



Upcoming Meetups

Monday, January 21, 2013 6:30 PM

Monthly Monday Meetup

@ Rio Grande Mexican Restaurant

40 Carothers Road; Newport, KY 41071

Tuesday, January 22, 2013 7:00 PM

FIG movie night “Salvation Boulevard”

Hannaford Suites Hotel

5900 E. Galbraith Road

Thursday, January 24, 2013: 6:00 PM

January Science Café, Dr. Kenneth Tankersley,

Mayan Volcanoes

Claddagh Irish Pub

5075 Deerfield Blvd; Mason, OH 45040

The Mayan Apocalypse came and went with little fanfare, but there is still much to be learned about their ancient culture. Dr. Tankersley will share his discoveries on how volcanoes influenced the lives and agriculture of the Mayan civilization.

Wednesday, February 6, 2013; 6 pm

Tri-State Freethinkers: Guest Speaker

David Silverman, of American Atheists

Radisson Hotel Cincinnati Riverfront,

668 West Fifth Street

Covington, KY 41011

Thursday, February 7, 2013; 7:00 PM

First Thursday @ Pomodori's Pizzeria

121 W Mcmillan St.

Cincinnati, OH 45219

Quote

I am free of all prejudices. I hate everyone equally.

W. C. Fields

Unquote



Despite the fact that there are tens of millions of nontheistic Americans, we remain one of the most marginalized groups in the country. The Secular Coalition for America is working to make sure that we are heard on Capitol Hill. We fight in Washington DC against religious privileging on a federal level, yet some of the most egregious violations of separation of church and state are being promoted and passed at a state level. We need your help to see real change in Columbus and across Ohio.

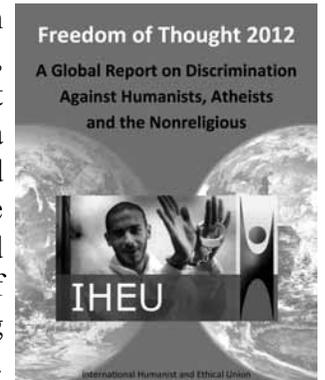
The Secular Coalition for America is forming state chapters across the country. Our chapters will bring together secular Americans in each state to influence government officials, legislation, and regulations. A Secular Coalition for America state chapter is unlike any other nontheistic state organization—it brings together interested organizations and individuals for the exclusive purpose of lobbying government officials.

Don't miss the next conference call! New conference call times have not yet been posted >secular.org/states< Check out the Secular Coalition for Ohio Facebook page!

If you have any questions about state chapter details or organization, check out our FAQs or email us. If you're interested in receiving emails about your state's chapter, check out our signup page. >secular.org/states/chapters/ohio<

Freedom of Thought (International Report)

UN: In recognition of Human Rights Day on December 10, the International Humanist and Ethical Union released a report detailing laws around the world which restrict the rights to freedom of belief and expression, and instances of nonreligious persons facing discrimination and persecution. The 72-page report, titled “Freedom of Thought 2012: A Global Report on Discrimination Against Humanists, Atheists and the Non-religious,” was produced in collaboration with the Center for Inquiry, American Humanist Association, Secular Coalition for America, and the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason. The report has received widespread news coverage by outlets such as Reuters, Huffington Post, NBC News, The Blaze, and the Jakarta Globe.



Quote

Despising politicians is as American as pizza, unwed mothers, and cheating on your income tax.

Wolf Roder
Unquote:

Honor thy parents. That creates
For life insurance lower rates.

Kill not, abet not those who kill;
Thou shalt not pay thy butcher's bill.

Kiss not thy neighbor's wife, unless
Thine own thy neighbor doth caress.

Don't steal, thou'lt never thus compete
Successfully in business. Cheat.

Bear not false witness – that is low –
But “hear ‘tis rumored so and so.”

Covet thou naught that thou hast not
By hook or crook, or somehow, got.

Source: Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, 1911

Decalogue

A series of commandments, ten in number – just enough to permit an intelligent selection for observance, but not enough to embarrass the choice. Following is the revised edition of the Decalogue, calculated for this meridian.

Thou shalt no God but me adore:
'Twere too expensive to have more.

No images or idols make
For Robert Ingersoll to break.

Take not God's name in vain; select
A time when it will have effect.

Work not on Sabbath days at all,
But go to see the teams play ball.



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

Law, Order and God

Sheriff's deputies in Fountain Hills, Ariz., say they knew that Mark Derksen, 63, was a drug dealer, but it took them two years to get enough evidence to arrest him. They say he gave away free samples of methamphetamine to get people hooked so that he could then sell them more. When they raided his apartment with a search warrant, deputies say they found "large amounts" of heroin, meth, and other drugs, as well as guns. Derksen allegedly admitted to investigators he sold drugs to people to "bring them closer to God" -- he's the pastor at Faith Mountain Christian Church. (Arizona Republic) No doubt, they will hear the angels sing and Satan bellow.



Quote

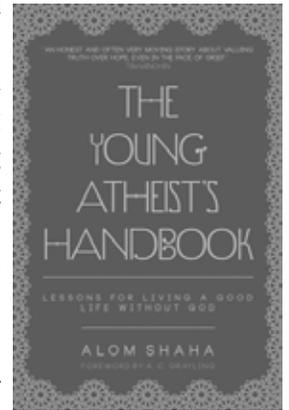
Faith: The preferred term for "religion" because it sounds warmer, more cuddly, more virtuous, less institutional, less hierarchical, and less coercive.

- *Butterflies & Wheels*, Euphemisms and Obfuscations

Unquote

Alom Shaha, *The Young Atheist's Handbook*

Growing up in a strict Muslim community in south-east London, Alom Shaha learnt that religion was not to be questioned. Reciting the Qur'an without understanding what it meant was simply a part of life; so, too, was obeying the imam and enduring beatings when he failed to attend the local mosque. Shaha was more drawn to science and its power to illuminate. As a teen, he lived



between two worlds: the home controlled by his authoritarian father, and a school alive with books and ideas. In a charming blend of memoir, philosophy, and science, Shaha explores the questions about faith and the afterlife that we all ponder. Through a series of loose 'lessons', he tells his own compelling story, drawing on the theories of some of history's greatest thinkers and interrogating the fallacies that have impeded humanity for centuries. Shaha recounts how his education and formative experiences led him to question how to live without being tied to what his parents, priests, or teachers told him to believe, and offers insights so that others may do the same. This is a book for anyone who thinks about what they should believe and how they should live. It's for those who may need the facts and the ideas, as well as the courage, to break free from inherited beliefs. In this powerful narrative, Shaha shows that it is possible to live a compassionate, fulfilling, and meaningful life without God.



This joke is from Luanda the capital of Angola a country in Africa

The latest technological invention is a machine to detect thieves. They demonstrated it first in a crowd the US, where in 10 minutes it detected some 50 thieves. They next showed it in South Africa, where the machine detected 100 thieves. When they brought it to Angola, in one minute the machine disappeared.



- Madalina Florescu



The Ten Females Who Cost Mitt Romney The Presidency

By Will Durst, *Humor Times*, 12 November 12

How each and every one of Mitt's failures can be traced directly to females.

Holey moley catfish. Well, thank god that's finally over. Further thanks that the climax was quick and clean. Almost surgical. Not as long a night as many first thought it might be. Except for Karl Rove that is, who for all we know is still scribbling numbers to prove the call on Clinton's re-election win in 1996 was premature. And as usual, Florida did all it could to gum things up, but was eventually rendered irrelevant. And long may it remain so.

In the end, President Barack Obama trounced, er, battered, um, eeked out a victory, or to be more precise, Mitt Romney lost. Or shall we say, found a thousand ways to lose. Except for one brief shining moment in the first debate, virtually carrying with him a defeat diviner. And each and every one of his failures can be traced directly to females. The distaff of life. Single women. Married women. Old women. Young women. Ladies and divas and flappers and baby mamas; duchesses, priestesses, shorties and floozies. So here they are, the top ten females who cost Mitt Romney the presidency, each of them representing one of the myriad factors that helped construct the unelectable mosaic that became Bain's Captain of Industry

1. Michele Bachmann. Mitt had to draft on her right wing to win the primary battle and when he tried to tack back to the center appeared not to be the Washington Outsider he claimed, but a typical politician with the core values of a hollowed out chocolate Easter Bunny. With really good hair.
2. Newly elected US Senator Elizabeth Warren from Massachusetts. A state the former Governor lost by 23 points. Proof positive the man arouses the enduring passion of a broken garden rake.
3. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who took foreign policy off the table making the entire election about the economy which kept getting better, gol darn it. And who can forget her husband. He certainly won't let us.
4. Sandra Fluke who gave a face to the GOP's Paleolithic Bronze Age attitudes towards women, further exacerbated by the fact that no man in the party could seemingly shut up about it.
5. Michelle Obama who is just darn likable. As is her husband. A stark contrast to Romney's cyborg demeanor and obvious discomfort around members of the human species.

6. Superstorm Sandy for providing the opportunity for the President to look Presidential and for he and Chris Christie to French kiss on Atlantic City's Boardwalk crystalizing the concept that bipartisanship is not the saddest word. That's "goodbye."
7. Ann Romney who would have made a simply terrific first lady. For Dwight D. Eisenhower.
8. Candy Crowley who single-handedly halted Romney's momentum in the second debate by speaking way above her pay grade. Don't you hate it when the help speaks out of turn?
9. All the Wal-Mart Moms, who never really understood that whole Cayman Islands bank account thing marking him not the poster child for the 1%, but as the poster child for the .0001% of the 1%.
10. And the last female responsible for Romney's loss; Rafalca the 15-year old mare who, while wearing the Romney silks in Olympic Dressage, failed to make the medal round and was probably shipped home strapped to the fuselage of a 747. Seriously, Mitt. Dressage?

Christian Rites

Communion: Rite used to weed out weirdo Christians who get way too into idea of consuming the flesh of Jesus Christ

Last Rites: Very last prayers administered to Christians before death, which were given to Timothy McVeigh prior to his execution, so he's happy and in heaven now

Confirmation: Christian rite of initiation in which potential members have to perform a drive-by shooting and rape at least three members of another religion

Anointing of Sick: Rite that involves applying blessed oil to sick members of the church to grease them up and help them slide easily into death."

And this riff from an incomparable entry on war: "If the unrelenting use of lethal force breaks down and warring parties find themselves on the brink of diplomacy—a tragic scenario both sides work to avoid at all costs—they are left with no other choice than to abandon their wholesale slaughter and meet face to face to civilly divide up contested territory. Often, however, a clear victor will emerge before war spirals into an all-out ceasefire, saving that nation's citizens from ever having to witness the horrors of nonviolent compromise.

Source: *The Onion*



NonBeliever Nation: The Rise of Secular Americans
 by David Niose
 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

The author, President of the Washington based American Humanist Association, does two things in this book. He persuades unbelievers to work together, to form a coalition, so as to make our voice heard and to contribute to the policy discussions of society. To make this advice concrete, Niose explores the recent history and the extraordinary increase in the proportion of secular Americans.

The author starts with a well-reasoned discussion of the number of non-believers. Niose distinguishes between religious "identity," a willingness to say what church the respondent claims and a positive belief. He grants that only 1.6 percent of Americans are willing to identify as atheists or agnostics. On the other hand only about 81 percent of Americans are willing to affirm a belief in God or in a higher power, while some six percent prove unwilling to answer this question. Thus, somewhere between 12 and 18 percent are nonbelievers, plus whatever seculars might claim a church membership. Whatever the number, seculars are a large proportion of Americans and their views ought to be heard in the marketplace of thought, and not dismissed as negligible or evil. It is important to "remove the stigma surrounding secularity and gaining a place at the table of public policy making and dialogue."(p.35)

Over the past thirty or forty years the importance of religion has increased remarkably in American society. Somehow, religion - any religion has become viewed as a "good thing." It has gone so far that virtually no politician or other person active in public can shrug his shoulders, but must declare his belief in god and religion. Fifty years ago Catholic Jack Kennedy speaking to a conclave of preachers could insist on separation of Church and State, while today Mitt Romney had to plead for the acceptance of his Mormon beliefs. Niose examines the proposition that religion is good and secularism is bad, showing in a brief overview many of the shortcomings of

religion: anti-science, racist, authoritarian, anti-women, and pro-war. He contrasts this with a perhaps reasoned, secular view.

The religious, especially the religious right sees itself as the true America, the inheritors of the founding fathers, with the proper ideas to shape public policy. Superficially pronouncements like "a day of prayer" or the "under God" pledge of allegiance may appear as no big deal. Beneath the surface there is a powerful effort to assert a specific religious conservative view of America, and a vision that considers secular Americans as second class citizens at best. Thus, religion has influenced foreign policy, the economy, education, has reduced church-state separation, and slipped into bed with corporate power. Religious doctrine invades the bedrooms and personal lives of citizens. The idea that someone could take the Presidency who believes the world is only a few thousand years old, climate warming is a hoax, and the battle of Armageddon is about to begin in the Middle East is truly frightening.

Niose pleads for the secular community to speak up. He applauds the numerous unbeliever organizations, and hopes they may be heard in the halls of power. He describes a number of recent activities, the Coalition for Reason, the Billboard campaign, various legal actions to maintain separation of Church and State. The public needs to be educated on the extent of secularity and the importance of reasoned decision making. Niose supports the Secular Coalition for America which has an explicit legislative program pushing back against the privileged position of religion in our life. He sees the secular stance as a real alternative, not merely a default status for someone who lost his faith. Secularism is or should be no stigma to be hidden from public view.

Secular Americans do not claim a truth which religions say has been encoded in their holy books. The secular world view provides a way of reasoning toward reliable knowledge and the hope to find liveable policy prescriptions. There is truly some advantage to work together as nonbelievers within society. I think this is a very important argument to be considered by all secularists.

- Wolf Roder





February FIG Meeting
TBD
Hannaford Suites Hotel



January FIG Meeting
January 22, 2013, 7PM
Hannaford Suites Hotel



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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 or freeinquirygroup.org.