

# FIG LEAVES

Volume 19 Issue 6

June 2010

## June FIG Meeting:

Sunday, 27 June 2010; 2 - 4 pm

### Sunrock Farms Natural History & Evolution Tour

Cost: \$5 per person

As summer is upon us, we are taking our meetings outside to appeal to freethinkers of all ages with a FIG Family Program, so bring your children, grandchildren, or your neighbor's children (with their permission of course!) to enjoy the fun. Farmer Frank Traina will be leading us on a tour of the farm and discuss aspects of evolution and the visible adaptations of the animals on the farm. You may learn why floppy eared rabbits have flopping ears (hint: god didn't make them so). Also, on the tour, participants will have the opportunity to milk a goat, pet a pig, feed sheep and hold baby chicks. In addition to leading Farm Tours, Farmer Frank is also a founding member of the Society for Evolution in Education (SEE), which produces programming and opportunities for people to gain a better understanding of science and evolution. Sunrock Farm is located near Northern Kentucky University and directions are below.

Sunrock Farm needs to know about how many are coming. Please **RSVP** to Shawn at e-mail [smj145@gmail.com](mailto:smj145@gmail.com) or at cell phone (513) 404-8191. Parking at Sunrock Farm is limited, so please car pool if possible.

#### From Downtown Cincinnati - (10 minutes)

1. Take I-471 south until it merges with Route 27 Alexandria and becomes a business district.
2. Go to the second stoplight (Nunn Drive) and turn right into Northern Kentucky University.
3. Stay right as you approach the round-about and merge right onto University Drive.
4. Continue straight under I-275, cross one lane bridge and turn right at the stop sign onto Gibson Lane.
5. Go to the end of the lane into Sunrock Farm.

#### From Eastern Cincinnati -

1. Take I-275 into Kentucky.
2. **Stay Left** on I-275 and take the first exit after entering Kentucky (Alexandria exit).

3. Go to the second stoplight (Nunn Drive) and turn right into Northern Kentucky University.
4. Stay right as you approach the round-about and merge right onto University Drive.
5. Continue straight under I-275, cross one lane bridge and turn right, at the stop sign, onto Gibson Lane.
6. Go to the end of the lane into Sunrock Farm.

#### From Kenton County & West -

1. Take I-275 East until Exit 76 (NKU).
2. Make a left at the exit, go to a one lane bridge and turn right at the stop sign, onto Gibson Lane.
3. Go to the end of the lane into Sunrock Farm.

If you need further assistance please call SunrockFarm at (859)-781-5502.

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## Events

### June Event

Sunday, June 27, 2010, 2-4:00 PM  
Sunrock Farms, Gibson Lane,  
In Northern KY

### FIG Community Dinner

*Join the FIG Gang for Dinner!*  
Tuesday, July 13, 2010, 6:30-PM  
Bronte Bistro, 2692 Madison Rd.  
Cincinnati, OH 45208  
**RSVP by 7/10** to Donna Loughry  
961-7331 or [dloughry@fuse.net](mailto:dloughry@fuse.net).

### July Meeting - TBD

We're not sure about the July or August program at this point. We would like to have a picnic, maybe someone would like to host this; or we might go to a park and have it at a shelter.



## May Meeting

### What Is Going On In The National Freethought Movement?

Amanda Metskas and August Brunsman

Amanda is the Executive Director of Camp Quest, Inc. August is the Executive Director of the Secular Student Alliance. Together they presented a summation of the status of the free thought movement nationally and their recent trip to the White House as representatives in a delegation from the Secular Coalition for America.



Amanda Metskas & August Brunsman

August began by describing that the Secular Student Alliance (SSA) is an umbrella organization for atheist, agnostic and secular humanist groups on college and high school campuses. August maintained that no social movement can be sustained without the support of more than one generation. The SSA currently supports 205 groups across the country, which are autonomous and independently run by the students. The SSA supports these groups by providing materials on how to start and maintain a group and by providing a network where these groups can communicate with each other and help each other work towards their goals. He cited recent polls that have shown an increase in the numbers of non-religious people, especially those of university age. Freethinking students are becoming more organized, public and outspoken. The SSA facilitates their endeavors and encourages these future leaders not only by helping them to get started but also by providing them with an e-mail address, a Facebook page, a speaker's bureau and a national conference held annually in Columbus, Ohio. You can learn more about the SSA or learn how to start your own student group by going to their web site at [www.secularstudents.org](http://www.secularstudents.org).

Amanda began her portion of the talk by mentioning that FIG was the organization that started Camp Quest (CQ) and that Edwin and Helen Kagin were the founding camp directors from its inception in 1996 until 2005. After briefly describing the history of CQ, she gave an update on its status at present. There are six US camps in Ohio, Minnesota, Tennessee, Michigan, California and the newest camp, Texas. There are over 300 campers registered at these camps with 74 at the Ohio camp where there is a waiting list. The Minnesota camp is full as are both camps in the UK. This year there is an inaugural set of two-day camp sessions taking place in Ireland with a weeklong session planned for next year. The growth of CQ has truly been a grass-roots phenomenon. People come in as counselors, (counselors are all volunteers), and go back to their home state or country with the idea of starting a camp in their area.

CQ has been an entry point into the free thought movement for families. Many have heard about CQ through national media and learned about American Atheists, the American Humanist Association and others previously unknown to them. This is helping to fill in the "missing demographic," as Amanda called it. Many groups ⇨



**FIG Leaves** - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to [gofigger at gofigger dot org](mailto:gofigger@gofigger.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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#### Memberships run from:

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have members mostly of retirement age. There is the present increase in the number of student groups. The age group that Camp Quest now seems to be reaching is the group in the middle. This is an unexpected benefit from a camp that started as an alternative to church camps and the Boy Scouts. The CQ web site is [www.camp-quest.org](http://www.camp-quest.org)

Amanda also credits Dale McGowan with attracting this age group into the movement through his books, *Parenting Beyond Belief* and *Raising Freethinkers*. He has also started a new organization called The Foundation Beyond Belief, which helps with the parenting aspect of being a free thinker and is a charitable organization. The foundation is set up for the non-religious to donate automatically to the charity of their choice. The foundation deals only with charities that are efficient at getting the money to those who are in need and do not proselytize. Their web site is [www.foundationbeyondbelief.org](http://www.foundationbeyondbelief.org)

The remainder of their talk explained the purpose and goals of the Secular Coalition for America and the recent trip to the White House by its representatives. Ten secular groups form the coalition that works to ensure the separation of state and religion. One of the most important things mentioned is the fact that all of these groups are working together to accomplish shared goals. This was not the case even a few years ago. This new spirit of cooperation is enabling people to become more public and outspoken about their lack of belief and is building larger and stronger organizations.

The Secular Coalition for America is a lobbying organization. It has lobbyists on Capitol Hill that meet with Senators and Congressmen to advocate for the issues that concern non-theists. They lobby against faith-based initiatives and religious privilege and for the civil rights of non-theists. The SSA and CQ are members, which is why Amanda and August were invited to attend the session with



White House officials. Sasha Bartoff is the legislative director who arranged the meeting. After seeing a planned public outreach program on the importance of fatherhood, to which several religious organizations were invited, Sasha emailed the White House and asked if the Secular Coalition could be a part of that kind of

event in the future. She was surprised to receive a reply the next day saying, "We didn't know you existed" and "Sure,

we would love to have you come."

The meeting was set for February and was attended by about eighty representatives from the groups in the coalition. They had three topics on their agenda. Religious medical neglect exemptions were discussed, with the coalition being opposed to them. In thirty-seven states, the religious have a legal right to forego medical treatment in favor of prayer, even when the medical condition is something that is threatening their children's lives. Many children have died or been disabled because their parents



opted for faith healing instead of modern medicine. Their next topic was the coercive religious climate that is prevalent in today's military. The chaplains tolerate religious differences but atheists are subject to their evangelizing. Better education for chaplains is a starting point to correct this problem. The third topic was the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Obama promised the reform of faith-based initiatives in his campaign. The coalition is holding him to that promise. Now a church can receive federal money without oversight and without really being accountable for how it is spent. The coalition advocates that churches form separate charitable organizations with their own accounting and that these entities be subject to government oversight and prove they are accountable for how federal money is spent.

There have been no concrete results from this meeting but at least we know that the administration will sit down with us to discuss our concerns. The more vocal non-theists become and the larger these organizations get the more attention our issues will attract. The Secular Coalition for America's web site is [www.secular.org](http://www.secular.org). Please go to their web page and sign up for their Action Alerts. They will send an alert to you by e-mail when there is an issue of importance. You can send your concerns to your representatives by using these alerts. It is very easy. This lets them know that you are a non-theist and a voter.

Thanks to Amanda and August for a great program. They are truly the "Dynamic Duo" of secularism. Both are well spoken, intelligent, witty, caring and dedicated. It is great to have such a couple as representatives of the non-religious.

– reported by John Welte







THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



## FIG Is Now On Facebook!

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," it is the first option on the search page.

By being a Fan you can receive FIG updates and meeting notices and RSVP for events such as the monthly FIG Community Dinners.

**Science Book Club 2010 schedule** All meetings on 3rd Sunday of each month at 2:30 in room 3A of downtown Main Public Library unless otherwise noted.

**June 13 - (2nd Sunday)** *How To Build A Dinosaur: Extinction Doesn't Have To Be Forever*; Jack R. Horner

**July 18-** *Logicomix: an Epic Search for Truth*; Apostolos K. Doxiadis, Christos Papadimitriou

**Aug 15 -** *Unscientific America*; Chris Mooney

**Sept 19 -** *The Evolution Of Consciousness: Of Darwin, Freud, And Cranial Fire : The Origins Of The Way We Think*; Robert E. Ornstein

**Oct 17 -** *The Roving Mind*; Isaac Asimov

**Nov 21-** *The Little Green Book of Awakening*; James George

**Dec 19 -** *Physics For Future Presidents: The Science Behind The Headlines*; Richard A. Muller



## The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

**Date:** Monday, 6 June 2010, 11:30 am

**Where:** China Town Buffet

1015 State Route 28

Milford OH 45150

### Meetup Description:

Just a good ol' Chinese Buffet doing what it does best. Decent food, great space and good service. Standard Chinese fare here, hibachi grill and even some sushi. As always, no agenda and everyone is welcome!

## Ho Hum in the Land of Egg Nog

Eighty one thousand, fifty one hundred years  
Before the Christian Era had begun  
All men connected god with all their fears.  
Well, not unlike today when said and done.  
The great IT was the name they gave to god.  
The cause of famine, pestilence, and pain.  
That IT would dry the crops which isn't odd.  
Gods always seem to love withholding rain.  
Much stronger than a king IT blocked the sun.  
He'd cause the earth to quake or send a flood.  
It loved to rain some plagues down just for fun  
Or turn their drinking water into blood.  
Two brother, one named Ho, the other Hum  
Got all sauced up and Ho then kicked a rock.  
He kicked it unshod because he was so dumb.  
"Cog me Wog" yelled Ho in Jabberwock.  
All who were there though "GOD" is what he said.  
At first that didn't make much sense.  
But, later when quite sober in their bed  
Twas GOD, not IT that was their preference.  
IT followers were then quite curious.  
They asked Hum to explain that GOD event.  
Chief Pundit Mord knew not rock stimulus,  
This new name GOD made IT now impotent.  
Discussions lasted for some time they say  
Before they could change to GOD from IT.  
One reads it in the *Book Of Hum* today.  
Most never know the Ho Hum god's a twit.

Dorothy B. Thompson





## Does The Priest Bless The Contaminants In The Holy Water?

After all, the Presidents Cancer Panel finds BPA, which is said to have estrogenic effects, to be present in numerous consumer products. It's detectable at biologically active levels in the urine of an estimated 93 percent of Americans. BPA is used to harden plastics including water and baby bottles. Canada banned its use in baby bottles and infant formula cans in 2008, and a number of U.S. municipalities are set to follow suit. Has anyone identified a reduction in Canadian cancers as a result of the ban? The panel expressed concern that the public is largely unaware of such common cancer agents as formaldehyde, benzene and radon. The Presidents Cancer Panel was created as part of the National Cancer Act of 1971, which is generally taken as a start of Nixon's War on Cancer. The panel report does not stop with suspected chemical carcinogens; it also includes a warning against frequent medical x-ray use and even cell phones. As WN has pointed out repeatedly there is no credible evidence linking cell phone radiation and brain cancer. In fact, the inclusion of cell phone radiation suggests the report is little more than public mythology. It is time to pare the list of cancer agents down to those for which there is at least a plausible mechanism. Don't we have enough to worry about?

- *What's New* Robert Park, 14 May 2010

## This Friday, 28 May, Science Will Be 2596 Years Old.

On May 28, 585 B.C. the swath of a total solar eclipse passed over the Greek city of Miletus. The early Greek philosopher, Thales of Miletus, alone understood what was happening. The world's first recorded freethinker, Thales rejected all supernatural explanations, and used the occasion to state the first law of science: every observable effect has a physical cause. The 585 B.C. eclipse is now taken to mark the birth of science, and Thales is honored as the father. What troubles would be spared the world if the education of every child began with an understanding of causality?

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 21 May 2010

## The Oldest Colonist On The Red Planet Is Thriving.

Opportunity arrived on Mars 25 January 2004. In the six Earth-years since, Opportunity has never once complained about the cold nights, and it lives on sunshine. It has now operated on Mars longer than the 1976 Viking lander, which ceased transmission in November of 1982. Meanwhile, Spirit, Opportunity's twin, is stuck in a sand trap. Not a lot happens on Mars for a stationary observer to report on, so Opportunity is trekking to a large crater. It should be there in a couple of years. Long before an astronaut could get there.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 21 May 2010

## Worth getting a ticket just to tell the story.

Brittany C. age 20, was cited by police in Northampton, Mass, after hitting a pedestrian in a crosswalk. The 50-year-old pedestrian was treated for minor injuries at a hospital and released. His legal name, according to his identification (which officers checked carefully): Lord Jesus Christ. (*Springfield Republican*) ...The victim told police, "I should have just walked across the river, like I usually do."



## Quote

Plenty of Christians have already made the point that the positive thinking of Christianity Light is demeaning to God, and I leave them to pursue this critique. More importantly, from a secular point of view, it's dismissive of other humans, and not only flight attendants. If a person is speeding, shouldn't he get a ticket to deter him from endangering others? And if [preacher] Osteen gets the premier parking spot, what about all the other people consigned to the remote fringes of the lot? Christianity, at best, is about a sacrificial love for others, not about getting to the head of the line.

If the Osteens' brand of religion is what flight attendant Sharon Brown lost faith in as a result of being manhandled by the preachers wife on that plane to Vail, then the suit should be dropped, because Victoria Osteen has already done her enough of a favor.

- Barbara Ehrenreich, in "Pastors go Postal"  
*Funny Times* (October 2008) p. 9

Unquote





## Martin Gardner 1914-2010 Founder of the Modern Skeptical Movement

This past weekend the world darkened with the loss of one of its brightest lights: Martin Gardner, polymath extraordinaire, founding father of the modern skeptical movement, and a friend. R.I.P. Martin.

Short of listing all his books, articles, essays, reviews, and letters published over the last 65 years — how does one capture in a couple of paragraphs the life of one of the most prolific science writers of our century, especially one who also nearly single-handedly founded the modern skeptical movement with his 1954 book, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*?

Martin Gardner could reflect back on a life well-lived, knowing that there was little of importance he did not reflect upon (and usually write about). In fact, “science writer” is really an unfair description. In other circles Gardner is as well-known for his “annotated” series of books as he is for his 25 years as columnist for *Scientific American*. He annotated no less than *Alice*, the *Snark*, the *Ancient Mariner*, *Casey at the Bat*, the *Innocence of Father Brown*, and even the *Night Before Christmas*. He wrote an autobiographical novel (*The Flight of Peter Fromm*), a book of short stories (*The No-Sided Professor*), and histories of Mary Baker Eddy and Urantia, the “Great Cult Mystery.” His mathematical games column was republished in numerous books, and he dabbled enough in magic to pen several works, including *The Encyclopedia of Impromptu Magic*. The best single-volume collection of Gardner’s works to date, spanning 1938–1995, is *The Night is Large* from St. Martin’s Press.

Born in 1914 (he is a firstborn with a younger brother and sister), Gardner served in the Second World War on a destroyer escort in the Atlantic. During those four years, Gardner honed his writing skills editing a weekly newspaper called *The Badger Navy News*. For his final two years, however, he saw action in the “Killer Group,” who looked for German U-boats to sink.

Gardner attended the University of Chicago “in the Adler-Hutchins heyday.” In high school, he explained, he wanted to be a physicist and go to Caltech, “but they didn’t take students until you had two years of general education. So I went to the University of Chicago because Hutchins had just become president and they had a new program that appealed to me where you had complete freedom to go at your own speed. If you passed a test in a course you didn’t have to take the course. It was noncompulsory class attendance. Nobody checked to see if you attended and I think I audited more courses than I actually signed up for.”

Following his undergraduate training, Gardner took a year of graduate work at Chicago but then decided he didn’t want to teach and instead became a fulltime writer. “Then the war came, but after the war I took another year of graduate work under the G.I. bill and this is when I took this course that Rudolf Carnap gave on the philosophy of science. This is when I really got interested in science.”

Where did Gardner get his drive and intellectual curiosity? He was raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Gardner’s father earned a doctorate in geology, specializing in limestone caverns (even publishing several technical papers on the subject). “He ended up in petroleum geology when the oil business was just starting, and that is how we ended up in Tulsa.” One of the last of the wildcatters, the senior Gardner had his own company that consisted only of himself and a secretary. He would do his own geological exploration until he found what looked like a dome with oil in it, then would hire a drilling company to drill it for him. “His company was up and down. Most of the time nothing happened but when he got a big hit it paid for the losses.” Not all of Gardner’s books have been big hits (it is hard to be popular when skewering sacred cows), but the ones he has had have more than paid for the losses, as he explained to *Skeptic*.

By Michael Shermer





## Helen Ukpabio, author of *Unveiling the Mysteries of Witchcraft*, preaching to a group in Houston.

By Mark Oppenheimer (21 May 2010)

Mark.Oppenheimer@nytimes.com, markopp1 on Twitter

HOUSTON - At home in Nigeria, the Pentecostal preacher Helen Ukpabio draws thousands to her revival meetings. Last August, when she had herself consecrated Christendom's first "lady apostle," Nigerian politicians and Nollywood actors attended the ceremony. Her books and DVDs, which explain how Satan possesses children, are widely known.

So well-known, in fact, that Ms. Ukpabio's critics say her teachings have contributed to the torture or abandonment of thousands of Nigerian children - including infants and toddlers - suspected of being witches and warlocks. Her culpability is a central contention of *Saving Africa's Witch Children*, a documentary that made its American debut on HBO2.

Those disturbed by the needless immiseration of innocent children should beware. *Saving Africa's Witch Children* follows Gary Foxcroft, founder of the charity Stepping Stones Nigeria, as he travels the rural state of Akwa Ibom, rescuing children abused during horrific "exorcisms" - splashed with acid, buried alive, dipped in fire - or abandoned roadside, cast out of their villages because some itinerant preacher called them possessed.

Their fellow villagers have often seen DVDs of *End of the Wicked*, Ms. Ukpabio's bloody 1999 movie purporting to show how the devil captures children's souls. And some have read her book *Unveiling the Mysteries of Witchcraft*, where she confidently writes that "if a child under the age of two screams in the night, cries and is always feverish with deteriorating health, he or she is a servant of Satan."

Visiting Houston last week to lead a four-night revival for a local church, Ms. Ukpabio, 41, had no idea that *Saving Africa's Witch Children*, which brought protesters out to greet her in London, was about to be shown in the United States. But she was eager to defend herself.

"Do you think Harry Potter is real?" Ms. Ukpabio asked me angrily, in the lobby of the Holiday Inn Express where she was staying. "It is only because I am African," she said, that people who understand that J. K. Rowling writes fiction would take literally Ms. Ukpabio's filmic depictions of possessed children, gathering by moonlight to devour human flesh.

Still, *Saving Africa's Witch Children* makes clear that many rural Nigerians do take her film seriously. And in her sermons, Ms. Ukpabio is emphatic that children can be possessed, and that with her God-given "powers of discernment," she can spot such a child. Belief in possession is especially common among Pentecostals in Nigeria, where it reinforces native traditions that spirits are real and intervene in human affairs.



In Nigeria, many preachers not only identify possessed children but charge dearly to perform exorcisms. To redeem their children's souls - and to keep the child from being killed or banished by neighbors - parents scrimp or borrow to pay the preacher.

Ms. Ukpabio argued that *Saving Africa's Witch Children* exaggerates or invents the problem of child abandonment. Asked how she could be so sure, she said, "because I am an African!" In Africa, she said, "family ties are too strong to have a child on the street." The Children's Rights and Rehabilitation Network, a school for abandoned children run by Sam Itauma and featured in Mr. Foxcroft's documentary, is "a 419 scam," Ms. Ukpabio said, referring to the section in Nigeria's criminal code that deals with fraud. She said the children's gruesome scars and wounds, shown in the documentary, are not real - or perhaps they are real, "but there are many ways children can get maimed." And if the injuries are the result of witchcraft accusations against the children, she said, those accusations could not have been made by Pentecostal Christian preachers, but by charlatans.

Since *Saving Africa's Witch Children* was first shown in Britain, in 2008, Mr. Itauma's home state has adopted a law against accusing children of witchcraft. But Ms. Ukpabio went on the offensive by suing the state government, Mr. Foxcroft, Mr. Itauma and Leo Igwe, a Nigerian antisuperstition activist. In the lawsuit, Ms. Ukpabio alleges that the state law infringes on her freedom of religion. She seeks two billion naira (about \$13 million) in damages, as well as "an order of perpetual injunction restraining the respondents" from interfering with or otherwise denouncing her church's "right to practice their religion and the Christian religious belief in the existence of God, Jesus Christ, Satan, sin, witchcraft, heaven and hellfire." In other words, in the name of religious freedom, Ms. Ukpabio seeks a gag order on anyone who disagrees with her.

The lawsuit also reiterates Ms. Ukpabio's contention that Stepping Stones Nigeria and Mr. Itauma's school are not charities but extortionate front organizations. According to Ms. Ukpabio, Mr. Foxcroft and Mr. Itauma aim not to educate abandoned children but "to use the said funds to blackmail."

"We're a registered charity in the U. K., so we publish our accounts," said Mr. Foxcroft by phone in England. "She can come in and see how much money we raised and where we spend it."

In Houston, Ms. Ukpabio reiterated that the state should close Mr. Itauma's school. To the children living there -who, according to her, may be actors or witches, but if witches, they were not abused, and if abused, then certainly not by Christians - Ms. Ukpabio offered the services of her own church. The school "does not understand demonic possession," she said. "If they understood, they would take the children to Liberty Gospel. "We would deliver them!"





## The Palin Principle - Bible trumps Constitution

By Rick Ungar, (10 May 2010)

Sarah Palin can't seem to distinguish between the bible and the American Constitution. Appearing recently on Bill O'Reilly's TV show, Palin advised that what we need to do in this country is -

Go back to what our founders and our founding documents meant — they're quite clear — that we would create law based on the God of the bible and the ten commandments. (*Huffington Post*)

That's quite a statement – but nothing new to those who would re-imagine this country as one based on religion. Indeed, the religious right has long sought to make the case that the United States was founded on Judeo-Christian beliefs despite the fact that the evidence clearly points to a very different intent.

While purveyors of this notion have come up with any number of reasons to support their claim, the most often cited 'proof' is the fact that the Declaration of Independence puts God front and center. The thing is, *there was no American nation* when we proclaimed our independence from Great Britain. And while the Declaration of Independence is certainly one of the most important political documents in our history, it simply has no legal effect on the laws of this nation. That distinction belongs to the Constitution; our first, and most enduring, statement of the concepts which form the basis of law in the United States.

Another explanation frequently offered up in support of the notion that the founders had God on their minds is the advent of the phrase "*In God We Trust*" as the nation's motto. What the religion peddlers don't appreciate is that the phrase was first used in 1864 – almost 100 years after the founding of the nation – when embossed on the two-cent coin in response to the rising religious fervor in the country as a result of the Civil War. Indeed, the phrase did not officially become our national motto until 1956.

While God played a part in the personal lives of many of our founders (though not all), the truth is that *nowhere* in the United States Constitution can you find the word "God" – not even once.

An oversight? Unlikely.

In Thomas Jefferson's autobiography, he comments on the language he used to restate the importance of religious freedom in the document that is his second most famous writing (and the one historians suggest was the

creation he was most proud of,) the Revised Code of the State of Virginia.

Where the preamble declares, that coercion is a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, an amendment was proposed by inserting "Jesus Christ," so that it would read "A departure from the plan of Jesus Christ, the holy author of our religion;" the insertion was rejected by the great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mohammedan, the Hindoo and Infidel of every denomination. (Thomas Jefferson, *Autobiography*, in reference to the Virginia Act for Religious Freedom)

Does this sound like someone who sought to weave Judeo-Christian theory and belief into the creation of the Constitution?

Indeed, no less a religious source than Beliefnet.com acknowledges that Jefferson was a heretic in his time – deeply angered by what he viewed as a total perversion of Christianity after the time of Christ's death. Given his feelings, it seems highly unlikely that he sought to include the principles of Christian religion into the founding of the nation.

Another key author of the Constitution, Thomas Paine, had this to say in Chapter 1 of his famous pamphlet, *The Age of Reason*:

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish Church, by the Roman Church, by the Greek Church, by the Turkish Church, by the Protestant Church, nor by any Church that I know of. My own mind is my own Church.

Does anyone believe that Thomas Paine sought to include Judeo-Christian beliefs in his drafting of the U.S. Constitution?

As for author John Adams – a man with strong religious beliefs who allowed religion to play a part in his personal life but carefully avoided it in public matters – nowhere is there clearer proof of the man's approach to

this subject than in the little known *Treaty of Tripoli*, signed by President John Adams and confirmed by the U.S. Senate in 1796, less than 10 years after the Constitution's adoption. Chapter 11 of the treaty reads:

*As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; (emphasis added) as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity, of Musselmen; and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries." (Treaty of Tripoli)*

Could it possibly be any clearer?

If people like Sarah Palin wish to argue that the nation ought to follow a course that places religion squarely into the law making process, I suppose that is their right. However, the continuous effort by Palin and friends to pervert the true history of the nation and the intentions of the founders is nothing short of subversive and clearly dangerous.

At best, the suggestion that religion rests at the foundation of our legal system is one based on ignorance of the principles that are the heart of this country. At its worse, the effort is little more than an attempt to pervert the philosophy of the nation's founders in order to re-invent America to meet the religious right's own objectives and to re-make the nation into something quite different than what it was intended to be.

I respect and appreciate the value of religion in many people's lives. But if Sarah Palin wants to rule a nation based on God, she really should look elsewhere. There are many countries in the world that would meet her requirements – although she will find that most of them worship the God of Islam. Palin might ask the women in so many of these theocracies how government and law based →





on religion has worked out for them.

Or Palin and friends might simply look up the word “Pilgrim” in the dictionary and learn about how our own original settlers were fleeing religious persecution at the hands of a Monarch who was also the leader of the *Christian* church in the land of their birth. Our founders knew exactly what they were – and were not – doing when determining the nature of law in this country and the importance of a secular government.

While the religious right are free to vote for candidates who share their reliance on religious belief, they are not free to re-imagine the fundamentals of this country - at least not without putting their reinvention through the rigorous process of amending, or re-writing, our Constitution. That's the way it was intended to be done and even Sarah Palin doesn't get to make it otherwise. ☘

## Godless Faith In Social Justice

by Herb Silverman, 12 April 2010

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

*Q: Fox News commentator Glenn Beck claims that faith-based calls for “social justice” are really ideological calls for “forced redistribution of wealth . . . under the guise of charity and/or justice,” and that Christians should leave their churches if they preach or practice “social justice.”*

*Rev. Jim Wallis disagrees, saying social justice is a faith-based commitment “to serve the poor and to attack the conditions that lead to poverty,” central tenets of the teachings of Jesus and at the heart of biblical faith.*

*Who's right? How does the pursuit of justice fit into your faith? Is “social justice” an ideology or a theology?*

So Glenn Beck thinks Christians should leave their churches if they hear preaching about social or economic justice, which he says are code words for Communism and Nazism. I wish I had Beck's dot-connecting chalkboard. I'd connect my dots between Nazism and Christianity, and leave for Beck the much more difficult task of connecting dots between Nazism and social justice. Over 90% in Nazi Germany claimed to be either Lutheran or Catholic, and these Christians wore Nazi belt buckles with the slogan, “Gott Mit Uns,” meaning, “God is with us.” Your turn with the chalk, Glenn.

As far as Communism goes, Hitler hated Communists even more than Glenn Beck does, if that's possible. And how fast would Beck run from Commie Jesus, who said in Acts 2:44, “Let all be divided, each according to his need.” Glenn Beck may consider himself perfect, though he ignores the rather extreme social justice in Matthew 19: “To be perfect, sell your possessions and give it to the poor.”

Have I taken biblical passages out of context? Perhaps. But who decides context? I think William Blake said it best: “Both read the Bible day and night, but thou read black where I read white.”

Social justice may fit into some churches' theology, but social justice does not need a theology to exist or to be a desirable goal. Humanists understand that it is humane to help people who can't help themselves. It all goes back to the simplest basis for interaction among humans: Treat others as you would like to be treated.

And finally, how does social justice fit into my faith? Social justice *is* my faith. ☘

## Foreign Policy + Religion = Recipe For Disaster

by Herb Silverman, 23 February 2010

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

*Q: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is recommending that the U.S. government develop a strategy to make religion ‘integral’ to American foreign policy. Should U.S. foreign policy get religion?*

When any country's foreign policy gets religion, disaster usually follows. What U.S. foreign policy should get is secular. This involves learning more about the religious and cultural beliefs of people in countries where we are engaged so we can more effectively communicate with them, determining what changes are both beneficial and doable and at what cost, and developing rational strategies to accomplish a mission.

We should start first by looking at what hasn't worked, and then don't repeat it. This includes, but is not limited to, the following assumptions:

1. God is on our side, which means Satan is on the other side. This turns the engagement into a binary and simplistic battle between good and evil, with no room for compromise or negotiation.
2. American exceptionalism makes us a role model for the world, and we can judge other countries and cultures on the extent to which they adopt our values.
3. All religions are good, and adherents who act in a manner we dislike are acting contrary to their religious doctrines.
4. Government officials may proselytize here and elsewhere, favor one religion over another, or religion in general over non-religion.
5. If we satisfy powerful religious leaders or factions, ➔



then we may ignore human rights. 6. We must either go it alone or take the lead when we act in coalition with other countries. 7. We can occupy a country indefinitely. 8. Perceived economic benefit for us is sufficient justification for foreign engagement. 9. We should do more talking than listening. 10. There will be no unintended consequences.

My negative formulation is in the spirit of Hillel, who summed up the Jewish religion with, "What is hateful to you, do not do to others." This leads to a reasonable foreign policy idea: Practice a version of the Golden Rule, which is a core value of both religious and secular peoples. That would rule out almost all war, as well as occupation, domination, and exploitation. It would rule in cooperation, assistance, and leading by good example. We've done this pretty well at times, and not so well at others.

We can work with people who put deeds above creeds and compassion above dogma. Such people are our allies against those who put the needs of an imagined god above the needs of real humans. ❧

## Palin: A Pat Robertson Feminist

by Herb Silverman, 17 May 2010

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

*Q: Can you be a feminist and oppose abortion in all circumstances? Can you be a person of faith and support abortion in some circumstances?*

Generally, I'm willing to accept labels people give themselves. So if Sarah Palin wants to call herself a feminist, though very different from feminists I know, I'll go along with it.

In my experience, feminists who have worked for social, political, and economic equality of the sexes have often been called aggressive, arrogant, intolerant, militant, and mean-spirited. In most cases, such accusations have been false; but I think they ring true for Palin feminism.

Sarah Palin isn't the only one who knows exactly what God wants of humans, and she isn't the only one who wants to outlaw any actions that she or he knows with absolute certainty would displease God (see which of the above feminist accusations fit). Palin calls herself a "frontier feminist," but she sounds more like a "Pat

Robertson feminist." The two of them are guided solely by their unshakeable certainty about what God wants. The good news, in this regard, is an equality of the sexes; the bad news is that both sexes can be sadly and dangerously mistaken.

Speaking to members of the Susan B. Anthony List, Palin described how she'd had doubts about whether she would be able to handle a baby with Down syndrome. She "chose" to have the baby because of her certainty that "God will never give us something we can't handle." Similarly, Sarah Palin said of her unwed and pregnant teenage daughter, "For Bristol, choosing life was not an easy decision." Note the implication that both members of this advantaged family had the choice on whether to have an abortion, and chose not to. Sarah Palin claims that her God made sure these choices worked out well for her family, and she would like to see other families prevented from making a different choice. However, "One choice" is an oxymoron.

Palin failed to mention the countless deaths of women who knew their lives would be in danger unless they had an abortion, or the women who wanted to prevent their hopelessly deformed fetuses from being brought to term only to suffer and die soon afterward. Palin may sincerely believe that those dead pregnant women and deformed babies pleased God and today are frolicking in heaven, but that does not give her the right to feel morally superior to other women with very different theological views.

I don't know if Sister Margaret McBride considers herself a feminist, but she is closer to my brand of feminism than Sarah Palin. McBride had the courage to agree with the ethics committee at her hospital to allow an abortion that would save a mother's life. For this heroic act, McBride was "automatically excommunicated" from her church. Interestingly, this nun would have remained a Catholic in good standing had she, instead, molested a child and confessed her "sin."

The bishop's reaction to an abortion that saved a mother's life is just one more example of why thinking people should ignore or run as fast as possible from immoral and heartless teachings of the Catholic Church. ❧





## *Germany 1945: From War to Peace*

by Richard Bessel

(New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009)

We may wonder how an author can write a thick book about a single year in one country. However it was an eventful year. Germany lost the second world war in 1945, lost much territory, and found itself occupied by the four victorious powers dividing the country into four zones. The capital city, Berlin, also was divided into four sectors of occupation by the same victors. Germany had achieved utter and total defeat.

Never before in modern history had a nation reached the depths plumbed by Germany in 1945: its sovereignty was extinguished; its infrastructure was smashed; its economy was paralysed; its cities reduced to piles of rubble; much of the population was hungry and homeless; its armed forces were disbanded and their surviving members were in prisoner-of-war camps; its government had ceased to exist and the entire country had been occupied by foreign armies. Germany had become a land of death.(p.385)

Germans speak of *Stunde Null*; the zero hour when history ended in complete defeat, chaos, and devastation and had to start over again in new directions.

At year's beginning Germany was under invasion by the Russian army from the east and southeast, and by British and American forces from west and south. Bessel describes the last battles of the war, the German Nazi regime's insistence on fighting to the last man, boy, and bullet, and the utter destruction wreaked on the nation. Much of the country, the great cities, the industry, and the cultural monuments were rubble. No transport, neither rail nor bus ran, no utilities, water or electricity worked. Germans were tired of the war, of their leaders, and surrender could not come soon enough for many. The pointed phrase was "better an end in terror than terror without end."

Bessel emphasizes that the last months of the war were the bloodiest of the six years. A million soldiers died in the field, thousands of concentration camp inmates died on death marches to nowhere, thousands of Germans

were forced to run from their homes in the territories taken over by Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, and other countries, others died from the acts of vengeance and rape perpetrated by the victorious soldiers. Not least, the Nazi regime treated its own people with utmost brutality to make them hold out to the end.

After the Germans laid down their arms, they proved remarkably docile. There was hardly any resistance, no guerilla force, no redoubt in the mountains. The Nazi ideas disappeared overnight, no one was eager to defend Nazi thought, and no person was willing to admit ever to have been a Nazi. The fact is, there never really was a Nazi ideology except for extreme *Chauvinism* and oppressing the Jews. The "socialism" in National Socialism never existed; the German economy under Hitler remained privately owned and market driven.

Bessel sees visions of a new beginning in the remaining eight months of 1945. But a careful reading sees not much happening. The occupation authorities had to concentrate on feeding everyone, create some order among the uprooted, care for the displaced persons, and impose a minimum rule of civil law. The fact was, the Americans had no idea what they wanted to do with Germany, and neither the Brits nor the French were able to move without US leadership and money. The Russians had very clear ideas about imposing a communist regime, ideally on the whole country, but if the western powers did not play that way, then on their zone of occupation alone. The wartime allies, Americans and Russians, insisted on playing diplomatic games for three years before the hostile disagreements of the occupation stifled all constructive action. Thus the real change, the famous economic miracle did not start until 1948 when the Germans were permitted and encouraged to create separate countries in East and West Germany.

Bessel has written a credible book about this pivotal year in German history. Because he has limited himself to just one year, his narrative occasionally suffers from dry enumeration of facts and data. Very often we might like to know what became to this displaced person or that tentative initiative, but that all happened in later years.

– Wolf Roder







**FIG Community Dinner**  
 Tuesday, July 13, 2010 6:30 PM  
 Bronte Bistro (RSVP Needed by 7/10)



**June Event**  
**Sunrock Farm**  
 Sunday, June 27, 2010, 2-4:00 PM  
 Please RSVP (see page1)



**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, or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.