

# FIG LEAVES

Volume 22 Issue 6

June 2013

## June 2013 Meeting:

Tuesday June 25, 7:00 PM,  
Hannaford Suites Hotel

### Novel: *Imaginary Friend*

Author and retired law professor, Douglas Whaley, will do a book talk on his novel *Imaginary Friend*.

*Imaginary Friend* has been described as an atheist thriller. When he rescues a large number of people after an explosion at Ohio Stadium, lawyer Franklin Whitestone becomes a national hero. On a famous call in show he's asked if God helped him out, but denies any such aid, identifying himself as an atheist who doesn't have an "imaginary friend." All hell breaks loose immediately. He fears losing the woman he loves as well as his job, his family is attacked, and a religious extremist vows to track Franklin Whitestone down and make him choose between conversion to a belief in God or a truly ugly death.

Copies of *Imaginary Friend* will be available to purchase for \$8 after the talk.

#### Speaker Bio

Douglas Whaley is a Professor Emeritus at the Mortiz College of Law, The Ohio State University, from which he retired in 2004. His specialty is commercial law, for which he has written seven casebooks, three Gilbert's Summaries of the Law, and recorded four lectures for the Sum and Substance CD Series. Whaley has been given nine awards for outstanding teaching from three different law schools.

After retiring from teaching, Whaley wrote the novel titled *Imaginary Friend*, which is an atheist thriller. Late in 2009 he started a blog after having a heart transplant; it can be found at <http://douglaswhaley.blogspot.com/>

## July Meeting: Sunday, July 14, Ultimate Dinosaurs Exhibit, Cincinnati Museum Center

11:30 AM Brunch at Frisch's; 1001 Gest St, Cincinnati, OH 45203

1:00 PM Ultimate Dinosaurs Exhibit at Cincinnati Museum Center  
1301 Western Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45203

In July, FIG will visit the new traveling exhibit, Ultimate Dinosaurs: Giants from Gondwana, coming to the Cincinnati Museum Center.

Based on groundbreaking research from scientists around the world, this exhibition reveals bizarre, unusual looking dinosaurs virtually unknown to North Americans because they evolved in isolation in South America, Africa and Madagascar. Ultimate Dinosaurs features three Augmented Reality (AR) experiences, used in creative ways to bring these specimens to life and illustrate the story of how a dynamic Earth with drifting continents affected the evolution of dinosaurs, from a Southern perspective.

Brunch will be at 11:30 am at the Frisch's one block from the Museum Center and our tour will start at 1:00 pm at the Museum Center. Tickets to the Museum Center are \$8 for FIG Members and the \$13 for non-FIG members.

Members. To join us for brunch or the tour, contact Shawn Jeffers at [figcincinnati@gmail.com](mailto:figcincinnati@gmail.com) or 513.404.8191.

## Inside

## Page

May Meeting	2
Contradiction Corner	3
Things To Do, Things To See	4
Science Book Club	5
Secular Coalition for Ohio News	6
Poem: Freethinking Franciscan Meditation by Paul J. Cech	7
CFI News	8
Will The Catholic Bishops Decide How You Die Or Whether You Live? by Valerie Tarico	9

## Events

### June 2013 Meeting

Tuesday June 25, 7:00PM  
Hannaford Suites Hotel  
5900 East Galbraith Rd  
(For directions see page 6)

### July 2013 Meeting

Sunday July 14, 1:00PM  
Cincinnati Museum Center  
1301 Western Avenue.

### August FIGnic

Saturday Aug. 17  
Location TBA

### Joe Levee

Our first member and founding President, Joe Levee has had a minor stroke. He is improving, but he is not yet ready to come home. He is at Marjorie P. Lee Rehab Facility in Hyde Park. 3550 Shaw Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45208. (513) 871-2090.



## May Meeting

### Open Space Technology

At the May meeting, instead of having a speaker, we turned the meeting over to FIG members for an Open Space Technology discussion.

Open Space Technology was created in the mid 1980s by organizational consultant Harrison Owen as a new style of conferencing. In Open Space conferences, anyone who wants to initiate a discussion or activity, writes the topic on a large sheet of paper in big letters and then stands up and announces it to the group. After selecting one of the pre-established times and places, (in our case the various tables) they post their proposed workshop. When everyone who wants to has announced and posted their topics, participant select a topic, move to the table, and start conversations.

A basic principle is that everyone who comes to an Open Space conference must be passionate about the topic and willing to take some responsibility for creating thoughts out of that passion. Another Open Space principle is The Law of Two Feet: "If you find yourself in a situation where you aren't learning or contributing, go somewhere else" by moving tables and joining a new conversation.

Four other key principles are:

- 1) Whoever comes are the right people.
- 2) Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
- 3) Whenever it starts is the right time.
- 4) When it is over it is over.

National Atheist organizations have declared May 2 as the National Day of Reason to provide an alternative to the National Day of Prayer that had historically been held on that day. We used the key themes from the National Day of Reason to inspire our conversation.

For the FIG meeting, we started by discussing topics that had been in the news and on our minds. We narrowed the topics down to three which people gathered to discuss:

- 1) Local/State/National Activism
- 2) Separation of Religion and Government Issues
- 3) Youth and Atheism Boy Scouts/Camp Quest/Secular Student Alliance

For the Local/State/National Activism, the group talked about how to make more of an impact in the local area through blood drives, adopt-a-highway, and marching in the Gay Pride Parade. TriState Freethinkers have adopted the highway in front of the Creation Museum and FIG is filing paperwork to adopt the highway in front of the Solid Rock Church Jesus statue in Monroe.

For the Separation of Religion and Government, there was a lot of talk of politics and Supreme Court decisions. There was also a discussion about the recent IRS scandal and how there should be increased scrutiny on religious and political organizations who abuse the nonprofit tax code by allowing politicking from the pulpit.

For the Youth and Atheism section, there was discussion of how the Boy Scouts recently changed their policy to allow gay youth to participate in Scouting, but still don't allow gay or lesbian adults to participate in Scouting. Also, the Boy Scouts still haven't changed their policies about the exclusion of atheists from participating in Scouting. And that is what makes organizations like Camp Quest, a secular summer camp, so important because it provides a safe and supportive place for nontheistic youth.

Overall it was a very successful introduction to the concept of Open Space Technology and participants kept the conversations going for well over an hour once the topics had been selected.

— reported by Shawn Jeffers ☯



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

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

#### FIG Board of Directors:

**President:** Shawn Jeffers  
**Vice President:** Chuck Byrd  
**Secretary:** Susan Davis  
**Treasurer:** Bryan Sellers,  
**Librarian:** Terry Kassnel  
**Newsletter:** Wolf Roder.  
**PR:** Michele Grinoch  
**Social Media:** Emily Mullen  
**Webmaster:** Dennis Davis  
**Immediate Past President:**  
 John Welte

#### 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.



## Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



Before I start discussing this month's topic I'd like to begin with a couple of corrections to my last two articles. I try hard to be totally accurate but being human I make mistakes and sometimes don't catch them before they make it into the newsletter.

First, in the last two articles I used the word Septuagint when I meant Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is the correct name given to the first five books of Moses while the Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that was very popular among Jews in ancient times. I don't know why I used the incorrect name in the articles but offer my sincerest apologies to you the reader.

Secondly, in my last article I incorrectly wrote that the Egyptians left Canaan in the Twelfth Century B.C.E. due to internal strife, and that the devastation afterward was due to infighting among the Canaanites themselves. I reread my sources last week and realized this was incorrect. Both the Egyptian withdrawal and the destruction of Canaanite city-states were due to the invasion from a group known as the "Sea Peoples". Although their exact origin is still in doubt, most archeologists believe them to be from the Aegean and suggest that the Philistines, dreaded enemy of Israel, were part of this invasion. They pillaged and burned the Eastern Mediterranean coast from Egypt all the way north to the Hittite Empire in Turkey. This appears to be the source of Canaanite destruction incorrectly attributed to Joshua in the Bible.

That being said, I would like to move on to the New Testament with a discussion of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all of unknown authorship. There is nothing in the text that indicates who wrote the gospels and they appear to be so named out of tradition perpetuated by early church fathers such as Papias, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen.

Popular Christian mythology claims that these four gospels are different accounts from eyewitnesses and differ the same way that four witnesses of an accident would report the crash differently. Taken at face value the claim might seem plausible but cannot be correct. For one thing the entire contents of Mark are contained within Matthew and Luke, and these passages are identical in phrasing and order, often the original Greek was copied word-per-word. This would not be the case if the authors interviewed witnesses separately; obviously the authors of Matthew and Luke were plagiarizing Mark.

There is another set of Jesus' quotes that is found only in Matthew and Luke that indicates they copied from another source in addition to Mark. Scholars refer to this other source as Q (from the German word Quelle meaning "source"). No copy of Q has been found, however the same sayings appear

in another document from the early Christian era known as the Gospel of Thomas discovered in 1945. This discovery seems to confirm the existence of Q.

For hundreds of years it was assumed that the gospels were written in the same order as they appear in today's Bible; but considering the evidence that Matthew and Luke copied from Mark this looks highly unlikely.

Of course the apologist might say that Matthew was first and that Luke and Mark copied from him with Mark being a Reader's Digest condensed version of the same story. This is not very likely either because the original Greek used in Mark contains grammatical errors that do not appear in Matthew and Luke. If Mark were written after Matthew, why would the author intentionally change the correct Greek into a corrupted version? This would only make sense if Matthew and Luke copied Mark and corrected the improper Greek. Mark also begins with Jesus being baptized by John, why would the author intentionally throw away Matthew's virgin birth story as insignificant?

Furthermore, the earliest copies of Mark actually end at chapter 16, verse 8 with the women leaving the tomb in fear; without an actual appearance of a resurrected Christ. It would be very strange indeed that an author creating a condensed gospel from Matthew would consider the resurrection so insignificant that it could be discarded.

Critical Biblical scholars date the Gospels from the earliest (Mark) in 60 or 70 C.E. to the last (John) written sometime after 100 C.E. meaning they were written from 30 to 100 years after events they covered. These same scholars believe the writings attributed to the Apostle Paul to be older written only 10 to 20 years after the crucifixion was supposed to have occurred. We may not know who the gospel authors were, but we can be relatively sure they were not among the first apostles since they would have been too old to write them or more likely dead.

Christian apologists go crazy when they hear scholars date the gospels so late instead claiming they were written no later than 44 C.E. with Paul's Epistles written shortly after. To answer them I must note that if the gospels and sayings of Jesus were written first, it is very odd that none of the Epistles ever quote the gospels. Every argument made by Paul, Peter, and James are based on Old Testament scripture or personal revelation when the gospel material would have been far more authoritative. The only quote attributed directly to Jesus by Paul is 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25 and those words do not appear in any of the gospels. The only reasonable explanation for the oversight of Paul and the others is that the gospels were not yet available.

Next month I continue my discussion of the New Testament, see you then...





**THINGS TO DO...**

**THINGS TO SEE...**



**Save the Date:**

**Saturday, August 17**

**The FIGnic,**

Our annual FIG summer picnic will be held on Saturday, August 17 at 3:00 pm. FIG provides meat and vegetarian grilling options and individuals bring a salad, side dish or dessert to share if they choose. More information and location will be in next month's FIG Leaves.

**Upcoming Meetings  
Of Interest To Our Members**

**June Science Café:**

“Understanding Drug Addiction” Dr. Eugene Somoza  
Slatts Pub, 4858 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, 45242  
Monday, June 17, 2013, 6:00 PM

Dr. Somoza will summarize our knowledge of what drug addiction is, which parts of the brain are affected, the characteristics of addictive substances (how they are different from other substances, such as tomato juice, which are not addictive, which types of individuals become addicted, and how addiction is highly problematic to society.

He will also focus in on the social problems we are dealing right now (a) the fact that opioid overdose deaths have overtaken automobile accidents as the #1 cause of accidental deaths in many states (including Ohio); (b) the U.S. prisoner problem where we have far and away the largest number of prisoners (per 100,000 population) than any other country in the world, and that those prisoners are highly enriched with African Americans. Finally, he will discuss the use of medication in the treatment of addiction.

Tri-State Freethinker: Blood Drive  
@ Hoxworth Blood Center  
3130 Highland Ave, 4th floor  
Cincinnati, OH  
(see page 5 for details)

**Gay Pride Parade**

FIG will team up with TriState Freethinkers to march in Cincinnati's Gay Pride Parade. Saturday, June 29, 2013, 1:30 PM.

The parade will start at 2:00 pm with walkers requested to be at the staging area (7th and Culvert St. off of Eggleston Ave) by 1:30 pm to get checked in and lined up. The parade winds through downtown past Fountain Square and ends at Sawyer Point. 705 East Pete Rose Way, Cincinnati, 45202.

For updates on those events: check the Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group calendar  
<http://www.meetup.com/cincinnatiatheists/#calendar>



**The Cincinnati Atheist Meetup Group**

Monday, June 17, 2013, 6:30 PM  
@ Rio Grande Mexican Restaurant  
40 Carothers Road, Newport, KY 41071  
\*\*\*\*\*

**The Cincinnati Atheist Meetup Group**

Sunday, June 23, 2013, 1:00 pm: rain or shine  
Potluck Picnic in the Park, at Mt. Echo Park  
Elberon Ave. Cincinnati, 45238  
\*\*\*\*\*

**The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup**

Tuesday, July 2, 6:30 pm  
@ The Hofbräuhaus  
\*\*\*\*\*

**The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup**

Monday, July 15, 6:30 pm  
@ Rio Grande Mexican Restaurant  
40 Carothers Road, Newport, KY 41071





THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



## Tri-State Freethinkers:

### Atheist Bloodsuckers Blood Drive

The "Atheist Bloodsuckers Blood Drive" is scheduled for Saturday, July 6. It will take place at the Hoxworth Central location in Clifton between 10 AM and 1PM. You are requested to make an appointment by calling (513) 451-0910 or you can do it online at [www.hoxworth.org](http://www.hoxworth.org). Please make an appointment by June 14. Mention that you are member of the Tri-State Freethinkers.

Please consider donating. One pint of blood can save up to three lives. It only takes about an hour. If you join the Premier Donor Club you will be able to make appointments online, collect rewards points, get a free cholesterol screening and find out where your donation is taken to save lives. More information is available on their website to answer any questions you may have.

We will be eating at a nearby restaurant after the blood drive. That location is to be determined.

Hoxworth Center Building  
3130 Highland Ave, 4th Floor  
Cincinnati, OH 452670055

To schedule your donation call (513) 451-0910.

— From: John Welte



### Contributing to Charity.

If someone has or gets a Kroger Plus Card, they can earn money for their favorite charity just by linking up the card. It doesn't cost anything extra.

One of the choices of interest to us is Planned Parenthood, but there are others.

— suggested by Michele Grinoch



## Science Book Club

### 2013 Schedule

All meetings on 3rd Sunday of the month. All meetings at the Cincinnati and Hamilton County downtown Public Library in room 3A .

**July 21** *The Signal and the Noise : Why Most Predictions Fail but Some Don't* - Nate Silver, 2012.

**August 18** *The Earth in Turmoil: Earthquakes, Volcanoes, and their impact on HumanKind* - Kerry Sieh, Simon LeVay, 1998

**September 15** *End this Depression Now!* - Paul Krugman, 2012

**October 20** *Incognito: the Secret Lives of the Brain* - David Eagleman, 2011

**November 17** *The Republican Brain : the Science of Why They Deny Science and Reality* - Chris Mooney, 2012

**December 15** *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe* - Lee Smolin, 2013



## Member's Library

Did you miss a speaker from the FIG 20 year program Fall 2011? Would you like to replay a presentation during your commute or Memorial Day car trip? John Welte has recorded and copied to CD's each speaker. Think Greta Christina "Why are Atheist's so Angry" , JT Eberhard "Reason a Moral Imperative" or "A History of Free Thought in Cincinnati" by Prof. Bill Jensen. "We are not Unicorns" Jamila Bey, it's amazing how John got so many great speakers to come to Cincinnati for the 20 year. Darrel Ray " Sex and God". This collection is unique to FIG and available to loan.

Our Library is taking donations, loans are of course free to members. Many books; including Asimov's "Guide to the Bible" (two volumes in one) The old and new testament. Just carrying a book of this size will increase your intelligence. "The World is Flat" by Thomas Friedman is a new addition to the library.

—From Terry Kassnel



## Arizona Lawmaker Announces: “I am an atheist!” Gives Humanist Invocation on House Floor

Arizona Democratic state Representative Juan Mendez invoked astronomer Carl Sagan on Tuesday when he was tasked with giving the opening prayer for the state House of Representatives and announced “I am an atheist.” Secular Coalition for Arizona executive director, Serah Blaine, left, helped organize Mendez’ “invocation.”

Exciting news from our Arizona affiliate! The Secular Coalition for Arizona was instrumental in organizing the announcement of a state legislator as an atheist, and the offering of a humanist “invocation” instead of a prayer to open the session. Rep. Juan Mendez, D.Tempe, acknowledged that he is an atheist as he gave the daily House invocation Tuesday, urging legislators to look at each other, rather than bow their heads, and “celebrate our shared humanness.” Mendez, who said it was freeing to be open about his secular views, also introduced about a dozen fellow members of the Secular Coalition for Arizona, who watched from the House gallery.

### Text of atheist prayer given in Arizona House

Democratic Rep. Juan Mendez of Tempe said he was looking for a way to convey his feelings like other members do when they participate in the prayer rotation at the beginning of the daily floor session.

“Most prayers in this room begin with a request to bow your heads. I would like to ask you not to bow your heads. I would like to ask that you take a moment to look around the room at all of the men and women here, in this moment, sharing together this extraordinary experience of being alive and of dedicating ourselves to working toward improving the lives of the people of our state.”

“This room in which there are many challenging debates, many moments of tension, of ideological divi-

sion, of frustration. But this is also a room where, as my Secular Humanist tradition stresses, by the very fact of being human, we have much more in common than we have differences. We share the same spectrum of potential for care, for compassion, for fear, for joy, for love.”

“Carl Sagan once wrote, ‘For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.’ There is, in the political process, much to bear. In this room, let us cherish and celebrate our shared humanness, our shared capacity for reason and compassion, our shared love for the people of our state, for our Constitution and for our democracy; and let us root our policy making process in these values that are relevant to all Arizonans regardless of religious belief or non-belief. In gratitude and in love, in reason and in compassion, let us work together for a better Arizona.”

— By Associated Press, 22 May 2013



### 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.





## House Armed Services Committee Rejects SCA Supported Humanist Chaplain Amendment

Wednesday, the House Armed Services Committee voted to decline a SCA supported amendment that would have allowed humanist chaplains for nonreligious service members who are serving in the nation's military. Democratic New Jersey Rep. Robert Andrews proposed the amendment to the 2014 defense bill that would add atheists, humanists and "ethical culturalists" to the corps of chaplains. Their mission: To serve as guidance counselors to military members. House Armed Service Committee members shot it down with a resounding "No" from the GOP majority.

Congressman Andrews explained, "I don't offer this to be provocative," he said, the Army Times reported. "I don't offer this to be an attack on anyone else's faith." However, House Republicans spoke in "vehement" opposition to the amendment. Rep. Mike Conaway (R.Texas) accused, "They don't believe anything," referring to "atheist chaplains."

Fortunately, Rep. Adam Smith (DWA) responded in defense of nontheists:

"To say that an atheist or a humanist doesn't believe anything is just ignorant. They have very, very developed beliefs and value systems and there are many, many of them serving in the military, including [deceased atheist soldier] Pat Tillman! The response to Andrews' amendment makes me feel all the more the necessity of it. So basically, if you are an atheist or a Humanist in the military, the military's response is: 'We got nothin' for you. There's no hope for you.' [Atheists] believe in a system of values. And that system of values is worth as much to them as our Christianity is to us."

The SCA has been instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of non-theist and Humanist chaplains and against practices that discriminate against non-theists or promote religion. The purpose of the amendment was to give the same support and confidential counsel to the estimated 23% of the armed services who are either nonreligious, humanist, or atheist, that religious members receive, considering that military chaplains are crucial for nontheistic and religiously unaffiliated service members because seeking psychiatric help (as opposed to consulting a chaplain) can stigmatize a service member for the rest of their career. Additionally, the chaplain-patient relationship enjoys more confidentiality than the psychiatrist or counselor relationship does. However, military chaplains are unrepresentative of the religious makeup of the military with evangelical chaplains highly overrepresented and these chaplains are ill equipped to deal with nontheistic service men and women. ☞



### Freethinking Franciscan Meditation

Be an instrument of peace  
Where there is hatred, sow love  
Where there is injury, pardon  
Where there is darkness, enlighten  
Where there is sadness, offer comfort

Seek to console  
Seek to understand  
Seek to love

In giving, you aid  
In pardoning, you strengthen  
In dying, you go in peace

May 26, 2012  
Paul J. Cech  
pjcech88@gmail.com





## CFI's UN Representative Condemns 'Honor Killings' And Human Rights Abuses.

Just as the Center for Inquiry (CFI) fights crucial policy battles in the United States for science, reason, and secularism, CFI also brings its efforts and advocacy to the international stage, with representation at the United Nations in both New York City and Geneva.

CFI's main Geneva representative is Dr. Elizabeth O'Casey, who today delivered a statement condemning the horrifying practice of so-called "honor killings" of women, and the governments that allow perpetrators to evade punishment.

"We can no longer stand by and watch this horrific violence against women go unpunished," O'Casey told the Human Rights Council. "This barbaric practice is justified on cultural and religious grounds. We must not allow such grounds to be used to legitimize or excuse such an abhorrent abuse of a woman's right to life, her right to equality, her right to freedom, or her right to dignity."

"We urge all member states to do more to protect women from this sort of violence, to punish those who commit it, and to condemn the culture of impunity and religious justification, which not only allows, but encourages, such barbarity."

O'Casey joined CFI allies the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) and the British Humanist Association (BHA) in delivering statements during a debate on civil and political rights, including a joint proclamation delivered on behalf of all three groups urging for greater access to contraception and abortion.

O'Casey will be working alongside these groups all session long to advocate on behalf of secularist and humanist causes, such as freedom of belief and expression, women's equality, and church-state separation. Also planned is a statement on the use of torture in Iran and equality for disabled persons around the world.

"Honor killings, restricted access to reproductive health care, crackdowns on free speech; these are all serious human rights abuses. Secularists have an important voice to add to these discussions, separating policy from the oppressive dogma of religion and superstition," said Michael De Dora, CFI's New York UN representative.

"We are proud to have Elizabeth O'Casey representing the Center for Inquiry, and all of us who believe in reason, secularism, and our common humanity. She is doing a wonderful job bringing the global community's attention to some of the most critical issues of our time."



## Protests Against Arrest And Incarceration Of Bangladeshi Freethought And Religious Doubt Bloggers.

Worldwide Protest led by the Center for Inquiry (CFI) on May 2nd held outside the embassy of Bangladesh in Washington D.C.



American Atheists rallies on Thursday (April 25) outside The Embassy of Bangladesh.

Text & Photos from the Internet





## Will the Catholic Bishops Decide How You Die or Whether You Live?

By Valerie Tarico,

*Truthout / News Analysis, 16 May 2013*

What happens when religious institutions get to manage public funds, absorb secular hospitals, and put theology above medical science and individual patient conscience? Religious freedom suffers.

In 2010, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, an elderly woman was rushed to a local hospital called St. John. She had suffered a massive stroke and could no longer eat, drink or speak. Mercifully, she was one of the growing percent of Americans who have prepared for such an eventuality by writing an end-of-life directive. Hers said that she did not want artificial hydration or nutrition if she wasn't going to recover. Unfortunately, St. John is a facility where the directives of the Catholic bishops take precedence over the directives of individual patients, and one such directive orders hospitals to feed and hydrate end-of-life patients whether they want it or not.

Americans would do well to consider what happens when theology dictates health care.

In the official language of the bishops, St. John is a "Catholic health care ministry," their term for all Church-affiliated hospitals and clinics. Catholic health care ministries are publicly licensed institutions intended to serve the general public. They are highly subsidized by public dollars. To fund them, the Church uses a variety of public revenue streams including Medicare, Medicaid, county appropriations, federal dollars allocated through the 1946 Hospital Survey and Construction Act, and tax-exempt government bonds. As with any hospital, additional revenues come from insurance payments and investments, with the end result that the Catholic Church contributes less than 5 percent of the funds flowing through their hospitals and clinics. And yet the bishops place theological restrictions on care for all patients and sometimes forbid providers from telling patients that treatment options exist elsewhere.

According to MergerWatch, Catholic control of health dollars and hospital facilities is on the rise across the United States. In Washington State, for example, if all currently proposed mergers go through, almost half of hospital beds will lie in the hands of religious institutions by the end of 2013. Across the US, as Catholic systems

such as Peace Health and Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI) quietly absorb secular hospitals, the bishops are fighting in court for the religious equivalent of corporate personhood, claiming that the constitution gives them institutional conscience rights that trump patient choice. Meanwhile, Catholic-owned pharmacies are suing for the right to deny services; and other Catholic-owned business are demanding (and winning) religious exemptions from health insurance obligations.

In an effort to standardize the rules of Catholic institutions and the advice that priests give lay-people, the bishops have created what they call "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care," called ERDs for short. When secular and religious institutions merge, the bishops' directives often restrict services in both. Patients may not realize that a once secular institution named Swedish or Highline is now subject to theology and could impose religious beliefs at odds with those of the patient. Following mergers, changes often are gradual, occurring slowly as staff leave and are replaced with believers, which makes the shift even harder for patients to detect. (Religious hospitals are exempt from nondiscriminatory employment practices, somewhat remarkable given that so much of their funding is public.) Hospital administrators may state that they do not interfere in the doctor-patient relationship while at the same time advertising for staff who are "deeply familiar" with the bishops directives.

From a consumer standpoint, one problem with putting religion rather than science in charge of health care is that patients may not know they are being denied the full range of medically appropriate options. They may have no idea when institutional rules prevent doctors and nurses from honoring end-of-life wishes or discussing services that are available in secular settings services like contraception, abortion, tubal ligation, vasectomy, fertility treatment, or death with dignity. For example, one woman tells of being diagnosed with an ectopic pregnancy at a religious hospital. She was advised that she needed to have her fallopian tube removed. Fortunately, she consulted her smart phone and realized that elsewhere she could simply obtain a medication to end her nonviable pregnancy. The medication is safer and leaves fertility intact, but the Catholic directives treat this as a direct abortion, while the surgery (which damages long term fertility) kills the fetus indirectly and →



so is acceptable.

Other countries where Catholic theology limits health options offer a dire warning of what might happen here if the Church had an equal hold on the levers of power. In El Salvador, Catholic theology was written into law in 1998, banning all abortions, even those intended to save the mother. As a consequence, a 22-year-old mother named Beatriz, who carries a nonviable fetus, lies in a hospital bed with her kidneys failing, hoping to be granted an exception by El Salvador's Supreme Court. She has been waiting for over a month. In Catholic Ireland last October, a young dentist, Savita Halappanavar, died after being refused an abortion.

In an ironic twist, the extremity of Catholic directives leads many people to believe that they couldn't possibly be implemented here. Consider the case of Beatriz. She is the mother of a young child. Her fetus is anencephalic, meaning it has no brain and never will be a person under any circumstance. (Note: Somewhere between 60 and 80 percent of human fertilized eggs self-destruct naturally before a full-term gestation, most before a woman knows she is pregnant, and many because they are defective.) In other words, the Salvadorian antiabortion law risks the life of a young mother for an incomplete fetus that is a normal failed reproductive product rather than a potential child. For someone who thinks that morality is about wellbeing, this just sounds crazy. Of course, this could never happen in the United States, right? You may be astounded to learn that a Phoenix nun was excommunicated and her hospital was forcibly disaffiliated from the Catholic Church for allowing an abortion under similarly hopeless circumstances.

In Ireland, after Halappanavar's unnecessary death, thousands of men and women demanded medical services based on scientific evidence and individual conscience. Halappanavar became the tragic face of an international movement. Even so, given the power of religious institutions and traditions, legal change in Ireland is likely to be minimal. The largely Catholic Irish Medical Association has declined to request abortion rights even in cases of incest, rape and nonviable fetal anomalies. Currently Irish law allows abortion only when a mother's life is threatened, which is not good enough for a case like Halappanavar's. A leading obstetrician testified that Halappanavar probably would have survived if she had gotten an abortion during the first three days of her

hospital stay. But at that time, there was not a "real and substantial threat to her life." By the time she met the legal criteria, it was too late.

Patients count on their doctors to know and suggest their best options to protect health and wellbeing. But as medical options increase, especially at the beginning and end of life, the range of services excluded for theological reasons also increases. Catholic "ethicists" devote millions of dollars to analyzing biomedical technologies in the pipeline and then advocating policy based on theological priorities. They block certain lines of research and prevent affiliated hospitals from participating in clinical studies that require participants to be on contraception, for example a study of a cancer treatment that might cause fetal defects. Procedures opposed by the theologians are likely to be absent altogether from patient-doctor conversations.

Some patient advocates say that mandatory disclosure is part of the solution: Pharmacies that refuse to fill some prescriptions should post the fact that they are not full-service. Church-run abortion diversion centers known as crisis pregnancy centers should post that they are not medical providers. Treatment consent forms should list the scientifically and medically accepted practices that a doctor or hospital refuses to provide so that patients know that these services are available elsewhere. Conversely, providers who sign onto a Patients' Bill of Rights promising to base care only on medical science and patient conscience could get the equivalent of a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.

But disclosure alone won't ensure state-of-heart health care for many Americans, especially those living in small towns or rural settings. Sometimes one clinic or pharmacy serves a wide area, or all nearby services are managed by the same religious institution. In these cases, a woman with a painful and life-threatening ectopic pregnancy might not be able just to get in her car and drive to another clinic. Denial of service hits low income communities hardest because members often have less flexible time off work and more restricted access to transportation and child care. The right of religious doctors and institutions to deny services obstructs the right of patients to receive timely care that meets normal medical practice standards, which are designed to maximize wellbeing.





That is because Catholic theology isn't necessarily about wellbeing; it is about submitting to the perceived will of God. Sometimes these two align, and sometimes they don't. To serve God's will, Catholic theologians attempt to derive moral principles that are about the inherent goodness or evil of certain beliefs and behaviors, regardless of their consequences. In this way of thinking, contraceptives or abortions should not be provided because they are "intrinsically evil," even when contraception or abortion may save a woman's life.

To make matters worse, Catholic theology values passive submission to harm when it is believed to serve Catholic practice or faith. Saints are heralded for their commitment to theological principle even in the face of outrageous and foreseeable outcomes, including martyrdom. In fact, Catholic theology sees pain as having positive soulpurifying benefits. This is called redemptive suffering. In the ERDs, it is offered up as an alternative for patients whose unbearable pain leads them to seek death with dignity:

Dying patients who request euthanasia should receive loving care, psychological and spiritual support, and appropriate remedies for pain and other symptoms so that they can live with dignity until the time of natural death.... Patients experiencing suffering that cannot be alleviated should be helped to appreciate the Christian understanding of redemptive suffering.

Former nun Mary Johnson (author of *An Unquenchable Thirst*) spent 20 years working with Mother Teresa's organization, the Missionaries of Charity, which has been accused of providing substandard treatment and pain management. She explains the sometimes abysmal conditions in their facilities thus:

Most people today would say that we help the poor by helping them out of poverty. That was never Mother Teresa's intention. Mother Teresa often told us that as Missionaries of Charity we did not serve the poor to improve their lot, but because we were serving Jesus, who said that whenever service was rendered to one of the least, it was rendered to him. Jesus promised eternal life to those who fed the hungry and clothed the naked.

The point, in other words, is not necessarily to solve the problem but simply to perform service. Ultimately, it isn't about real world outcomes for the person on the receiving end, but about eternal outcomes for the person on the giving end. The difference is important. And although Johnson doesn't mention it, the passage she quotes mentions the ill as well as the hungry and naked. The Jesus of the gospel promises eternal life to those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit prisoners and care for the ill. When religion and healing are at odds, the way to get to heaven is to offer theologically principled care, even when more compassionate options are available.

This difference in objectives seems like reason enough to separate religion from medicine. Thanks to science, fertility treatment has come a long way from the mandrakes and dove blood prescribed in the Bible. Victims of sexual assault now have options other than being forced to bear rape babies (also the Biblical solution). As we face death, we have alternatives to convincing ourselves that suffering is redemptive. Do we really want theology at the helm of our biggest hospital and clinic systems?

If not, it may be time for ordinary men and women to speak our minds. In Washington State, where the battle over Catholic hospital mergers is heating up, the state constitution specifically prohibits the use of public funds to support religious institutions. Despite that prohibition, one district actually has a lineitem in the property tax code to subsidize a Peace Health facility, leaving the local community with no secular alternative. With the Peace Health clinic newly open, the local bishop has already tried to block the nowCatholic system from providing lab work for Planned Parenthood, as was done in the past. Legal challenges may play out in court thanks to a patients' rights campaign by the ACLU and grassroots groups, but the broader question is this:

When it comes to medical options, whose beliefs count: the bishops', or the patient's? Who gets to say whether one woman is forced to incubate a pregnancy gone wrong or another is forced at the end of life? Whose version of god gets to dictate how you live and how you die? ☩





**July FIG Meeting**  
 Sunday, July 14 1:00 PM  
 Cincinnati Museum Center

**June FIG Meeting**  
 Tuesday, June 25, 7:00 PM  
 Hannaford Suites Hotel



**FIG Is 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" and find it 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.

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

# FIG

## Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists. Though most of our members are secular humanists, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.



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

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

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

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