

FIG LEAVES

Volume 21 Issue 6

June 2012

June FIG Meeting:

Sunday, July 01, from 7-9:00 PM,
Hannaford Suites Hotel

A Performance of Revival

by Brother Sam Singleton, Atheist Evangelist

Just in time for summer, you have an opportunity to get saved and attend Brother Sam's newest performance piece titled *Revival*, a participatory Revival-Meeting Parody. Get and Be Revived!

The performance will include a service, tongues-speaking, an offering, an altar call, and, of course, a scorchingly satiric sermon by Sam Singleton Atheist Evangelist. As a member of the "congregation," you can settle back and watch the unbelievableness unfold, or join in as the spirit moves you.



Be there or be damned!

FIG Accepting Credit Card/PayPal Donations

FIG now can accept donations online through PayPal - pay with your credit card or PayPal account. A link for a PayPal donation is available on www.gofigger.org. OR You can also donate online by using this web address - <http://tinyurl.com/3dtvpp4> OR You can also find the information on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/gofigger.

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Events

(Note dates & times)

June 2012 Meeting

Sunday July 1, 7-9:00 PM
Hannaford Suites Hotel
5900 East Galbraith Rd.
See directions below.

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

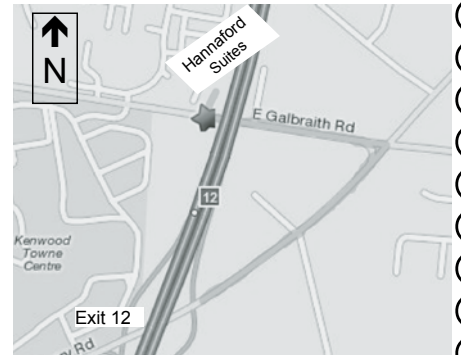
OR *From the South*

- Turn Right

3) Continue on Montgomery Rd. to East Galbraith Rd.

Turn Left.

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





THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Science Book Club

2012 Schedule, books, and dates

All meetings are on 3rd Sunday of month at 2:30 pm except in June on 4th Sunday because Father's Day falls on 3rd Sunday. All meetings at the Hamilton County downtown Public Library in room 3A except for April and May (room 3B) as noted below:

June 24 (Not 3rd Sunday) — *The Roving Mind*, Isaac Asimov 1983

July 15 — *The Emperor Of All Maladies : A Biography Of Cancer*, Siddhartha Mukherjee 2010

August 19 — *The Grammar Of Society: The Nature And Dynamics Of Social Norms*, Cristina Bicchieri (game theory) 2005

September 16 — *Thinking In Pictures : And Other Reports From My Life With Autism*, Temple Grandin 2006

October 21 — *Drama Of The Gifted Child : The Search For The True Self*, Alice Miller 2008

November 18 — *The Revenge Of Gaia: Earth's Climate In Crisis And The Fate Of Humanity*, James Lovelock 2006

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



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

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Upcoming Meetups

Thursday, June 7, 2012, 7:00 PM
First Thursday
at The Hofbräuhaus

Thursday, July 5, 2012, 7:00 PM
First Thursday
at The Hofbräuhaus

Monday, June 18, 2012, 6:30 PM
Monthly Monday Meetup
at The Washington Platform

Monday, July 16, 2012, 6:30 PM
Monthly Monday Meetup
at The Washington Platform

FIG Board of Directors:

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Memberships run from:

1 January to 31 December.
One year: \$30
Family: \$40

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.

Will Expertise Replace Empathy

© Vivian B. Kline

Three-year-old push button
To bring themselves cartoons.
Computers now fill libraries
Where there were only books.
Once telephones were on a wall
Now iPhones are transportable.
Lap-tops and kindles go trundling along
As Skype shows us each other.

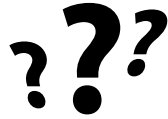
Some oldsters still use pen and ink.
The postman brings them mail.
They don't "spam" and things don't "Crash"
But much they miss today.

Will friends be known through tweeting?
And face book show their face?
We won't go back. Must forge ahead.
Forever: über alles?
But a kiss in person
And a hug so warm:
Those things last forever.



Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



This month I will continue my discussion of the Moral Argument for God. Last month I began by pointing out that there actually are no universal moral truths and any shared values are due to common sense reactions and shared culture without the need for divine authorship.

As a reply to the naturalistic basis for morality, Christian apologists often create a false dichotomy between absolute morality and moral relativism; claiming that anything less than an unyielding absolute moral code is a slippery slope into ambiguity leaving us unable to distinguish right from wrong.

We are not forced into moral relativism because we can choose morality by directly observing the consequences of immoral behavior. If I lie or betray my friends and family, then no one will trust me. If I steal and cheat people in business deals, then no one will do business with me and I could go to prison. If I betray the trust of my spouse then I should expect that she would do the same. This logic also applies to groups of people. Societies need to punish undesirable behavior in order to ensure stability otherwise they will deteriorate into chaos and soon cease to exist.

Next, I would now like to focus on a different weakness in their argument; that the biblical god could not be the author of a universal moral code even if one did exist. The question the theist avoids like the plague is this: “How can we know if God is good?”

If the Bible is to be believed, then the same god who said “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” also ordered Abraham to sacrifice his own son and commanded the Israelites to slaughter thousands in the books of Numbers, Judges and both books of Samuel. If killing is a universal moral wrong then God himself has broken this law by ordering the murder of innocents, not to mention thousands killed directly by him such as the first-born of Egypt in Exodus or 70,000 Israelites in 2 Samuel 24. Likewise, the same god who says not to covet also ordered the Israelites to take the lands of Canaan by force under Joshua. The same god who says not to commit adultery or fornicate also makes a young virgin girl pregnant with his son without marrying her. Far from being absolute, the biblical moral code seems to be nothing more than the fickle whim of an apparently bipolar deity.

The whole God morality debate throws up a logistic red flag when we consider that the Abrahamic religions claim God is all-powerful. But if you look at ethics and systems of morality you will find that they consist of laws, and laws are nothing more than limitations on behavior. How can a god be all-powerful if he has morals that restrict what he can do? Yet if he can do anything without restraint, then how can he be called good? The concept of a god being moral is in itself a logical contradiction. A good question for any religious believer is this: “What could God do that would show that he is not good?” Christians make a big deal of praising God’s holiness; however, if there is no limitation to what he can do then the phrase “God is holy” is meaningless.

The Christian apologist is in a no win situation here. If he says that morality holds power over God then he is not omnipotent and morality becomes higher than God and cannot have come from him. If he instead says that morality is absolute only for created beings; then he admits that God is not restricted by morality and free to behave immorally; once again morality cannot have come from him because he is immoral.

In the Bible, God arbitrarily tells us to kill and not to kill, to not eat pork and to eat pork, to circumcise and not to circumcise, making no logical sense. Of course this refutes an absolute morality because it is constantly unchanging. This is exactly the spot the Patriarch Abraham was in when he was ordered to sacrifice his son; the rules were different for him. If universal morals existed Abraham would have answered God back, “Wait God, this is morally wrong! Is this a test?” Instead he is praised for having the faith to ignore our moral code and attempt to murder his own son.

The biblical believer is in an even worse moral quagmire because the Bible says that God cannot be trusted to accurately deliver truth, in other words, he lies. Ezekiel 20:25-26 says “So I gave them other statutes that were not good and laws through which they could not live; I defiled them through their gifts - the sacrifice of every firstborn - that I might fill them with horror so they would know that I am the LORD.” (NIV) In this verse we are told that God intentionally told the Israelites to offer human sacrifices to ensure they deserved punishment, even though they were doing what he asked of them.

When referring to the unsaved, 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 states: “And for this cause God shall send them





Contradiction Corner Cont.

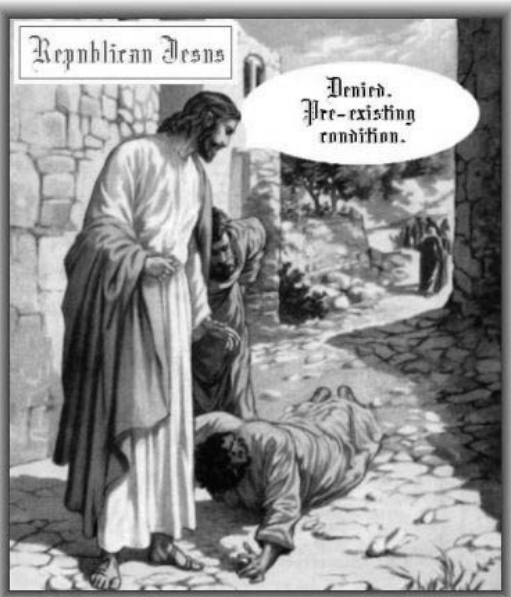
strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” From these verses we see that the Christian can never be sure if his internal moral clock is in tune with God, it may have been set incorrectly out of God’s malicious desire to have someone to punish. Even if the apologist were correct, he can never be sure that he is not deceived and may be in the very position as he claims we are in. The Argument from Morality is one of the most cherished yet weakest in the theist’s tool belt, have fun discussing it. ☩



Catholic Institutions Sue the Government.

The lawsuit argues that the Obama healthcare plan violates the religious freedom of Catholic institutions by requiring them to cover the contraception costs of employees. In the eyes of the Church, artificial contraception violates the doctrine of *Natural Law*. If sexual intercourse cannot lead to procreation it removes the sovereignty of God over Creation. Try thinking that through while having sex. What are the odds of the Church winning its suit? The Church hasn’t won a case based on Natural Law since 1615 when the Inquisition forced Galileo to recant his belief in a heliocentric universe.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 30 May 2012



Putting a Price on Prayer

- Some people might feel happier if they get their hands on some more money.
- Some people might feel happier if they use their hands to pray.

Leading some to the question : is it feasible to equate the two? In other words, is it possible to put a price on prayer?

Timothy T. Brown, Ph.D. (Assistant Adjunct Professor, Health Policy & Management Associate Director for Research, at the Berkeley Center for Health Technology) has entertained just such an idea. And has a paper scheduled to appear in the journal *Applied Economics*, Volume 45, Issue 15, 2013. The article : “A Monetary Valuation of Individual Religious Behavior: The Case of Prayer” is currently available (to non-subscribers) for \$36.00.

It found that :

“Praying at the frequency of the national mean of 8.1 prayer sessions weekly is valued at \$53,055 (2004 dollars) per annum.”

Those readers who don’t wish to part with \$36, but who would nonetheless like to further explore the idea, can turn instead to a substantially similar (though subtly different) working paper, by the same author, entitled : “A Monetary Valuation of Individual Religious Behavior: The Case of Prayer” which found that :

“Praying at the frequency of the national mean of 8.1 prayer sessions weekly is valued at \$89,100 (2004 dollars) per annum.”

Put another way:

“... the amount of happiness that an extra prayer session per week is worth is the same amount of happiness that \$11,000 provides. At the sample mean of 8.1 prayers per week, individuals are 9% more happy relative to those who do not pray at all which is valued at \$89,100 per annum.”



Contraception's Con Men

By Garry Wills, NYR Blog, 18 February 2012

By a revolting combination of con men and fanatics, the current primary race has become a demonstration that the Republican party does not deserve serious consideration for public office. Take the controversy over contraceptives. American bishops at first opposed having hospitals and schools connected with them pay employee health costs for contraceptives. But when the President backed off from that requirement, saying insurance companies can pay the costs, the bishops doubled down and said no one should have to pay for anything so evil as contraception. Some Republicans are using the bishops' stupidity to hurt the supposed "moderate" candidate Mitt Romney, giving a temporary leg up to the faux naïf Rick Santorum; others are attacking Barack Obama as an "enemy of religion."

Pusillanimous Catholics - Mark Shields and even, to a degree, the admirable E. J. Dionne - are saying that Catholics understandably resent an attack on "their" doctrine (even though they do not personally believe in it). Omnidirectional bad-faith arguments have clustered around what is falsely presented as a defense of "faith." The layers of ignorance are equaled only by the willingness of people "of all faiths" to use them for their own purposes. Consider just some of the layers:

The Phony Religious Freedom Argument

The bishops' opposition to contraception is not an argument for a "conscience exemption." It is a way of imposing Catholic requirements on non-Catholics. This is religious dictatorship, not religious freedom.

Contraception is not even a religious matter. Nowhere in Scripture or the Creed is it forbidden. Catholic authorities themselves say it is a matter of "natural law," over which natural reason is the arbiter - and natural reason, even for Catholics, has long rejected the idea that contraception is evil. More of that later; what matters here is that contraception is legal, ordinary, and accepted even by most Catholics. To say that others must accept what Catholics themselves do not is bad enough. To say that President Obama is "trying to destroy the Catholic Church" if he does not accept it is much, much worse.

To disagree with Catholic bishops is called "disrespectful," an offense against religious freedom. That is why there is a kind of taboo against bringing up Romney's Mormonism. But if Romney sincerely believed in polygamy on religious grounds, as his grandfather did, he would not even be considered for the presidency - any

more than a sincere Christian Scientist, who rejects the use of medicine, would be voted for to handle public health care. Yet a man who believes that contraception is evil is an aberrant from the American norm, like the polygamist or the faith healer.

The Phony Contraception Argument

The opposition to contraception has, as I said, no scriptural basis. Pope Pius XI once said that it did, citing in his encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930) the condemnation of Onan for "spilling his seed" rather than impregnating a woman (Genesis 38.9). But later popes had to back off from this claim, since everyone agrees now that Onan's sin was not carrying out his duty to give his brother an heir (Deuteronomy 25.5-6). Then the "natural law" was fallen back on, saying that the natural purpose of sex is procreation, and any use of it for other purposes is "unnatural." But a primary natural purpose does not of necessity exclude ancillary advantages. The purpose of eating is to sustain life, but that does not make all eating that is not necessary to subsistence "unnatural." One can eat, beyond the bare minimum to exist, to express fellowship, as one can have sex, beyond the begetting of a child with each act, to express love.

The Roman authorities would not have fallen for such a silly argument but for a deep historical disrelish for sex itself. Early Fathers and medieval theologians considered sex unworthy when not actually sinful. That is why virgin saints and celibate priests were prized above married couples. Thomas Aquinas said that priests must not be married, since "those in holy orders handle the sacred vessels and the sacrament itself, and therefore it is proper (decens) that they preserve, by abstinences, a body

undefiled (*munditia corporalis*) (*Summa Theologiae*, Part 3 Supplement, Question 53, article 3, Response). Marriage, you see, makes for defilement (*immunditia*). The ban on contraception is a hangover from the period when the body itself was considered unclean, as Peter Brown overwhelmingly proved in *The Body and Society* (1988).

The Phony "Church Teaches" Argument

Catholics who do not accept the phony argument over contraception are said to be "going against the teachings of their church." That is nonsense. They are their church. The Second Vatican Council defines the church as "the people of God." Thinking that the pope is the church is a relic of the days when a monarch was said to be his realm. The king was "Denmark." Catholics have long realized that their own grasp of certain things, especially sex, has a validity that is lost on the celibate male hierarchy. This is particularly true where celibacy is concerned.

There was broad disagreement with Pius XI's 1930 encyclical on the matter. Pope Paul VI set up a study group of loyal and devout Catholics, lay and clerical, to make recommendations. The group overwhelmingly voted to change the teaching of Pius XI. But cardinals in the Roman Curia convinced Paul that any change would suggest that the church's teachings are not eternal (though *Casti Connubii* had not been declared infallible, by the papacy's own standards).

When Paul reaffirmed the ban on birth control in *Humanae Vitae* (1968) there was massive rejection of it. Some left the church. Some just ignored it. Paradoxically, the document formed to convey the idea that papal teaching is inerrant just convinced



most people that it can be loony. The priest-sociologist Andrew Greeley said that *Humanae Vitae* did more damage to the papacy than any of the so-called “liberal” movements in Catholicism. When Pius IX condemned democracy and modern science in his *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), the Catholic historian Lord Acton said that Catholics were too sensible to go crazy every time a pope does. The reaction to *Humanae Vitae* proves that.

The Phony “Undying Principle” Argument

Rick Santorum is a nice smiley fanatic. He does not believe in evolution or global warming or women in the workplace. He equates gay sex with bestiality (Rick “Man on Dog” Santorum). He equates contraception with the guillotine. Only a brain-dead party could think him a worthy presidential candidate. Yet he is praised by television pundits, night and day, for being “sincere” and “standing by what he believes.” He is the principled alternative to the evil Moderation of Mitt Romney and the evil Evil of Newt Gingrich. He is presented as a model Catholic. Torquemada was, in that sense, a model Catholic. Messrs. Boehner and McConnell call him a martyr to religious freedom. A young priest I saw on television, modeling himself on his hero Santorum, said, “I would rather die than give up my church’s principles.” What we are seeing is not a defense of undying principle but a stampede toward a temporarily exploitable lunacy. Acton to the rescue!



The 2012 Atheist Alliance of America!

Hi, I’m Jeanette Norman. I organize DAFT (Denver Atheists & Freethinkers). I’m also on the planning committee for the 2012 Atheist Alliance of America convention, which will be here in Denver, Colorado over the Labor Day weekend.

I hope you will share info about our convention with your members. (And I would be glad to reciprocate whenever you have a national atheist gathering.)

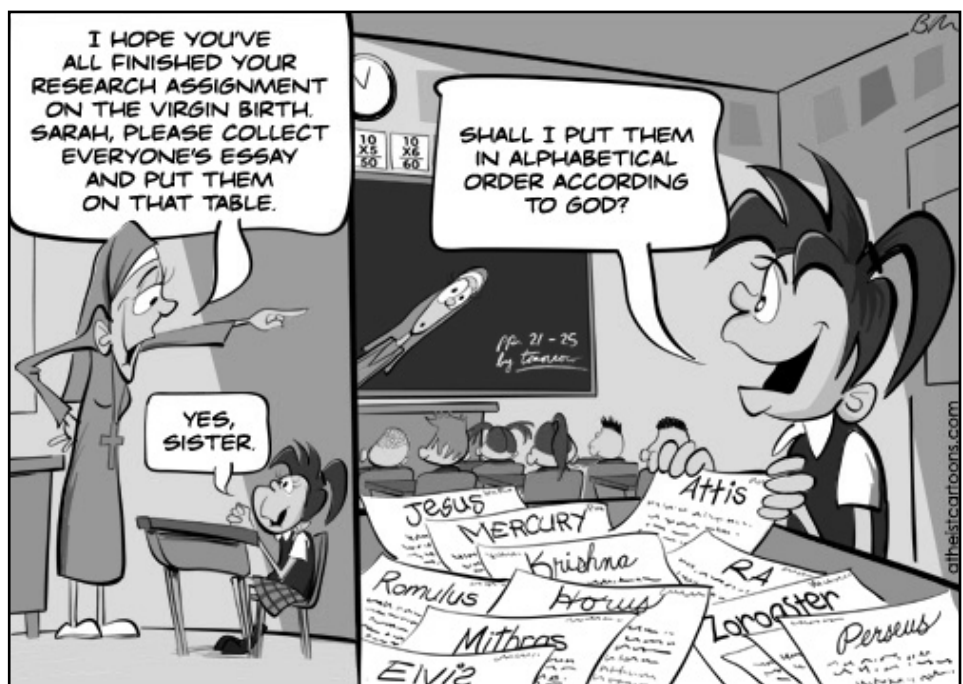
Our theme this year is “The Ascent of Atheism.” The convention starts on Friday, August 31, and ends with a family-friendly picnic in the mountains at nearby Genesee Park on Monday, September 2. Aside from the picnic, the convention will be held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in downtown Denver, where luxury rooms are available to convention guests at the very special rate of \$85 a night.

The convention is specifically designed to include the whole family, and there will be many activities to choose from, including a super kid adventure sponsored by Camp Quest, the Freethought Shorts Marathon movie event, music, and more!

People can see more details and register at the AAA website, at atheistallianceamerica.org.

Those who can't make it out this year are invited to “like” our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/AtheistAllianceOfAmerica2012NationalConvention

Thank you for your time,
Jeanette M. Norman





Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt

by Herb Silverman.

(Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing, 2012)

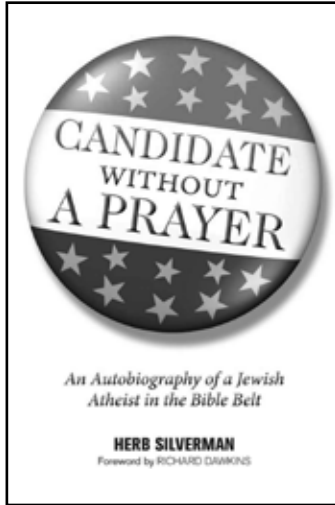
book review by George Erickson

“If a man is going to publish his life story, he had best take the precaution of leading an interesting life first. Or at least to being a very funny writer or of lacing his pages with wittily unconventional wisdom. Or even being just an exceptionally nice person. Fortunately, Herb Silverman ticks all these boxes, and more.”

With these words, Dr. Richard Dawkins, yes, *the* Richard Dawkins, began the foreword to *Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt*, and Herb deserves every word.

I first met Herb in the nineties, when we served on the board of the American Humanist Association, where his humor, his clear thinking and thoughtful nature helped move our meetings along. However his attire and appearance, which trended toward the hippie end of sartorial splendor, explains why I was shocked to find (in *Candidate*) a photo of Herb dressed in an oversized tux for a presentation he gave at Oxford. For a moment, I thought that Lincoln had arisen from the grave.

Before reading *Candidate*, I already knew of Herb's efforts in behalf of Humanist and Atheist causes, and that he'd taught Mathematics at the College of Charleston, South Carolina, but his opening chapters were a revelation. Why? Because we grew up in very different worlds—I in an average Northern Minnesota family where religion or ethnicity was never an issue, and Herb in a Philadelphia family where Jewishness was everything, and *their* Jewishness included a loving, “control freak” mother whose attentiveness to her son included *ironing his shoelaces*. Thus, when Herb arrived at college, his roommate had to tell him how to boil water and change a light bulb—skills I was practically born with.



I had expected Herb's pre-college chapters to be a bit of a slog (because mine would have been), but instead, they provided a look into a culture I'd never had a chance to understand, and though the entire book is first rate, those opening chapters were, for me, among the best. And as it turned out, it would also be the most expensive book I've ever read. (More on that later.)

I was surprised to learn that Herb had joined a fraternity, then pleased that he'd been elected its president, but I was not surprised that he had been arrested for protesting the Vietnam War, that he had been an early advocate for Women's Rights, or that, on learning in 1990 that the South Carolina constitution prohibits atheists from holding public office, he had decided to run for governor- which is how he met his future wife, whom he calls his first and only groupie. He lost, but, as Herb puts it, “with politics in my blood... I decided to try to fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a notary public.” Herb won. Bigotry lost.

In the ensuing years, Herb founded the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, followed by the Coalition for the Community of Reason, which evolved into the Secular Coalition for America. His tireless work for reason and against bigotry makes inspiring reading in the chapters he devotes to Discussions on Religion, Debates on Religion, and Essays on Religion before turning to his first love and his occupation in a chapter titled Mathematics and God.

Silverman's *Candidate Without a Prayer* is, to use the vernacular, a candid, well-written, captivating “read,” but be warned: If you find *Candidate* as inspirational as I did, it might cost you—like it cost me—because, inspired by Herb's remarkable story, I was moved to donate \$200 to the Secular Coalition for America. Don't say I didn't warn you.

Candidate Without a Prayer is available from the usual sources, including Amazon and is also available as an eBook.

George Erickson is a former AHA VP and author of four books, including *Eyes Wide Open: Living, Laughing, Loving and Learning in a Religion-troubled World*. <http://www.tundracub.com>

Source of Review: *The Separationist*, newsletter of Secular Humanists of the Low Country, Charleston, SC



July FIG Meeting
TBD
August FIG Meeting
TBD



June FIG Meeting
July 01 7-9:00 PM
Hannaford Suites Hotel



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

FIG Leaves
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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.